

~ Political Crossfire ~

by Alex Tryst

Copyright August 2004

Disclaimer: The organizations in this book are real. Nothing was meant by including any of them other than that they fit into the plot. No infringement on any of these groups was intended. (In other words, don't sue if I said something negative about an organization.) More details regarding these groups can be found at the end of the book. Also, even though all the people in this book are fictional, I know it won't be too difficult to know who inspired some of them, so infringement wasn't intended there either. (Hey, I'm just trying to keep myself off the FBI's Most Wanted List here.)

Dedication: To my angels, my nephews. Through the good and bad days, the joys and sorrows, the unconditional love and adoration you both exude makes the meaning of life apparently clear.

Dara stood with her hands on her hips watching the cold air escape her mouth as she and her friends waited for the other team to break from their huddle. It was a cold late February Sunday morning but the first she had taken off in weeks, so she was determined to enjoy it regardless of the bitter cold that swept across The Mall of the great city of Washington, D.C. She and her other friends had been planning this football game since the Super Bowl and were resolved to keep it regardless of the weather.

As the other team broke from their huddle, Dara and her teammates started to line up against the opposing squad. The brunette looked at her old pal across the line of scrimmage and shot her a cocky grin. "You're going down, Southerland," she teased.

"Yeah, right. Bring it on, Rosenthal," Lesley, her friend of many years, replied.

Pushing up the sleeves on her sweatshirt, Dara prepared for the snap. Both she and Lesley took off sprinting down the grass waiting for the imminent pass. Both women tried to catch it with Lesley being the winner. Laughing at Dara, she took off in a sprint toward the makeshift goal. However, the brunette would not be outdone. Pushing herself as fast as she could, she leapt for her friend, knocking her to the ground with such force that the ball escaped and flew over to a nearby bench.

Dara noticed its flight pattern immediately and screamed at the innocent bystander blonde sitting alone reading, "Heads up!" The football landed with a thunk against the bench, knocking over the woman's coffee. Running over Dara tried to apologize. "I'm terribly sorry. Are you all right?" she questioned as the blonde tried to wipe her beverage from her papers.

"You could be a little more careful," the stranger growled, raising her head.

Dara met the bluest eyes she had ever seen. "I'm really sorry. I hope that wasn't too important."

"Actually it was," she complained. "You just ruined my whole brief."

"Again, I'm sorry. Let me make it up to you. I'll buy you another cup of coffee," the brunette suggested.

"No thanks," the blonde grumbled, rolling her eyes.

Suddenly Dara realized she recognized the other woman. "Hey, wait a minute. I know you," she said.

The blonde looked at Dara's shirt and then mumbled, "I don't think so."

Looking down at her own clothes, the brunette realized the snide remark was in reference to her Rainbow Flag sweatshirt with the Human Rights Campaign logo on it. "It's no line. You're not even my type. I know you from somewhere. It'll come to me." Just then she asked, "Yale Law School?"

The blue eyes met hers again. Skeptically she answered, "Yeah. I went to Yale."

"So did I. I knew I recognized you. You were two years ahead of me. I'm Dara Rosenthal," she introduced, extending her hand.

The blonde shook her hand. "Junior counsel for the Human Rights Campaign and volunteer for the American Jewish Committee and NAACP. I know who you are," she declared.

Flashing a smile, the brunette stated, "Wow, you know so much about me and I so little about you. What's your name?"

"Elisabeth Gunter," she stated.

"You're Elisabeth Gunter?" the younger woman questioned. "Of course. I know your reputation as well. You're DOJ, civil rights division. The HRC keeps close tabs on you all over there."

"Yes, I know. I can hardly get any work done with your special interest groups knocking down my door," she quipped.

"Special interest groups? You call gays, Jews, and African-Americans special interest groups? What are you? Some kind of damn Republican?" she snipped.

"Yes, as a matter of fact," the blonde answered.

Dara shook her head. "Well, I guess you and your President are having a grand old time then with the way things are going. I suppose you hate gays as much as he does," she challenged.

"Certainly not. I just have a problem with people who feel the need to wear their sexuality on their clothes," Elisabeth quipped, standing and gathering her belongings.

"Hey, loud and proud is the only way to be, Elisabeth. It's people like me who facilitate change."

The older woman laughed lightly under her breath. Looking over toward the grass, she mentioned, "Your friends are waiting on you. I guess you better get back to them. Tell Agent Southerland I said hello, would you?"

"You know Lesley?" Dara asked in surprise.

"You could say that. Well, I'm going back to the office now. Have to do something terrible for you to refute tomorrow morning in the press," she jeered, although her small smile gave away her joke.

"And don't think for a minute I won't," Dara replied, returning the grin even though she had no idea how their conversation had gone from hostile to friendly in a matter of moments.

"It's nice meeting you, Dara. I'm glad to put a face to the reputation at last. I'm sure we'll be seeing more of each other during this election season."

"You better believe it." As the blonde moved to walk away, Dara went back to her friends with the ball. Looking over at Lesley, she stated, "Elisabeth Gunter says hello."

The FBI agent groaned. "Was that her? It's been a long time. She hardly looks like the same girl I knew back in college."

"You went to college together?"

"Yeah but that was almost a decade ago. I'm surprised she even remembers me. We used to get into big debates. She was the head of the Republican club, and I was the head of the Democratic club."

"Well, she's certainly a spitfire."

Lesley nodded. "But what a body," she mumbled. "She was so hot back then. I had the biggest crush on her, and she knew it."

"She is attractive," Dara conceded. "However, she's got a thing against dykes."

"I'm not so sure about that," Lesley mentioned.

"What do you mean?"

"It's nothing. There were just rumors at school. Enough about her, though. Let's get back to this game."

Dismissing the strange encounter, the attorney turned her attention back to the football game.

After a few more hours, they all decided to call it a day and head off to one of their favorite bars for a few drinks. Sitting on her barstool nursing a beer, Dara turned to Lesley and said, "Tell me more about Elisabeth. What were these rumors?"

The redhead laughed. "Why do you even care? Are you interested? You didn't exactly make a stellar first impression."

"Come on. I'm just curious. She's got gorgeous eyes. Just indulge me, will you?"

"Fine. We went to school together at Washington and Lee. During that time there were rumors that Elisabeth wasn't just into guys. In fact, there was this persistent rumor that she had a girlfriend who went to Hollins College. Of course no one could ever really prove that, but it just didn't seem to go away regardless of how badly she spoke about liberals. It's amusing to think about now. There were times when I used to fantasize about that woman. She was the epitome of a goddess to me back then."

"She still could be to a lot of women. What she lacked in grace, she certainly made up for in those eyes. But you know what, my friend? Someone else you know went to Hollins," Dara said.

"Who?"

"Me, you big dork. I probably know the woman. What was her name?"

"Oh, I don't know, Dara. I never heard a name. It was something about her being a soccer player. They were friends in high school or something. Apparently Elisabeth used to go to all her games."

"That's too weird. I played soccer while I was there, too. Let's see. She's two years older than me, right?"

"Yeah," the redhead confirmed. "But the story goes that something happened between them, and she didn't go to those games senior year."

"All right. Then I would have been a freshman at the time. God, that's so far back. I wonder who it is. Are you sure there's nothing else you know?"

Lesley shook her head. "I swear, but if I remember I'll tell you. Okay?"

"Deal. All right. So, you knew each other in undergrad and then both went to Yale."

"Right. After undergrad I took a couple of years off before attending Yale where we met. Elisabeth pretended as if she didn't even know me, and I thought it was best to do the same. You have to watch that one, Dara. She's quite dangerous. Those looks pull you in, and she goes in for the kill," the special agent joked.

"I'm sure all her ex-boyfriends would agree with you. I felt those eyes of steel today when we

ruined her brief. I'm glad though. Gives her less time to screw with people," the attorney joked, taking a sip of her beer.

Lesley shook her head. "Don't give her another thought, Dara. She talks big, but she's never done anything with her life. She wants to be a big fish so badly on the political scene, but she's never going to be taken seriously with the way she looks. No one can get past her legs."

"Those are the most dangerous kind of people, Lesley. They're desperate to be recognized."

"Well, we'll see if she can make anything of herself. I've got my money on you, though. You're the real mover around here."

"Thanks for the confidence, pal," the brunette replied, patting her friend on the shoulder.

Going home that afternoon, Dara was still thinking about her encounter with Elisabeth. She was so intrigued with the idea that they could have known each other previously that she set about finding her old yearbooks from her alma mater. She quickly found herself lost in reminiscences of a decade gone by and the joys of youth. However, then she turned her attention to her soccer teammates. At least one of them had known Elisabeth.

Going to her team pictures, she started looking at the upperclassmen carefully as she tried to recall any details of her soccer seasons. The more she thought about it, the more she realized seeing a blonde on the sidelines at all her games freshman year, but she couldn't quite remember with whom she associated. There were two teammates that stood out in her mind, one of whom she still spoke to on a regular basis, so she decided to start her search there.

Digging out her directory, she dialed the familiar number and waited. As soon as the feminine voice answered, she said, "Sharon, hey. It's Dara."

"Dara, hi. It's been a long time. How are you?"

"I'm great. How are you doing? How are the kids? How's Nathan?"

"They're fine. What are you up to? Are you calling about the Annual Fund Raiser? We could really use your help this year."

"I know. Count me in, but that's not why I called actually. I met someone today that I think you knew at one point when we were in school. Her name is Elisabeth Gunter."

"Elisabeth? Oh yeah. I knew her. She was Suzanne Howard-Bell's best friend. They knew each other from high school. What a small world. Where did you meet her?"

"Oh, on The Mall actually. Some friends of mine were out playing a game of football, and it was one of those fluke things. Listen. I know this was a long time ago, but I wanted to ask you something about her. When we were in school, was there anything ever going on between the two of them? You know, in a romantic sense?"

Sharon laughed lightly. "Come on now, Dara. I know you had a crush on Suzanne. We all knew, but haven't you let that go yet?"

The brunette chuckled in response. "This is not about me, Sharon. Seriously. I have a friend that went to undergrad with her, and she said there were rumors about Elisabeth and Suzanne. You know me. Curiosity is just killing me. Did you know of anything? You and Suzanne were good friends. Surely if something was going on you would've known about it."

"Well, there were a few strange things about their friendship, I suppose."

"Such as?"

"Well, just the fact that Elisabeth was always hanging around. I mean she came to every soccer game for three years, but then our senior year she wasn't there once. It was like she and Suzanne just stopped being friends for no reason."

"Maybe like they broke up?" Dara suggested.

"I didn't say that," corrected Sharon. "But I did find it strange. Supposedly they were really close growing up, closer than I've ever been to a friend at least. When Suzanne and I were freshman, we lived together in the dorms. Elisabeth used to spend the night a lot."

"And did you ever think something was going on?"

After a brief pause, Sharon mentioned, "You know, Suzanne is married now with kids. I'm not sure it's best to be dragging this stuff out from under the rug."

"Come on, Sharon. I promise you. This has nothing to do with Suzanne. I want to know because of Elisabeth. When I met her today, she made it pretty clear she has a thing against gay people, and my friend Lesley who went to undergrad doesn't seem to remember it that way. I just want to know, so I can knock a little wind out of her sails the next time I see her. That's all. Help me out here."

"Well, let me put it to you this way. I don't remember her having a thing against gay people either. In fact, I used to wonder if she wasn't in love with Suzanne with the way she followed her around."

"Now we're getting somewhere. Why did you think that?"

"Well, everyone knew when Suzanne was a freshman and sophomore she experimented. I mean, it does happen. We did go to a women's college after all."

"Yeah, yeah. We all experimented. It just stuck to some of us more than others," joked Dara.

Laughing Sharon continued, "Well, I walked in on them one time accidentally."

"When was this?"

"Suzanne and I were sophomores. We lived in West on the third floor."

"Party Central," Dara mentioned.

"Yeah. Anyway, one weekend I had gone away to see my boyfriend at Hampden-Sydney, and I wasn't supposed to be back until late Sunday night. However, I arrived around noon that day, and the two of them were passed out asleep in bed together. They weren't exactly suitably dressed."

"What happened?"

"Nothing. They were asleep, so I turned around and left like I had never been there. I didn't want to embarrass Suzanne. I knew she was going through a confused phase, and I didn't want to seem unsupportive or anything. I've never told anyone, Dara, not even Suzanne."

"All right. I understand. So, if they were in this relationship for all that time, what happened? Why did they stop speaking senior year?"

"Well, fall of our junior year I introduced Suzanne to my friend Bryan Bell, and they hit it off immediately. They got to be great friends, but things began to change between them that spring. I think Suzanne finally told Elisabeth that she was in love with Bryan, and that was the end of it."

"And what makes you think that?"

"I remember Suzanne crying one day when I came in from class. She said she had gotten into a fight with Elisabeth, and she wasn't sure Elisabeth would ever speak to her again. I asked what about, but she wouldn't tell me. As far as I know, they never did talk again after that."

"Sounds to me as if they were having a relationship. Lesley was right."

"Dara, please don't do anything harmful with what I just told you. I'm not sure Suzanne ever told Bryan about it."

"No problem, Sharon. This won't get back to her. I promise."

"Good. Now on to better topics," her friend stated, changing their subject.

A few days later was the HRC's annual fund-raising dinner. Since it was an election year, the organization felt it was extremely important to focus their energies on supporting the Democratic candidate, so a large portion of the night's proceeds from their silent annual auction was going to go to his campaign.

As per usual, Dara invited Lesley to be her date to the formal event. Never being one to wear a dress though, the brunette chose a nice dark suit for the night before going to pick up her friend.

Driving up to the FBI agent's house, the younger woman walked to the door and knocked strongly. Within a moment, the shorter redhead answered the door.

"Wow. You look stunning," Dara complimented.

Lesley blushed slightly and gave a twirl so her friend could see the entire outfit. The black dress was perfectly cut in all the right places to show off the older woman's assets. "You look nice too, Dara."

"Remind me again why I've never made a play for you," the attorney teased as she circled the agent.

"Because I can kick your ass," Lesley answered quickly.

"Oh yeah. How soon I forget when you're dressed like this. I can only imagine where you'd strap your gun."

"Don't even let your mind go there, Rosenthal. I'm off limits, remember? I've got a girlfriend who would be happy to remind you of that fact."

"How could I forget, Southerland? Come on. You've got some people to impress, and I'm to be envied with you on my arm," she said, extending it to her old friend.

Walking her down to the car, she opened her door before moving to the driver's side. Both of them were fairly quiet as they drove downtown to the Hilton in DuPont Circle where the event was always held. In her mind Dara was going over the speech she was going to give at the dinner and the awards to be given to various political people. Once at the hotel, Dara took Lesley by the hand and led them through the growing crowd waiting to get in. Smiling at one of the interns she knew, Dara greeted her politely before heading down to the VIP reception.

Inside the attorney turned to her friend, "Are you going to be all right here for awhile? I have to go see to some last minute things."

Nodding her head, Lesley smiled. "Dara, you ask me that every year, and every year I'm fine. Go on. I'll be here when you get back."

"All right. Be back in a bit. When I return I'll try to introduce you to some people."

"Fine. There are plenty of people here to entertain me in the meantime."

Leaving Lesley to her own devices, Dara went to check in with the director of the HRC to ensure all was prepared for the evening. Getting the confirmation that it was, Dara swept through the silent auction and then the ballroom before heading back downstairs. Quickly she headed to the bar for a much-needed drink before scanning the room for any major players in the Democratic Party. As her eyes drifted across the room, an incongruence stood out among the sea of tuxedos.

There was a blonde standing in a gold-sequined dress talking to some other people only a few feet away. Dara couldn't help but stare for a moment at the contour of the stranger's back, almost completely exposed and yet so alluring at the same time. The blonde hair was pinned up off an elegant neck, making the attorney momentarily forget her mission as she just watched. She wanted to meet the woman, but as she approached, she heard that unforgettable voice, and her heart dropped. Going right up behind the blonde, Dara inquired, "Elisabeth?"

When the blonde turned, she smiled demurely at Dara. "Well, if it isn't Dara Rosenthal. Hi."

"Hi. I never would have expected to see you here."

"Well, I couldn't miss an opportunity to see what one of the nation's special interest groups was up to on such a night. I heard that the HRC was giving Arthur King an award this evening. It's not often I get a chance to meet the President of the NAACP."

"That's true. I'm actually presenting it to him myself."

"I also heard the DNC Chairman would be here."

Dara nodded as her eyes found the topic of their conversation. "Yes, Chad Peterson is here. Want to keep your enemies close, do you?" the attorney lightly bantered.

"Something like that," Elisabeth replied as her eyes followed Dara's across the room. "Do you know him?"

"We've met on a few occasions. Why? Would you like an introduction?"

"Only if you're offering," the blonde replied.

"Oh, why not? Come on." Taking the lead between them, they crossed the room to where the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee was speaking with people. Making their way up to him, Dara smiled. "Mr. Peterson, I'm Dara Rosenthal, one member of counsel for the HRC," she introduced, extending her hand.

"Yes, I remember you, Dara. Hi. How are you?"

"Good. And you?"

"Glad to be here." Looking over at Elisabeth, he smiled at her. "Dara, may I boldly assume that this beautiful young lady is your date?"

"Well, um," the attorney began.

However, Elisabeth answered for them. "Don't be so modest, Dara. You can admit to it. Mr. Peterson, I'm Elisabeth Gunter," she said with a beaming smile.

"It's a pleasure, Ms. Gunter," he answered. Looking at Dara he added, "You've done well here, Dara."

"Yes, the evening is turning out well."

"That's not what he meant, sweetheart," the blonde stated, touching Dara on the shoulder. "He was referring to me." Both the blonde and the chairman laughed lightly as Dara flushed uncomfortably. "Would you just look at her? So shy suddenly. Actually, Mr. Peterson, Dara is just too ashamed to admit that she's dating a Republican."

"Oh, you're a Republican?" he inquired in interest. "So, you must find yourself in quite a quandary with the President's stance on gay marriage," he stated.

With that comment the brunette felt it best she move on to other guests, so she smiled. "Mr. Peterson, it was nice seeing you again, but I really must see to some other people."

"Getting out of the line of fire?" he joked.

She nodded. "Something like that. Just remember to sweep up Elisabeth's ashes when you're finished, will you?" she teased.

"I'll do that."

Turning to the blonde, Dara took an unexpected opportunity. Since Elisabeth had introduced herself to Chad Peterson as her date, the younger woman felt she should take advantage of the chance to pretend herself. Leaning in to Elisabeth's cheek, she kissed her lightly before whispering, "Good luck."

Both the blonde and the chairman watched her walk away before turning to each other. "You were saying, Chad?"

"Doesn't matter, Elisabeth. We can talk business some other time. How is your mom? I haven't seen her in awhile."

"She's fine."

"And you?"

"I'm doing all right."

"Head over heels for Counselor Rosenthal, I see. Tell me. How did you get interested in her?" he inquired.

"Actually, Chad, we're not dating," she admitted. "That was just a ploy to get over to see you without it looking suspicious to her."

"But that's not from your lack of interest," he added. "I haven't seen you look at someone else that way in the thirty years I've known your family. She seems to be interested as well."

"I wish. I haven't been able to stop thinking about her since we met a few days ago," confessed the blonde.

"And just how did you meet?"

"You know that brief I sent to you with the coffee stains all over it?"

"The one that I've already shredded? I know the one."

"Well, that stain was courtesy of Dara Rosenthal. I was proofreading it on The Mall one afternoon where she and some friends were playing football. A loose ball came my way and knock over my coffee. Of course I was upset, because I had taken all that effort to type that on a typewriter instead of a computer, so it couldn't be traced, and she had to go and ruin it."

"Nevertheless, she stuck with you?" he asked with a smile.

Elisabeth nodded. "She has, Chad. She's a spitfire, just the type I've always been attracted to." He nodded. "I am a little concerned, though."

"Why's that?"

"She's such a zealot, and do you see who she's talking to right now? That redhead?"

"Yes. Who is she?"

"Her name is Lesley Southerland, and she's with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She, Dara, and I all went to Yale Law School, and even more Lesley and I went to undergrad together as well. She can probably tell Dara a few things I'd rather she not. Dara is a smart woman, Chad. With a little help, I'm afraid she can put two and two together."

"So, what are you going to do?"

Elisabeth shrugged. "Ignore her the best my heart will let me," she answered. "I can't afford to blow this. It would ruin my career."

He shook his head. "Elisabeth, how old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

"You're thirty-two years old. I've told you this many times, and I'll tell you a thousand more until you get it through your head. You don't have to do this. You don't have to put your career on the line or give up your love life to serve the interest of the people."

"This is just something I have to do, Chad. You and I both know that. Ever since Clinton was impeached, I knew I had to get involved for change. The Republican Party isn't what it was a decade ago. Back then I knew what it stood for, but now I'm not so sure. I know the game well by now. I stand alone, and I go down alone if it comes to that."

"Fine but I care about you like family. Don't throw it all away just to try to make a difference. You can make the same difference just being true to yourself."

Elisabeth nodded. "Thanks, Chad. I'll remember that."

He gave her a supportive smile. "And good luck with Dara. Don't let her get away."

Smiling back at her old family friend, the blonde responded, "I owe you a hug later for that."

"Go on now. Have some fun. We'll talk more later," he said, shooing her away.

A little later that evening when it was time for dinner, Dara took Lesley to their table that was filled with senators and congressmen from all over the country. Curiously the brunette wondered where Elisabeth was sitting but didn't have time to investigate the matter before being drawn into conversation with her fellow tablemates.

During a lull after the first course, Dara excused herself from the table to go to the bar at the back of the room. She ordered herself her second gin and tonic of the night and gazed over the sea of people in attendance. By the sheer volume it appeared as if over a thousand were there, all in support of her cause, which made her feel incredibly wonderful about the state of liberal politics. Upon receiving her beverage, she decided to sneak into the silent auction to see if people were being as generous with their funds as they had been in their attendance. She was immediately impressed at the large numbers she was seeing posted for various items. In inquisitiveness she took mental notes of who the larger bidders were for future reference. However, when she came to one coveted piece of art, she smiled at the blonde standing studying it.

"I see Chad didn't reduce you to ashes after all," she joked, taking a sip of her drink.

"No. He was surprisingly kind," Elisabeth replied, sipping from her own wine glass. "Which is more than I can say for you, Dara, leaving me there like that."

"You can't expect me to come to your defense, Elisabeth. After all you had the audacity to introduce yourself as my girlfriend. You don't even know if I'm single."

Elisabeth gave a charming smile, making her blue eyes sparkle even more. "Well, are you?"

"Yes, I am single at the moment. What about you?"

"Me too."

"And why may I ask did you choose to pose as my date in front of Chad? Some secret I don't know about you?"

In an effort to laugh off her unease, the older woman patted the taller woman on the arm and stated, "If you're ever curious about me, you can just ask, Dara."

Shooting the blue-eyed blonde a sexy grin, she mentioned, "There you go touching me again. I guess you like me regardless of how much you deny it," she teased.

Nodding, Elisabeth answered, "You caught me, Dara. Try as I might, I still like you. Somehow it doesn't seem to matter that you are my worst political nightmare. Your charm outweighs everything."

Finding it an interesting statement whether true or not, Dara decided to say something as equally provocative. "Well, politics aside I happen to like you too, Elisabeth. Even if you do work for the enemy, you're just too irresistibly beautiful. I can't help but notice you."

"Are you flirting with me, counselor?" Elisabeth asked, knowing full well Dara was, and furthermore, she was enjoying the brunette's attention.

"Yes, I am. Loud and proud is my motto, so you'll always know how I feel, Elisabeth. When I like someone I tell them. Nothing good ever comes from hiding the truth."

"I'll bear that in mind."

Checking her watch, Dara noted the time. "I'm sorry to cut this sparring season short, but I need to get back. Perhaps you'd like to listen to my wonderful speech about Arthur before I give him his award."

"That would be wonderful. I'd like to see what kind of stage presence you have to see how much of a threat you really are."

Dara chuckled loudly. "Well, in that case, I'll invite you to sit at my table right in front, so you have a good view. There is an extra space, and I'm sure you and Lesley can get along for that long."

"Will you introduce me to Arthur later?"

"Only if you still pretend to be my date, so I can kiss you again," the brunette bargained.

Elisabeth shook her head. "Don't forget I'm a Republican, Dara. Don't let my looks deceive you. You can't trust me."

"Don't I know it. Come on. I'll show you back to your table," the taller woman suggested, gesturing back toward the ballroom. Walking the blonde to the table where she was sitting, she pulled out her chair for her.

Smiling at the chivalry, the older attorney replied, "Thank you, Dara."

"You're most welcome. I'll come get you just before I have to go on stage for my speech if you'd like that front row seat," she commented.

"I look forward to it."

"Wonderful. Enjoy the rest of your dinner."

Going back to her own table, she was met by an anxious redhead. "Where have you been? I've been putting up with the senator's advances for long enough," she whispered, wrapping her arm around Dara's shoulders.

The brunette laughed lightly. "She likes you. It's hard not to when you're dressed this way," she teased. "Believe it or not, I ran into someone unexpected."

"And who is that?"

"Elisabeth Gunter."

"What? You're kidding me. Where?"

"She was in the silent auction looking around. She's sitting toward the back of the room. I don't know why she's here, but she looks fabulous. She introduced herself to Chad Peterson as my date, which I found intriguing."

"Seriously? That doesn't make any sense."

"No, it doesn't. Her presence doesn't make any sense at all. It makes me wonder what she's up to. There has to be something. Anyway, I invited her to sit up here with us during speeches. I'm hoping that might shed some light on the situation. She asked me to introduce her to Arthur as well. I don't get it. Why does she want to meet all these Democrats?"

"Maybe she's taking notes on us for the Republicans. She may be feeding them information by coming to this event. You know, they wouldn't know what was being said otherwise."

"True but she doesn't strike me as having that kind of power in the party. Of course I could always be wrong about that. Maybe her looks have gotten her farther than we think. Seems to me though that if she were in any position of influence she'd be working for the President's re-election campaign, not the DOJ."

"Good point. I suppose we'll never know though."

"Not unless we ask, which I intend to do as soon as I find out some more information on our beautiful enigma."

"I'd like to be there when you do."

Dara smiled at her friend. "Regardless of why she's really here, it felt strangely good to have her hanging on me in front of Chad. For just a moment I knew what it was like to have the arm of the second prettiest woman in the room, and it was fantastic."

"The second prettiest? Dare I ask who the first is?" Lesley inquired with curiosity.

"You of course."

"Well, thank you for the flattery, but I happen to believe Elisabeth is the most gorgeous woman in this room as well."

"She is that. Lesley, I could be in trouble here. When we aren't talking politics, it's easy to forget what she stands for. All I have to do is look in those blue eyes, and I could get lost. Good thing we won't be seeing a lot of each other. I would hate to fall in love with the enemy."

"Well, if it's any consolation, I think she's at as much of a risk of falling for you. After all, you are perfect in every way."

"God, who needs a girlfriend when I have you to stroke my ego?" Dara asked.

"Well, I can think of some services I can't provide, but how much do you want to bet Elisabeth would love to?"

"Yeah, right."

"No, I'm serious. I bet you that if you hung around her for a month or two she would be desperate for your intimate attention."

"Desperate being the operative word, Lesley. I wonder how long it's been since she's been with a woman," idly Dara pondered as their meal was served.

"Why don't we find out?" the redhead challenged.

"And just how do you propose we do that?"

"Ask her out, Dara."

"But she's supposedly straight, Lesley. That's not going to go over well. She'll turn me down flat."

"I'm not so sure about that. She might be equally intrigued with you. You won't know unless you try."

"You know what? Fine. I'll ask her out. That will prove where she stands once and for all."

"Great. I can't wait to see the look on her face," the special agent stated, as she took a bite of her dinner.

For the rest of the meal, Dara entertained the acclaimed guests at her table. However, just before the speeches began, she went to retrieve the blonde as promised. When she got to the back of the room where Elisabeth was seated, she was greeted by a dazzling smile. "Are you ready for your front row seat?" Dara questioned, extending her hand to the older woman.

The blonde attorney looked at it and then into the brunette's dark eyes before gamely taking her hand. As soon as they touched, the shorter woman felt the tingle all the way up into her arm. There was no denying the way the Democrat made her feel when they were close, but Elisabeth knew she had a far more important mission than to flirt with the attractive attorney. Nevertheless, she felt there wouldn't be any harm in indulging in her chance to be close to her, especially in such a public place.

Moving together up the aisle hand in hand, Dara could feel her heart start pounding. Not only was she touching her supposed enemy, she was enjoying the connection too much to let go. Elisabeth felt good near her, and the sheer magnitude of the blonde's physical presence made Dara proud to be in her own shoes at the moment. She knew many eyes were on her for being with the elegant woman.

Finally making it to the table with the congressmen, Dara held out a seat for Elisabeth. Thanking the brunette, the older woman sat and smiled at Lesley, greeting her politely as the taller woman took her chair as well. Dara then took it upon herself to introduce the blonde to other people seated near them quickly before speeches started for the evening.

As the first person got up to the podium, Dara shifted her attention from the blonde to the stage. She tried to focus on the speech, but she began to feel nerves in her stomach. The idea of standing in front of the entire audience hadn't bothered her once that night until she felt the blonde at her side. She knew she wanted to impress Elisabeth more than anyone else in the room but that speech would be filled with opinions with which she knew the older attorney would disagree. Knowing she had to put aside her mixed feelings about the woman next to her, she took a deep breath. This moment was more than just about her. It was about taking a stand against those beliefs she opposed, even if the woman she suddenly found interesting felt differently. She was honoring one of the world's most liberal leaders and a champion for the call to action, and she would not allow herself to feel badly about anything her talk entailed, even if it did mean speaking ill of Elisabeth's President. With those thoughts fortifying her confidence, she knew she was ready to make the biggest speech of her career.

Minutes later the time came for her to take her place at the podium. As she stood, she met blue eyes and felt a hand in hers squeezing it gently in support. Unable to even question it in the moment though, Dara simply smiled at Elisabeth and Lesley before going to the stage.

The blonde attorney watched as the younger woman went to the podium. She could tell Dara was

nervous about what she was going to do, but she hoped her presence was not making the situation worse for her. Even before the taller woman took her place on the stage, Elisabeth was impressed by the way Dara carried herself. She walked tall and confidently, smiling brightly as if she was not making a career-setting talk about Arthur King. By Dara's volunteerism with the NAACP, Elisabeth knew the Jewish attorney had great respect for the man upon which she was about to bestow distinguished honor.

Secretly the blonde had always admired him as well. He was a great leader for the social causes not only of African-Americans but all minority groups. By his strength, he was a clear example of what a diligent social leader should be, and as Elisabeth saw Dara take the podium, she sensed she was about to witness a new leader be brought into the light that very night, one who championed so many different causes, all for the greater good of the minority. With eyes riveted on the brunette, Elisabeth waited in anxious anticipation.

Dara looked out over the crowd for a second as she found her notes in the notebook that was sitting discreetly on the podium. The place seemed even larger from where she was standing, but she felt the energy of the room course through her and give her strength as she prepared to speak. She knew this was the first night of the rest of her life and the moment she had been anticipating for more than a decade. This was her moment to make her presence felt in her community and politics, and she was not going to give anything but her best effort.

Looking down at her notes, she took a deep breath and began. "Ladies and gentlemen, as one of the members of counsel for the Human Rights Campaign I find myself in the daily struggle of promoting the ideas for change in politics as well as in the law for people in our community. The needs of the lesbians, gays, transgendereds, and bisexuals have been brushed aside for far too long by the people with the power to facilitate change, but tonight I sense that momentum is shifting. As I stand before you, I see a great many of our country's leaders sitting here open and ready to grasp the reigns for the promotion of equality in all our lives. They are here with us tonight not only as members of Congress, mayors, governors, and executive directors of various social organizations, but as citizens of this great country who believe in the vision of parity for all people.

"Tonight I am honored to be presenting to you one man who has struggled with this very vision for over a decade. He is a man I greatly respect and admire for his tireless efforts to ensure that the rights of the African-American community are safeguarded from the forces of the narrow-minded. It is those same intolerant people who infringe upon the rights of the communities that the HRC protects and advocates, and so it is on a night such as this that all minorities stand together for one common goal, the ambition of equality for all American people. This night is not just about sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious differences, or even political affiliation but about the equal opportunity for all. The current administration in the White House would have you think that some groups are less worthy than others of their rights and are in the process of ensuring that our country's most-prized document, The Constitution, is shrouded with the message of inequality and hate. They want to amend the very fabric of our lives to direct what someone can and cannot do, who deserves protection under the law, and who has the right to marry. These horrific catastrophes cannot take place. We must fight them at every turn to ensure that we, the citizens, are always free. Our country was founded on that basic principle, and right

now that fundamental law is in jeopardy.

"During this election year, we must stand as a united front for the betterment of all, so tonight it is with great regard I present this special award for service to my friend, Arthur King, for his foresight of advocating the rights of his community and standing with us unified in the goal of equality for every American. He is a humble servant to the greater good of all citizens of our fine country. I give you this year's special service recipient, Arthur King."

The audience roared as Dara gestured toward her friend. She had never felt such a way in her entire life as she stood there waiting for him to come accept his award from her. The exhilarating rush of being heard and having an overwhelming response made her proud to be who she was. As Arthur finally reached her, they embraced in a tight hug before she relinquished her spotlight to him and returned to her seat. Not even looking at anyone else, she focused solely on the person she so admired to hear his charismatic reception.

Elisabeth also sat watching the great leader speaking. He was gracious enough to thank Dara personally for such a fine introduction, but the blonde was distracted by the brunette's presence next to her. Her inclination was that Dara was an effective speaker but never had she imagined the impact such a short dedication could make on a crowd. She was as moved as everyone else by the passionate call Dara had placed upon her community, and even though she couldn't vocalize her feelings about what the brunette had said, she felt proud for the first time in her life that she found interest in someone who knew exactly for what they stood.

As the next two hours passed listening to speeches, the blonde realized that everyone in the room but her was able to embrace themselves regardless of who they were or for what they stood. It was a trait she had always admired in others, and one she for which she had strived. In private she was able to admit to herself the feelings within, but whenever faced with the possibility of that knowledge being public, she always conceded to her fear of rejection on both a professional and personal level. In fact, it was only her family and some of her closest friends that knew the truth. However, in the midst of her trepidations, she and Chad had found a way for her to be true to herself, and she felt more so than ever during the evening.

When the official speeches were completed for the night, Dara smiled at her company. "Lesley, Elisabeth, this would be an ideal time to meet and greet if you two would like. I happen to know where the guests of honor are."

"That would be wonderful," the blonde stated.

"Yeah. Lead on, Dara."

With a confident grin, Dara extended an arm to both women, which they gladly took and led the two most beautiful women of the night toward all the special guests. While they were chatting Dara decided to make her move on Elisabeth as she and Lesley had agreed. Pulling Elisabeth aside out of earshot for a moment, she inquired, "Are you having a good time? Are these Democratic giants all that you imagined?"

"Yes, they truly are, Dara. Thank you for being gracious enough to introduce me. Democrats or not, these are people of great political prowess, and there is always something to be admired and to learn. I must say I was surprised at the valor of one speaker in particular."

"And who might that be?" the attorney asked, her eyes casually scanning the room for any politicians she might have missed during the evening.

"You, Dara. I felt the people respond to you. I felt as if I was witnessing a new starlet on the political stage," she commented. "You have a charisma that not many Democrats have."

"Well, I guess I should be flattered by that comment."

"It was meant to be a compliment, Dara," Elisabeth confirmed.

"Well, in that case, thank you. One day I do hope to be one of these titans."

"And I think you will have your time if tonight was any indication."

"And what about you, Elisabeth? Do you dream of walking with the giants as well?"

"I used to, but I've come to realize that sometimes covert operations for change can be just as effective. I don't necessarily crave the spotlight any longer, but I still believe in the idea of a different and better nation. However, I wouldn't mind knowing those in the spotlight," she admitted.

"Well, how about knowing me? Is that something you can accept graciously?"

"I think it would be more of a pleasure than a bane to be known as an acquaintance of yours."

Smiling brightly Dara gathered her courage. Even though she was only asking the older woman out as a dare from her friend, there was a part of her that knew she wanted the blonde to accept her invitation. "What about as more than just acquaintance, Elisabeth? Do you think there could be more to us?"

"Possibly. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I would like to invite you to a function I'm going to two Saturdays from now."

"A political function?"

"Not exactly," vaguely Dara answered.

"Well, what type of occasion then?"

"More of a social thing. I'm going to the Cystic Fibrosis Annual Microbrewery Beer Tasting. All the money goes to CF research. Would you like to join me?"

Elisabeth took a moment to contemplate her answer. Her immediate reaction was to accept because of her desire to get to know the brunette, but she had her political situation to consider. Deciding to test the water with the younger attorney, she asked, "Are you asking me out on a date, Dara?"

The taller woman shrugged. "Well, I did say that I don't hide the truth, Elisabeth. I like you. Despite the fact that you do work for the enemy, I can't help myself. I would like a chance to get to know you better. I'll let you decide if it's a date or not. How about that?" she bargained. "Dinner ahead of time. We can't drink on an empty stomach after all, and I guarantee a sober ride home. What could be better than a free dinner, all the beer you can drink, and no responsibility of getting yourself home?"

The blonde nodded. "You know what, Dara? I'd love to come, but I have to check my calendar before I can commit for sure."

"Fair enough," she replied. Digging into her pocket she pulled out a business card and a pen. Quickly she jotted down some phone numbers and then extended it to the blonde. "Here are all my numbers. You can best reach me by cell, because I'm not always in the office. How might I reach you?"

Elisabeth gestured for the pen as she dug into her own purse. She wrote her own personal numbers down on her business card before mentioning, "I would appreciate it if you wouldn't call or email me at work. I can't have my Republican counterparts knowing I'm consorting with the opponent. Even if we are both Yale grads, they might not overlook it."

"I understand. We'll keep things low profile, Elisabeth. I'm not looking for trouble, just some company," Dara said.

"Well, I should be going. It's getting late."

"How are you getting home?"

"I drove myself."

"Well, I should at least walk you to your car. The city is no place for a beautiful woman like you alone at this hour."

"It's not necessary, Dara. I'll be fine."

"It would make me feel better, Elisabeth. I couldn't have the Republicans blaming us for allowing something to happen to its most stunning constituent," she stated with another smile.

Blushing at the compliment, Elisabeth replied, "Well, thank you. I appreciate it."

"My pleasure. Let me just tell Lesley that I'll be right back."

Once she had returned from her short errand, the brunette extended her arm to the older woman again. Elisabeth looked at it but quickly accepted the gesture, giving into her own desires to touch Dara. Quietly they made their way through the thinning crowd and out of the building. "I'm in the garage across the street," Elisabeth mentioned.

"It's freezing out tonight. You didn't wear a coat?" the younger attorney asked as they waited on the light to change before crossing the busy intersection.

"No. I didn't want to have to deal with it."

"But you're so cold now. Look at you. Here. Take my coat," she offered, slipping her suit jacket off her shoulders.

"It's okay, Dara. That's not necessary."

"Please. It would make me feel better. You've got goose bumps you're so cold," she pushed.

Conceding the blonde nodded and allowed Dara to help her into it. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," she answered. Finally the light changed for them, and they were able to proceed into the garage. Silently the blonde led the way to her car. When they reached the gray Honda Accord, Dara dutifully held the door open after the blonde had unlocked it.

Elisabeth stood looking at the brunette for a moment as a flurry of feelings took hold of her. She knew it would be a challenge to keep her professional life private from Dara, especially at such a critical juncture in the election year, but she knew in order for her clandestine mission to succeed, she would have to be successful in keeping the brunette at bay. That thought saddened her though, because she knew the only way to do that was to not see her. For a brief moment Chad's advice entered her mind, and she wondered if she could really juggle a secret relationship with the supposed foe while maintaining her Republican persona at work. Only time would tell. Smiling at the woman to whom she was quickly becoming attracted to, she slipped off Dara's coat. "Here. Thank you for the coat and the escort."

Dara returned the grin. "Keep it. That's the only way I'm guaranteed to see you again," she teased lightly. "Besides, you'll be cold in your car until the heater kicks on."

Elisabeth laughed and shook her head. "You're sneaky, Dara. Fine. Just to prove that I will see you again, I'll keep your jacket."

"Call me about your schedule on Monday," the younger woman said as Elisabeth took a seat in the car.

"I will. Thanks again for tonight."

"It was my pleasure. Talk to you soon." Closing the blonde's door, Dara started to walk away

back toward the hotel. Just as she reached the street, she heard the friendly honk of a horn as the blonde's car passed her and pulled out into traffic.

As Elisabeth drove herself home, she took the time to take in the feeling of Dara's jacket around her shoulders. Even though the heat in her car was fine, she wanted to keep it on her body. She liked the way it felt against her skin. The wool material smelled exactly like the brunette like fresh linens and spice. The jacket was slightly too large for the blonde, but she still felt warm as she imagined Dara was there embracing her. Sighing deeply she knew she could be in trouble if she couldn't deny her feelings of attraction. Just then her cell phone disrupted her thoughts.

Pulling it out of her purse she flipped it open to see the number. Her heart dropped when she comprehended it, because she knew her night was about to become all business once again. Nevertheless, she answered, "Good evening, President Minion."

Later that night when Dara took Lesley home, she reported, "I invited Elisabeth to the CF Beer Tasting tonight."

"What did she say?"

"That she needed to check her calendar and would get back to me. I'm starting to think that those general feelings for other woman Elisabeth once had haven't been resolved. I see a certain desire there, but I don't know if it's directed at me or just a broad curiosity of the alternate life she left behind."

"I don't know. It could be both. Hopefully she'll come with us to the CF thing, and we'll find out more."

"By the way, Lesley, I didn't exactly tell her anyone else would be with us. Perhaps if she decides to come, we should just meet there. I kind of want some alone time with her."

"I understand. We'll work it out however you want. We have to get her to say yes first though."

"Well, she acted interested, so we'll see. This could be fun. It's been a long time since I've chased a woman. Elisabeth is a true challenge. I just hope I get her."

The redhead smiled at her friend. "Dara, you're sexy, smart, funny, and you have more charm than most women we know. If Elisabeth doesn't fall for you, she won't fall for any woman."

"Thanks for that biased opinion, but I don't want this to be a game of will she or won't she. After tonight I really do want to try to snag this girl. I think she's pretty amazing."

"But can you deal with the fact that she stands against all of what you believe?"

"If Maria Shriver and Arnold Schwarzenegger can do it, I think Elisabeth and I could manage. After all, the Kennedys are as liberal as they come and the Governator not so much."

Laughing Lesley inquired, "And just which one of you is the governor of California in that scenario?"

"I am of course. Elisabeth would just be a fine decoration," the brunette joked.

"Don't tell her that. She may have her own sights on a governorship."

"I don't think so, not after tonight. There's really only one politician between us, and that's me. As she put it, she's more about covert operations for change. I'll admit, I'm curious as to what she means by that."

Two weeks later Dara's limousine pulled up to a small house in Bethesda, Maryland. As the driver opened the passenger door for her, she took a deep breath and got out of the car. This was a big night for her. Elisabeth had accepted the invitation to dinner and the charitable function, so she wanted to make a good impression since they would be alone for the first time since their meeting.

Grabbing the flowers from the back seat, she gathered her courage and went to the door. At first she had opted not to buy flowers, because she wanted to move slowly, but Lesley had convinced her to in the interest of truly discovering the blonde's feelings. Dara rang the bell and then waited for the moment of truth. For the first time in years she felt self-conscious. Everything was making her nervous from her outfit and the flowers to the limo and dinner. However, she knew she could trust Lesley's clothing advice and that her outfit of black slacks, black turtleneck and classic black leather jacket was a chic choice for the event. She just hoped that heeding the redhead's advisement on what flowers to buy wasn't too much for the blonde to handle.

After a moment the door slowly opened and there before her stood the blonde. She too had on black slacks but a blue blouse that perfectly accentuated her eyes. Around her neck was silk scarf that rounded out the outfit. In her hand she held a long black cashmere coat. After recovering from her shock, Dara finally realized she hadn't said anything yet, so she smiled brightly. "Elisabeth, you look incredible," she admitted.

The blonde blushed lightly. She could tell she was having the effect on Dara that she wanted. "Thank you, Dara. You look nice yourself."

Extending the flowers the younger woman announced, "These are for you."

"Thanks. Would you like to come in while I put them in a vase?"

"All right." Both of them went into the house, and Dara closed the door behind her as to not let any heat escape into the cold night. She stood nervously in the foyer as the blonde traveled into another room she assumed was the kitchen. The TV was on in the living room and another blonde about their same age sat in front of it engrossed so thoroughly she didn't seem to notice Dara's presence. A few minutes later Elisabeth returned ready to go. Curiously Dara asked, "Is

that your roommate?"

"No. That's my little sister. I'd introduce you, but she'd kill me."

"Why's that?"

"She's sick with the flu and is in a bad mood. She's better off just left alone. I'll introduce you next time."

Secretly pleased that there would be a next time, the brunette just nodded her head. "Let me help you with your coat," she offered, taking it from the blonde.

Elisabeth indulged in the attention as Dara assisted her with her jacket. Without even asking she then took hold of the taller woman's arm as they left the house. "A limo?" the blonde attorney questioned.

"Well, I did promise you a safe ride home. This was the best way to ensure that would happen."

"I see. Well, tell me where we're going for dinner. You've been so secretive about this whole night."

"You'll see. Don't you trust me?" Dara asked with a sexy grin.

"I'm not entirely sure, Dara," she answered with a smile of her own.

Letting the blonde get into the limo first, the brunette did the same and then thanked the driver as he closed the door. "So, here we are. All alone," Dara mentioned. "I suppose now that it's just us we can stop pretending to hate each other."

Elisabeth laughed her tension away. "I don't know where you got the idea that I hate you, but it's not true. Your politics maybe but never you."

"Well, then I guess that's better than I expected, but let's not talk about the obvious political opposition between us. Let's talk about other things. Tell me about you. What do you like to do when you're not working?"

"I love being outside. I've always enjoyed riding horses. I did that when I was younger, was in major competitions. Hiking, walking, anything to do with nature is something I would be interested in. There is something so freeing about being out where there are no walls."

"That's the truth."

"I also like to write and read. That day we met I was mad, because you had messed up some writing of mine that had taken me days."

"I'm sorry about that. It was an accident."

"I know."

"So, what kind of stuff do you like to write?"

"Poetry mostly. Occasionally I'll write a short story. What about you? What hobbies do you have?"

"Well, like you, I'm very into nature. I love being outside. Sports are my thing really. Of course I like hiking and camping as well. Haven't had a lot of time for that though. Most of the time if I'm free and I'm not playing a pickup game with friends, I'm out logging flight hours."

"You're a pilot?" the blonde questioned curiously.

"Recreational only but yes. I really enjoy it. Being up in the air, especially on a clear day, you can see for miles. It's a neat feeling."

"Do you have your own plane?"

"Yeah. My parents gave it to me as a gift for graduating law school."

"That's quite a gift."

"It is. Maybe sometime you'd like to go with me on a flight. In the spring and summer it can be quite nice."

"I've never been in a small plane before. That could be fun."

"Great. Then we'll plan for it. Tell me about your family. You have a sister. Any more siblings?"

Elisabeth shook her head. "It's just the two of us. She'll be twenty-nine this year, which is so strange to think about. I can still remember her as a baby. Time has a way of flying."

"That's very true. How old are you?"

"I'm thirty-two. What about you?"

"I'm thirty. Just turned it actually last month. I thought it was going to be this big milestone in my life, but it wasn't. I still feel as if I'm treated as a kid at times."

"I know the feeling. I feel surrounded by balding old men or young guys that try too hard to act like the old men. No one ever seems to be themselves where I work."

"Not even you?" Dara inquired.

"Especially not me. I try my best to keep work people out of my personal life. It just wouldn't

mix well for me."

"Probably a wise move. What about your parents? What do they do?"

"They're divorced. My mother lives in Atlanta, and my father moved back to Germany after their divorce. She's an accountant, and he's a civil engineer."

"He moved back? Is that where he's from?"

"Yes. He was born and raised in Berlin. He met my mother when he was over here on a business conference."

"Do you look like him or your mom?"

"Both my sister and me look exactly like him, nice Aryan German girls," she stated with a roll of her eyes. "Sometimes that's hard to live down. What about your family?"

"I have one brother and two sisters. Both my parents are doctors. My father is a surgeon and my mother an ob/gyn. They are still married and live in Potomac, Maryland."

"Is it nice to have them so close?"

"It is. I don't get to see them as much as I would like, but when our schedules do coordinate, it's nice to have them around. Go back to what you said before about being Aryan. You sound as if you're not proud to be German."

"Let's just say it's caused me problems in my life. People can be stupid sometimes. With my ancestry being entirely German on my father's side, people sometimes think negative things about that. You know, when I was a kid, other kids would make fun of me. People sometimes blindly believe whatever they're told. You don't know how many times I was called a Nazi just for being German. Of course now as an adult, the fact that the Germans don't support the U.S. war with Iraq doesn't make me any less of a target. I might be German, but I am an American citizen. The ethnic bias in this country can be incredible at times."

"Tell me about it. I'm completely German myself, but with a name like Rosenthal, people see me as a Jew first."

"I don't," the blonde mentioned.

"And I haven't thought about you being German since you first told me your name. I was made fun of as a kid too for being Jewish. Kids can be so cruel for no reason."

"They certainly can. I've realized as an adult that it still happens though. It's just more indirect. Instead of saying it to your face, people use ulterior ways."

Dara nodded in agreement. "I know that for a fact. I guess that's one of the reasons I try so hard

to make a social difference. I believe everyone deserves the right to existence without prejudice. It would be an ideal place if everyone could just get along."

"I wish for that too, but the reality is it will never happen. There always has to be someone who thinks they are better than someone else," Elisabeth answered.

"That might be true, but it's not going to stop me from trying."

For the rest of the drive to the restaurant, the two of them made idle talk. However, once they were seated and had ordered, Elisabeth said, "I assume Lesley told you that we went to undergrad together. Where did you go?"

"I went to Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia. It's not that far from Washington and Lee actually."

"No, it's not. I love Hollins. I almost went to school there myself. They have a great riding program."

"Yeah. They're always nationally ranked. Why didn't you go?"

Elisabeth shrugged. She wasn't prepared to talk about her college days in depth, so she answered, "I just thought W & L could give me other opportunities that I wanted. It turned out to be the right choice for me."

"Then that's all that matters. That would have been funny though had you gone to Hollins. We would have known each other a lot earlier in life. That school is so small everyone knows everyone. There's no hiding yourself or your business. On the other hand, the sisterhood of being at an all-women's institution is so empowering, but it isn't for everyone."

"Why did you go there?"

Dara chuckled before responding, "Several reasons. It was only a few hours to the beach but in the mountains as well. It was close enough to home that I could drive back for a weekend if I ever wanted, but far enough that my parents couldn't drop by unannounced. However, most importantly to me at that time was the fact that it was all girls. I was about ready to burst with my raging hormones in high school and wanted a safe environment in which to explore the possibilities. Little did I know that women's schools don't have a higher rate of lesbianism in them. It's just that the practice is more accepted, because women tend to be more accepting in general of differences I think. Besides at the very least it had a good academic record."

Elisabeth laughed at Dara's blunt explanation of her desire for women, even in college. "Tell me when you first realized that you were interested in women," she requested.

"Why do you want to know that?" the brunette asked, wondering why the line of questioning had taken a turn.

"Well, you just said you picked your school because of the girls. Did you know early in your life that you were gay?"

"Actually, yes. From the moment I even knew what it was like to have sexual thoughts they were only about girls, but I had my struggle with it the way some people do. My parents and siblings have always been incredibly supportive though. I know I'm in the minority where that is concerned. Too many young people don't have the support to be confident with who they are. Their sexuality doesn't even matter. The kids today have far less support I think than when we were growing up. They have no one to show them the way."

"I would agree with that," Elisabeth mentioned, taking a sip of her red wine. Deciding to ask a question that had been on her mind since Dara had asked her to come to the CF event, she inquired, "May I ask if this Cystic Fibrosis function has personal meaning for you? I'm just wondering, because I've never heard of you being involved with them."

"It is personal. My nephew has CF. He'll be six in May. There's no cure for it."

Hearing the sorrow in Dara's voice, she instinctively reached across the table for the brunette's hand. "Is he doing okay?"

"He hasn't had a good year. He's already been in the hospital for three weeks this year. That's a week increase over his usual stays. They are concerned about him, because he's not gaining weight. He's just skin and bones."

"What are they doing for him?"

"They have a permanent feeding tub inserted into his stomach, so he gets fed at night as well as during the day. To be hooked to a machine every night of your life is no way to live, especially for a child."

"Poor thing. What's his name?"

"It's Justin. They're doing everything they can for him, but he's at an age where he's defiant. He doesn't want to do his treatments or eat properly. He's just like any other kid, but he doesn't realize how important it is to do those things. Those things will prolong his life, and without them..." Dara felt her emotions begin to slip, so she stopped speaking for a moment. She took a deep breath and said, "I refuse to even contemplate life without him. It's hard enough to accept the fact that my brother and my sister-in-law will outlive their son, but I refuse to put him in the ground prematurely with my thoughts."

Seeing the vulnerability on the attorney's face, the blonde felt terrible for bringing up the subject. Trying to be supportive, she squeezed Dara's hand tightly in her own. "I'm sorry for asking, Dara. I didn't mean to upset you."

"It's all right. It was bound to come up at some point during the night. The cause means a great deal to me, so it inevitably comes up in conversation. However, if we could talk about something

else, it would nice."

"What would you like to talk about?"

"How about your love life?" Dara suggested with a wicked gleam.

"There's nothing interesting on that subject," Elisabeth stated uncomfortably.

"Why don't you let me be the judge?"

Meeting dark eyes with her blue ones she countered, "Why don't you ask on another date? I can't give away all my secrets just yet."

"Is that what this is? A date?" Dara asked in sudden interest.

Shrugging off her slip of words, she replied, "I haven't decided yet." In truth she had wanted it to be a date as much as she felt the younger woman had, but she knew to admit that could have potential consequences.

"Fair enough," the taller woman mumbled as their food was brought to them.

Once dinner was complete and the bill had been brought to the table, Dara pulled out a credit card to pay, but Elisabeth objected. "Maybe this should be dutch, Dara."

"Why? I can hardly ask you to consider this as a date if I don't pay," she joked.

"But you're already paying for everything else tonight, the limo, the tickets."

"So? Allow me to do this. It gives me pleasure," she insisted.

The blonde smiled and nodded her consent. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"It's not often that I am treated so well by my dates," Elisabeth admitted.

"Well, that's about to change if you hang around me. As powerful as women want to be, I know that secretly they also want to be treated like a princess. It wouldn't be a childhood fantasy for so many girls otherwise. The key for most is to find a life somewhere between the two, and with me I always try to give women the chance to do just that."

Elisabeth smiled brightly at her companion for the night. For the first time in over a decade, she felt just as Dara had described, and she realized it was a common feeling whenever she was near the younger woman. "You're incredible, Dara. You know that, right?"

"I do now," the brunette answered with a charming smile.

"Someday you are going to make another woman the luckiest woman in the world. You'd make an ideal spouse."

"I've always thought so, but I'd have to be able to get married legally first."

Deciding to let the brunette see a little of her true self, Elisabeth mentioned, "If it means anything to you, I don't support the President's proposal of a constitutional ban. I think it's ludicrous for him to believe people are that discriminative. It will never be passed."

"You never know for sure, but I'm going to do my damn best to keep it from happening."

"Believe it or not, even more than opposing him, I'm for the work the HRC does. I think gay people should have the same rights as straight ones."

"Then why are you a Republican?"

"Because there are so many more issues than just that one, Dara. The Republican party has always firmly stood on what it believed. It's the Democrats who have the evolving party. You never know what you're going to get in a leader."

"It's an evolving party, because we want to keep pace with the changing times. We want to be on the pulse of the people, not some political dinosaur who refuses to see the changes facing our nation."

"You know what? I'd really rather not talk politics tonight. Can we just drop it for now? We can debate later, but I don't normally like to start arguments on a first date," the blonde teased lightly.

"Neither do I. It doesn't always make for a good first impression, so we'll keep politics out of it. Let's just go get ourselves drunk instead. Sound good?" Dara bantered, as their waiter came back to the table with her card and a sales slip. Signing it quickly she ushered the blonde back out into the night.

Once back in the limo Elisabeth questioned, "So, where is this event anyway?"

"At the Torpedo Factory in Old Town Alexandria."

"We're going all the way to Alexandria? That's a bit of a hike."

"True but it's worth it. I forgot to tell you that Lesley and her girlfriend are going to be there as well as some of my friends. I hope that's okay."

"It's fine. It'll be nice to meet some of your friends. Maybe they can give me some dirt on you," the older woman answered, lightly touching Dara's arm.

The brunette didn't say anything, but she did notice the elegant hand resting on her forearm.

Elisabeth had a habit of touching her, but she couldn't deny the shorter woman the pleasure, because she felt it just as greatly. The pull to be close to the blonde was more than she had experienced in a long time. Going with her instincts, Dara slowly maneuvered her arm until her hand was touching Elisabeth's. Not seeing any rejection, she enclosed the older woman's in her own and held her breath, but the blonde attorney didn't say anything, and they rode the rest of the way in that position.

However, Dara felt Elisabeth's openness for physical contact change once they got out into public. The taller woman didn't let it bother her though, figuring her assumptions about the blonde's confusion regarding her sexuality were true. The brunette had considered the fact that the older woman might truly be gay but unable to be open about it. Their night out together so far had bolstered her theory. Not one to ever out another person though, Dara just shrugged off Elisabeth's uneasiness, knowing it was not her but the situation that made the blonde anxious.

Almost as soon as they got inside, they found Lesley with Dara's other friends. "Well, it's about time you got here," the redhead stated with a smile. "We were beginning to wonder if Elisabeth had stood you up."

"I would never do that to Dara," the blonde mentioned, smiling in return.

"Elisabeth, let me introduce you to everyone," the younger woman said. "You already know this obnoxious redhead. This is Callie, Lesley's girlfriend."

"Hi. Nice to meet you," the blonde attorney said, extending her hand to Lesley's blonde girlfriend.

"You too. I've heard so much about you from Les. I feel like I already know you."

"I hope most of that was good," the attorney remarked uneasily. Privately she wondered if Lesley had shared any information to anyone about their college days.

"Of course it was. Not only that she happened to mention how lucky Dara was at this chance to take out the most attractive woman she's ever known outside of me," Callie joked.

Dara and Lesley both blushed, but Elisabeth took it in stride. "Well, that certainly is a compliment."

"Moving on," Dara cut in, deciding to move the blonde away before any other embarrassing comments could be made about her. "These are some more old friends of mine, Allison and Deborah Holladay. We went to Hollins together."

"It's nice to meet you both."

"The pleasure is all mine," Allison said lightly as she shook the blonde's hand.

Deborah just rolled her eyes and laughed under her breath. "Get over yourself, honey," she

quipped before shaking Elisabeth's hand. "Don't let these two gang up on you," she mentioned, pointing between Dara and Allison. "They'll flirt and flatter you into annoyance if you allow them, especially this one," she mentioned, curving an arm through Allison's.

"I'll bear that in mind," Elisabeth stated with a smile at the couple before her. It was obvious that even with Allison's playful flirting, Dara's friends were deeply in love with each other. It was refreshing to see such commitment, and instantly her thoughts turned to her own date, making her wonder if Dara wanted what her friends so visibly had.

Once formal introductions were out of the way, Dara suggested, "How about we go sample some beer now? We can catch up with the rest of the group later."

"Sounds good. Lead the way."

For the next two hours both women consumed beer from every available vendor. Even though the alcohol was affecting the way she was feeling, Elisabeth knew she had to maintain control around Dara. To slip and do something contrary to her image would be damaging to her political mission, so she took care not to insinuate anything by her words or actions toward the brunette. In her mind though she was spinning fantasies of what she would have rather been doing with the taller woman.

As the night grew later, Dara realized the closeness that they had shared at the beginning of the evening was gone. The brunette was disappointed in that, but she knew there was nothing she could do to persuade the blonde to act differently. Her theory that Elisabeth was still on her team sexually never left her mind as she watched the older woman's behavior, but she was simply an observer for the rest of the night instead of initiating any contact.

Around midnight Elisabeth mentioned that it was getting late, so Dara took the cue and bid her friends goodnight. Going back out to their limo, they both got into the back seat for the ride back to the blonde's house. During the ride the shorter woman made absolutely certain not to even touch Dara. She knew one caress could potentially compromise her will, so she sat as far away as possible from the brunette without seeming distant and cold. However, the younger attorney noticed the cool reception she was getting in the car and wondered what was going through the blonde's mind.

Neither spoke much on the way back to Elisabeth's house. Upon arrival Dara dutifully walked her to the door and lingered while the older woman unlocked her house. Looking down into blue eyes, the brunette could tell something was bothering Elisabeth. She hoped she hadn't scared the blonde attorney away that night. After all, she had enjoyed her company immensely, but she wasn't quite sure what Elisabeth was feeling as she gazed into her eyes.

Knowing the moment of farewell was at hand, the blonde knew she should just go inside her house. However, her body had other ideas. It craved to seek out the brunette's touch, but Elisabeth remained strong. She thought of the President and her career, which quickly impeded her passionate desires. Smiling at Dara in the most friendly way she could, she said, "Thank you for the terrific night, Dara. I had a lot of fun."

"I'm glad. It was a pleasure to be with you, Elisabeth. I hope we get another opportunity to spend some time together again in the near future."

"I would like that," answered the shorter woman.

"Then I guess I'll call you later this week and see what our schedules look like for any future endeavors."

"All right. Next Sunday night I'm going to the local Yale Law Alum cocktail party at the National Museum of Natural History. Are you going?"

"Yeah. I said I would. I guess I'll see you there then."

"So it would seem. Well, I should probably go inside. Thanks again."

"It was fun."

With a smile and nod, Elisabeth turned and went into her house. She closed the door behind her but curiously then gazed out the peephole to watch the brunette disappear down her stairs and back to the limousine. Suddenly a voice startled her. "She's attractive."

Yelping lightly Elisabeth turned to see her sister standing there in pajamas. "Shelby, you scared me. What are you doing up? I thought for sure you'd be passed out."

"I was earlier but got up for a drink. So, tell me. How was the date?"

The attorney shook her head. "I blew it. Things started out great. We had lots to talk about, and the chemistry is there. However, then we went to the CF event, and I started to feel self-conscious. As much as I wanted people to know that I was with Dara, I didn't. I've just got this image to uphold for the sake of the election campaign. I can't be seen as getting cozy with the opposition."

"But you like her. I can tell. Why does it have to be either or? Why can't you find a happy medium?"

"You wouldn't understand the complexity of the situation. Dara is an up and coming social leader for the Democratic Party. As a member of the President's re-election staff, that wouldn't sit well with anyone who knew about it. I do like Dara immensely, but my career is also extremely important, Shelby."

The younger blonde shook her head. "I think you're selling yourself short, Elisabeth. You've always been so afraid of anyone finding out about you. Now you have the interest of an attractive successful woman, and you're not giving it a chance. When will you ever? I don't want to see you go through life alone, because you're too busy with your job. What about a love life? Don't you want a relationship, maybe even kids someday? I know you do. You talk about it all the time."

You're thirty-two, which means the clock is ticking."

"Thanks for that terribly depressing thought, Shelby. I know how old I am and where I stand on kids. After this election I am planning on re-evaluating my professional situation, but until November I have to remain committed to the cause. People are counting on me. If Dara and I are meant to be, it can wait for a few months."

"Ten months, Elisabeth. Heck, you could have a baby in that amount of time. Just think about what you're doing. A woman like her doesn't come around often."

"Don't I know it," the older blonde mumbled, looking back outside to the empty street. "Well, I guess only time will tell how tonight went over. I'm seeing her next weekend at a Yale function. Hopefully by then we will have both regrouped."

When Dara returned to her apartment, she noted that her own sister with whom she shared the space was gone. Figuring that she would be out late, the brunette made herself comfortable on the sofa and picked up the phone to call Lesley. The redhead answered on the third ring out of breath.

"Did I catch you at a bad time?" the attorney joked.

"Why are you calling me? I thought you would be with Elisabeth still," Lesley mentioned.

"Yeah, well, the night didn't end as well as it started."

"What went wrong?" the agent inquired through bated breath. It was obvious she was being distracted by someone.

"Maybe we should just talk about this after you and Callie are finished," Dara suggested.

"Oh, come on, Dara. We'll both listen to every word. I'm putting you on speaker, so Callie can't ignore you," she teased. After a moment she continued, "Now you were saying?"

"Well, I thought I had her when the night began. She was being open and physical with me. If I didn't know any better, I would have thought she was making a move. However, once we got to the beer tasting, she backed off completely. It was almost as if she didn't want people to think we were together. I don't get it. After tonight I am almost positive the woman is in the closet and with good reason professionally. It has to be difficult given who she works for, but at the same time, the brush-off hurt more than I expected."

"Because you're interested."

"Of course I'm interested. Who wouldn't be? I just don't know what to do from here. I mean when we said good night we agreed to see each other again, but I don't know if that means as friends or more."

"What happened when you said good night? A hug, kiss, what?" Lesley inquired.

"Nothing. It was awkward. I really wanted to kiss her, and the vibes she was giving me early in the night made me think she would have liked that, but when we were with you all, it was totally different."

"Do you think maybe we're the problem, Dara? Maybe she's not comfortable being around your friends yet. We can be hard to take for someone new. We're an acquired taste," she teased lightly.

"Maybe. I don't know. She started acting weird before we ran into you, so I'm leaning toward no. My inclination is that she did not want anyone to think that we were on a date or involved in any way other than friendly. That point was clear to me."

"I don't know, my friend."

"Me neither."

"So, what now? You said you agreed to see each other again."

"Yeah. I promised I'd call her this week at some point to make plans. She's going to be at the Yale thing next Sunday too. You're going, right?"

"Sure am. Never hurts to schmooze."

"Well, then you'll be able to see her again and maybe shed some light on this situation. I mean, I know I asked her out as a dare to see which side of the fence she was really one, but now that I am fairly sure, it's painful to my ego to think she's not interested in me," she admitted.

"Well, any woman in her right mind would fall for you, Dara. You're perfect. Just give it time. There might be other issues that you don't know about. I mean, she might think being with you is a conflict of interest with her career. There aren't many gay Republicans left supporting the President after his gay marriage ban proposal. She might be lying low until that blows over as to not seem on the opposite side of the President. Although I will admit that any self-respecting gay person would have ditched him for what he's trying to do."

"Well, she confessed to me that she doesn't believe in the ban or that it will pass Congress. She further stated that she believes in gay marriage."

"I'm sure that's private information, Dara, and not what the President wants the world to see. She's probably going through some emotional turmoil here. I mean, she's been in the closet for over a decade and working for a group of individuals that hate what she is, even though they don't know that she is that way. I think I would be scared too of making any sort of movement. Her job is a stake, so maybe it's not you after all. I say you give her time. Let her get comfortable with you and the idea of being together, and see where that gets you."

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt to do that. Well, I'm going to let you two get back to your activities

now. I'll give you an update when I know something."

"All right. Keep your head up. I think you're closer with her than you realize. Talk to you soon."

"Good night, you two. Keep the noise down. I don't want to hear you all the way over in my neighborhood," the attorney joked with a laugh.

"Shut up. You're just jealous, because you're not in Elisabeth's bed right now. Make do. You know how to use your imagination. Now leave us lovebirds alone."

"Good bye."

"Night, Dara."

Hanging up the phone, Dara's thoughts strayed to the blonde of discussion. She idly wondered what Elisabeth was doing at the moment. She imagined her getting prepared for bed. Closing her dark eyes, the brunette let her mind wander, fantasizing what the older woman might look like under her clothes. She envisioned pale, soft, kissable skin, the curve of the shorter woman's shoulder under her lips. Dara pictured her hands moving over the buttons of Elisabeth's blouse, slowly freeing the blonde from its confines as her mouth took in the landscape of her elegant neck. Those same hands quickly found the clasp of the older woman's bra and released her from that imprisonment as well. Gazing down her eyes were met with the most perfect set of femininity she had ever had the pleasure of viewing. The crests were fair but quickly responded to her soft touch. Elisabeth emitted the tiniest of moans, signaling her consent. Looking back up to the blonde's face, she saw pink lips parted in anxious anticipation. Gently and reassuringly Dara met them with her own mouth, allowing them to meld together slowly into a deep exchange.

Just then the sound of the phone invaded the attorney's unfolding fantasy. Displeased that she was being interrupted from the only activity she was going to have for the evening, she grabbed the phone to check caller ID to see who it was before deciding whether or not to answer. Seeing an unfamiliar number, she grumbled a greeting.

"Dara?" the female questioned on the other end.

"Yeah."

"Hi. It's Elisabeth. Sorry if I caught you at a bad time."

"No, no. I was just getting ready for bed actually. What's up?"

"I just realized as I was getting into bed that I forgot to get my driver's license back from you. I had asked you to hold it when we were at the beer tasting, and I didn't get it back."

Reaching into her pants pocket, the brunette retrieved the blonde's license. "Oh yeah. It's right here. I'm sorry. I totally forgot."

"It's okay."

"Did you want me to bring it to you tonight?"

"No, that's okay. I'm not sure you're fit to drive, and it's late. Why don't I just get it tomorrow?"

"Fine. What time do you want to meet?"

"Around 11:00 if that's okay with you," Elisabeth stated.

"Fine. I'll come by your place."

"Are you sure you don't want me to come to you?"

"No. It's fine, really. I'm going to be over that way anyway. I'll just bring it by your house."

"Great. I really appreciate it."

"No problem."

There was a momentary pause in conversation. Elisabeth didn't know quite what to say. She hadn't intended on seeing or speaking to the brunette so soon after their disaster of a date, but she was faced with at least another short encounter the following day. "Well, I'm going to go to bed now. Thanks again for the wonderful time tonight."

"My pleasure. I'll see you tomorrow. Sleep well, Elisabeth," Dara said in almost a whisper. She couldn't help herself. After her vivid imagination, she was picturing the blonde just then in nothing but a bed sheet, and her hormones were getting the better of her.

The brunette's low voice stirred the older woman's desires. She shifted nervously on her bed. Her thoughts automatically turned to the vision of Dara being there with her. However, she didn't vocalize that. Instead she answered as evenly as possible, "You too, Dara. See you tomorrow."

"Good night, Elisabeth."

"Good night." Once the line went dead, Elisabeth placed the phone back in its cradle before sitting for a moment. Just the tone of the attorney's voice was making her stomach quiver. She knew she had consumed far too much alcohol to be thinking clearly, but she let her body override her mind. Getting under the covers and extinguishing the light, the older woman closed her eyes and envisioned Dara there with her. She could almost feel the weight of younger woman's body on top of her own as her blue eyes met dark ones. Elisabeth craved the intimate attention that could only be fulfilled with another woman. It had been eleven years since she had felt the touch of woman's hands against her body, and she knew she wanted Dara's against her skin. The Younger attorney fascinated her. The way the taller woman held herself, her confidence just made her all the more alluring to the blonde. She fantasized that the brunette's

body was lean and toned just as she appeared in her suits. In her mind she let her hands run through that dark hair and pulled the younger woman's head down to her own to meet in a greedy kiss. The bare skin of Dara's frame pressed tightly against her own. The brunette's muscular legs entwined with her own as the taller woman's hands trailed over all the places that needed attention.

Elisabeth moaned as her body instinctively squirmed to the images in her head. She wanted the other woman so desperately that she wasn't sure she could manage to keep her carnal hunger at bay. It was in that moment she truly realized the extent of Chad's words from a couple of weeks prior. She was giving up so much in her pursuit of a career. She was not only gambling with the most powerful man in the world, but she was also potentially forfeiting the best thing that had happened to her since Suzanne. Briefly Elisabeth left her fantasy to consider her options. However, she quickly realized that the best one was to stay on course.

She had the President's trust. It was the spot she had been angling for since taking a position at the DOJ, and now serving as a part of his re-election campaign, it had become even more important. The President was finally starting to open himself up to her, and she could not afford to blow her chance. He believed in her, and whether or not she felt the same towards him, she knew this was her one chance to make a difference in politics and the November election. She knew she would pay just about any price to see her mission come to fruition, but she never considered that a love interest would ever enter the picture.

Her only love interest was supposed to be a surmised relationship she had fostered with the man she had hoped to topple. So far the plan had worked well. The President, although faithful to his wife, had extended her some affection, albeit not sexual, which relieved Elisabeth greatly. She knew there was always a chance things could progress to such a level, but she was confident that unlike some Presidents of the past, this one would at least stay committed to his wife while flirting with the blonde in a casual manner. Elisabeth had made herself comfortable with the idea of such a relationship, even though under it all she knew she was trifling with someone's feelings and trust. The information he had bestowed in secrecy had far outweighed any objections she could imagine to cease such a course. She knew it would be the intelligence she garnered that would be most beneficial to stopping the monster of a man that had been placed into office four years previous.

With a sigh Elisabeth reconfirmed with herself that this was the best way to help her people. Even though Chad had tried to dissuade her from the beginning, she wanted to do this for the party in which she placed full faith. When she had first proposed the idea of spying to the DNC Chairman, Chad was reluctant to allow the daughter of a personal friend to take on the President alone. Their families had a long relationship, and he didn't want to see anything happen to Elisabeth professionally or personally, but she had managed to convince him that she could help in ways others couldn't. After all she was a trusted member of the Republican Party and an attractive woman who knew how to use her wiles as a weapon when necessary. Finally after much discussion, Chad compromised and stated he would take any information she could provide and pass worthy parts on to the right people but that he would not solicit her for any intelligence. He didn't want to be caught in any kind of scandal such as Watergate, because the course of the nation was too dependent on the outcome of the November election. They further

agreed for the benefit of the Democratic Party that she would be solely responsible for her own actions and never accuse him or any other member of requesting her to spy. This was her own venture. She stood alone and perished alone should she be discovered.

Elisabeth had felt confident that she would never be discovered until she had met Dara. The brunette attorney was incredibly astute, and she sensed immediately that the woman was on to her deception. She figured Dara couldn't quite place the pieces together yet, but she knew there wasn't much time before she did, especially if their relationship turned intimate. That was why it was imperative the blonde not get involved with the younger woman. She did not want to jeopardize her mission for the feeling of the taller woman's body against her own. Elisabeth knew her cause far offset any sense of loss she might feel at the absence of Dara's touch.

The following morning Dara rose later than normal. The alcohol from the night before had taken its toll on her head, and she awoke with a pounding headache. Luckily, though, after taking some aspirin, she was feeling better, especially after a shower and light breakfast. She was just sitting at the kitchen table, finishing her meal, when her younger sister came in.

"Morning, Dara. How was your date last night?" she asked inquisitively.

The brunette attorney shrugged. "Well, I came home alone, so I suppose it could have gone better, Leah," she joked. "Are you just getting in?"

Her sister nodded. "I spent the night at a friend's place."

"Hope you and that friend had protected festivities," Dara mentioned. She knew her sister was promiscuous, leaving her with some concerns about her safety.

"Not that kind of friend," she stated. "Although I've always wondered it what it might be like to jump the fence. You seem to like it pretty well."

"Sure do but I don't think you'd feel the same way, Leah. You're too interested in the boys to give them up permanently, and being a switch hitter isn't an easy life from what I've been told."

"Probably true. So, anyway, tell me about this girl. You promised you would. What's her name?"

"Elisabeth Gunter. She's a thirty-two-year-old attorney. She's one of the hottest women I've ever known. What else do you want to know?"

"How the date went. You took her to the CF beer tasting. Then what? Did you get her drunk and put on the moves?"

"No. We both did get a little drunk, but she didn't seem to want to have anything to do with me. It was weird actually. At dinner I was getting the vibes that she was into me. She kept touching me constantly and smiling. I was getting a clear signal, but then we went to the event, and she acted like we were barely even friends. I mean, we talked and stuff, but she didn't touch me any more and she shied away from my advances. It made me very uncomfortable actually, because I

thought I was reading her right, but I suppose I wasn't."

"Sorry to hear that. I know you were looking forward to spending time with her. You seemed so excited about the prospect before you left last night."

"Yeah, well, I misjudged her," the older woman mumbled into her coffee cup.

"Doesn't make it any easier, does it? I can tell you're still into her."

"Of course I am. She's really incredible, but sometimes these things just aren't meant to be."

"Or maybe they are, and you're just giving up too soon. She wouldn't have said yes in the first place if there wasn't interest on her part."

"That seems to be Lesley's take on it as well. She thinks Elisabeth is just too afraid of making a move."

"Why would she be afraid? Is she straight?"

"I don't think so and neither does Lesley, but Elisabeth hasn't confirmed or denied anything. She's a Republican, Leah, and not only that, she works in that environment. To be seen with me can be a scary career prospect. From that standpoint, she has a lot to lose by being in a relationship with me. I'm the sworn enemy. Not only that, if she truly is gay, the chances of her co-workers knowing about that are slim to none. It would be difficult to come out of hiding unless she was sure of herself, which obviously she isn't."

"Still you shouldn't give up so easily. I know you like her."

"I do like her, Leah. We'll see, I suppose. I'm not ready to give up quite yet, but you know I'm not used to having my ego banged up like this by women. The mixed messages are hard to take. It would be easier if she would just tell me how she really felt. I could take it better than trying to guess."

The younger woman nodded. "I suppose you're right. Well, good luck with her. Sounds like you're going to need it. So, anyway, what's up with you today? I thought you had a basketball game this morning."

Dara's eyes popped open wider at the mention of that. "Oh, I totally forgot. What time is the game on the schedule?" she asked as her sister went to the refrigerator.

"Says it starts at 11:00. It's just after 10:00 now. You still have plenty of time to get there."

"Shoot. I have to get going. I promised Elisabeth I would drop something by her house at 11:00. I forgot about the game. I need to go there first."

Leah smiled at her sister. "Good luck. And if you like her that much, give her a chance."

"I will. See you later. Have a good day."

Rushing back to her bedroom, Dara threw on some workout clothes and a coat before hopping in her car. Heading off towards Bethesda, she figured she should call Elisabeth ahead of time to let her know she'd be early but then realized she had left the blonde's phone numbers at home. Shrugging it off, she figured it wouldn't be a big deal to show up early unannounced.

At 10:40 the attorney pulled up in front of Elisabeth's house. Jumping out of the car, she quickly made her way up the walk and rang the bell. It was only a moment before the door opened and the older woman's sister answered.

"Hi, you must be Elisabeth's sister. I'm Dara Rosenthal. Elisabeth forgot her driver's license last night, and I was just returning it."

"That's sweet of you. Come on in. Elisabeth's in the kitchen."

With the invitation, the brunette made her way into the house and then followed Shelby toward the kitchen. As they made their way through the living room, Dara noticed the blonde in the kitchen standing at the sink. Her back was to them, allowing Dara a moment to view her. The blonde's hair was in a ponytail, exposing the back of her neck to the younger attorney. She was wearing a sleeveless blue tank top and a pair of blue and green flannel pajama pants. Dara thought she looked adorable. Just then Elisabeth turned to pick something up off the table. Immediately Dara's eyes took note of the way the tank top gapped down as she leaned over, exhibiting the items of the brunette's fantasy the night before for a brief moment.

However, before she could advert her dark eyes, she met blue ones. "Dara, hi. You're early," Elisabeth stuttered, standing up straight.

"Yeah. Sorry about that. I remembered that I had a basketball game at 11:00, but I wanted to get this to you before then," she mentioned, placing the blonde's license down on the table.

"Thanks. I appreciate that," the older woman answered.

"No problem. Sorry I came by before you were ready."

Looking at her sister a moment, Elisabeth realized she hadn't given them an introduction yet. "I assume you've met my sister Shelby by now."

Dara nodded. "You were right. You two look a lot alike."

"So you think I'm cute, do you?" Shelby teased lightly, putting a hand on the brunette's arm.

Laughing loudly at the younger blonde, the thirty-year-old played along for the fun of it. It was obvious to her that Shelby had no real interest in women anyway. "Extremely. Maybe I asked out the wrong girl."

"Well, you can always correct that mistake," Shelby answered.

Glancing at Elisabeth, Dara tried to read her for a moment but couldn't. Figuring there was no harm, she said, "Well, how about it then, Shelby? I'm about to head over to the gym and put the hurt on some friends of mine in a game of hoops. You want to come and drool over me for awhile? I could always use a good ego stroking."

Playfully the twenty-eight year old gave Dara the once over. "I'm already drooling, hot stuff. Just let me grab a coat." Looking at her sister, Shelby inquired, "Lis, you want to come?"

"Well, I'm not exactly dressed yet."

"We've got a few minutes. Just throw on a sweatshirt. You already look great," Dara commented.

Unable to stop herself, the older blonde flushed lightly. "All right. I'll be ready in a few minutes."

When she was gone, Dara looked at Shelby. "What was that all about?" she teased.

"Just making a point to Lis. That's all. It's a sister thing."

"Whatever you say, Shelby."

The younger woman smiled at the brunette. "Dara, you just never know. This could be the start of something," she joked.

"True. You two look so much alike, and you are younger."

"Fewer hangups as well," the blonde mentioned.

"Just maybe I can score with one of you after all," Dara jested.

"You'd have to fight off that awfully big boyfriend of mine, but I'd root for you."

Dara laughed. "You're all right, Shelby. Now if I could just get your sister to lighten up."

"Give it time, Dara. I know she likes you, but it's complicated."

"Tell me about it. Last night I first thought she was going to jump me in the limo, and then at the end of the evening, I got the cold shoulder. That does things to someone's psyche. At this point I'm not sure which way I'm going with her. I mean, she's never even confirmed if she's a lesbian or not. I'm putting my heart into someone, but I don't even know if she shares my interest. Come on, Shelby. You have to tell me if I'm just living in a fantasy land on this one. I feel like she's into me, but she's scared of me at the same time."

Putting a hand on the brunette's shoulder, Shelby leaned up to Dara's ear. "Trust me. She's into

you. I heard just how much last night," secretively she declared.

"What do you mean? What did she say?"

Putting her mouth against the brunette's ear again, she whispered erotically, "I believe the exact phrase she used was, 'Fuck me, Dara. Please, baby.'"

The attorney took a control breath at the thought of Elisabeth actually saying those words and the blonde's younger sister's body brushing into her seductively. "Are you trying to kill me, Shelby? Did she really say that? Why would she say that to you?"

"She didn't say it to me. I overheard her. She thought I was already asleep, but I can actually hear quite a lot of her bedroom activities out in the hallway."

"Are you saying she was..."

"Listen, Dara. My sister might not have had a lot of the one-on-one horizontal tango, but she does have the most active solo sex life I have ever known. She's a tomcat just waiting to be discovered." Feeling her legs start to weaken at the thought, Dara lowered herself into a kitchen chair. "What's a matter, Dara? Too much for you?" Shelby joked.

"I think you've told me quite enough. I'm not sure I could handle anything else."

"Oh, come on. It's not like it's a big deal. People do it all the time."

"No, it's not a big deal. It's just that her doing that and thinking about me is huge. It's almost too much to comprehend."

"Dara, she's thirty-two-years-old. Her clock is ticking. Her hormones are raging. These are supposed to be some of the best years of her sex life, but she's alone, because she's scared. She obviously wants you, and I think it's pretty clear the feeling is mutual. Go for it. Please. I'm begging you. Give my sister what she's been wanting her entire life."

Shaking her head, Dara answered, "I can't unless she's ready, Shelby. If she's not ready to accept the life she's been denying for so long, then it won't meet her expectations. I will have failed her miserably. I only have one shot at this. Whether you choose to believe this or not, I don't want your sister for a cheap thrill. She's got the hottest body I've seen in years, but it's about more than that. I want to be the one to show her the way, and that takes time and understanding."

"Well, she'll be all the better for it if you succeed," the blonde mentioned.

A few moments later Elisabeth returned in a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt. Dara smiled at her as she tried to push away the intimate things Shelby had said to create havoc in her mind and body. However, it was difficult considering how lovely the brunette thought the older woman looked. "I like your hair like that," she complimented. "You should wear it that way more often."

"Thanks. I usually don't wear it up, but I haven't even showered today. You're extremely lucky that I agreed to even go out like this. Thankfully it's just to the gym."

"Nevertheless, I think you look terrific." Dara waited to see her blush before turning to Shelby and joking, "Come on, beautiful. Let me go show you off in front of the girls."

Quietly Dara drove the three of them to the gym where her game was taking place. When she arrived, she got some grumbles about her being late, but for the most part everyone was more interested in the two blondes that had accompanied her.

"Where did you find them?" one of her teammates asked.

"On the corner. Thought I'd pick them up to lift our team's spirits a bit," she jested.

"Well, you certainly did that. Which one is yours?"

"They're both mine, so don't get any ideas."

"They're so hot. Are they twins?" curiously another teammate asked.

"Yeah, right. Lesbian twins, everyone's favorite fantasy. No, they are just sisters."

"Close enough. Man, you sure are lucky, Rosenthal."

"I know, so make me look good today. I've got some showing off to do."

As Shelby and Elisabeth sat in the bleachers, the two sisters idly chatted about the brunette. "I have to hand it to you, Lis. She's one of a kind. You know how to pick them."

"I told you this morning, Shelby. We can only be friends. I just can't deal with that right now. The election is more important."

Her younger sister shook her head. "You are so going to miss the boat on this one, Lis, and you're going to regret it for the rest of your life."

"Don't tell me how I'm going to feel, Shelby. I know what I'm doing."

"No, you don't. Dara is totally into you, and you're going to put her off for so long, she'll finally get the hint and go away. That's not what you want happening. You want that woman. You want her to love you. You can't deny it," the younger blonde pressed.

Elisabeth took a deep breath. "I'm not denying anything. I just know that my career is more important to me at the moment. I'm needed by other people."

Shelby shook her head. "You know what, Lis? When this blows up in your face, I'll still be there to comfort you, but I am going to say that I told you so."

"Fair enough," the attorney conceded as her eyes followed Dara along the court. She watched as the brunette played with her friends. She wondered if the younger woman could read her as easily as her sister. She hoped not, because she had a lot to lose when it came to her career. Nevertheless, she privately enjoyed watching Dara's athletic prowess for the next hour.

When the game was finally over, the brunette came over to them and smiled. "Glad to see you stuck around. I'm sure it was pretty boring."

"Boring? Far from it, Dara. You certainly know a thing or two about spanking your competition," Shelby teased, immediately laughing at her own remark.

Dara chuckled as well as she got the deeper meaning of not only the basketball game but Shelby's sister. However, Elisabeth did not seem at all amused at the comment. "Well, could I convince either of you in a casual lunch? I'm not exactly appropriate for anything fancy, but I'd love to take the best looking blondes here out for a bite."

"Actually, I need to get to work at some point today, but thank you anyway," the eldest woman answered.

"Work? What's so important at work right now?" she asked Elisabeth.

However, Shelby beat her to an answer. "Ever since she started working on the re-election campaign, she's been working non-stop. The woman is crazy."

"You're working on the re-election campaign? I thought you were still at the DOJ," Dara inquired with confusion and hurt. She couldn't fathom that the woman she was interested in would actually work to get the man she hated re-elected to office.

Seeing the look on the brunette's face, Elisabeth wanted to smack her younger sister. She intentionally hadn't mentioned that piece of information to the taller woman in fear of the rejection that could ensue. Nevertheless, it was now in the open. "Yeah, I am working on the campaign. I'm still with the DOJ, just on a leave of absence."

"Why didn't you tell me this sooner? You know how I feel."

"That's why I didn't tell you. It's a job, Dara, and it'll look good on my resume."

"But you're trying to get a man re-elected who hates me. I thought I knew you a little better than that."

"You don't know anything about me, Dara," indignantly Elisabeth commented as she stood. "And as far as I'm concerned, you never will."

"Lis," Shelby rebuked.

"Stay out of this, Shelby! It's none of your business!" Looking back at Dara, she held a firm face. "Look, Dara. This isn't going to work. We're too different. I thought I could have a gay friend, but you will not let go of the fact that I'm on a different political side than you. I've done my best to not make it an issue between us, but it's clear you can't get over that, so as far as I'm concerned, we have nothing left to say to each other."

Taking the sharp retort with a strong countenance, Dara swallowed the pain at the stinging remarks. "I'm sorry, Elisabeth. I apologize. You're right. I haven't been able to get over it, and I'm not sure I ever will. It probably is best that we not associate any longer." Turning to the younger blonde, Dara smiled. "Shelby, it was a pleasure meeting you. Thank you for your company. You could teach your sister something about manners. I'm going to head for the showers now. If you'd like me to take you home, just wait for me in the lobby. I should only be about half an hour."

The younger blonde nodded. "You know, it's not far. I think we'll just walk, but thank you for the offer." She leaned to hug the brunette for a moment. "Perhaps you should focus your attentions on the other Gunter girl. I'm a much better companion for you than my sister, I think."

"Is that an invitation?" Dara asked in confusion.

"It sure is. Call me sometime?"

"Of course. How could I turn down such an offer?"

"Good. Thanks for today. I'll talk to you soon."

"Great. Bye, ladies." Dara watched as the two of them left the gym. She wasn't sure what had just taken place, but she knew two things. Elisabeth had just kicked her to the curb, and the blonde's younger sister was up to something.

Walking out into the cold afternoon, Elisabeth glared at her sister. "What in the hell were you doing, Shelby?"

"Saving your ass, Lis! I don't know what your problem is! She likes you. She really likes you, and she's trying so hard. You're the one who lied about what you were doing. Why did you give her the brush-off just now?"

"It's for the best."

"You're just too scared! Lis, I know how you feel about her."

"No, you don't! You don't know anything!"

"Oh no? Then just tell me what the hell you were doing last night."

"What are you talking about?"

Shelby rolled her eyes and then affected her sister's raspy voice from the night before. Spewing the vulgar commentary she had heard through the door last night, Elisabeth's younger sister faked the peak she had overheard. "Now tell me, Lis, I don't know what I'm talking about. You were fantasizing about her in your bed!"

"You bitch! You were spying on me?"

"I wasn't spying, Lis. You're louder than you think you are. Damn, woman, by the sound of it, you wanted her badly last night."

Shaking her head, Elisabeth began to cry. "Did you tell her?" she asked. "I'll never forgive you if you did."

"Lis, you like her. Why won't you let yourself be happy?" Shelby inquired, ignoring the posed question.

"You wouldn't understand," the older blonde answered.

"Try me."

Before Elisabeth could offer any sort of reply, her cell phone rang. She recognized the number and tried to compose herself quickly before answering. Hearing the President on the other end, she stated, "Sir, I will be in as soon as I can, but it's going to be at least two hours." She listened for a moment to him before saying, "I understand the imperative nature of the meeting with you, and I will try to get there as soon as I can."

Shelby just listened quietly as the two of them walked toward their house. However, when Elisabeth was off the phone, she inquired, "Who was that? I've never heard you talk to anyone like that before."

Sighing the attorney figured she could tell her sister the truth. "It was the President," she responded.

"The president? What president?"

"Of the United States, Shelby."

"You just spoke to the President?" the younger woman asked in surprise.

"Yes."

"Holy shit! How long have you known him?"

"We met over the holidays in December. I was invited to a dinner at the White House, and we started communicating. I'm responsible for a part of his campaign, Shelby."

"I didn't realize you two were on friendly terms."

"Well, we are. That makes things complicated with Dara. Do you see that now?"

Shelby nodded. "I'm sorry, Lis. I guess this political opposition is more serious than I realized."

"It's true I like Dara. I'll admit that to you and only you, but this is a chance of a lifetime, and I can't let anything get in the way of that. Do you understand?"

"Yeah. I understand."

"Thank you. Now promise me that you will not try to lure Dara back for my sake. If you want to be friends with her, that's fine, but just know a relationship between us is impossible right now."

"Will you at least be friends with her?"

"I'd like to be, but I'm not sure it's going to work," Elisabeth admitted.

"Just leave it to me. I'll get her back. Don't worry."

Laughing lightly at her sister, Elisabeth replied, "Your powers of persuasion can be scary, sis. No one can really resist them."

"That's what I'm counting on."

The following Saturday evening was the Yale Law School cocktail mixer at the National Museum of Natural History. Dara and Elisabeth hadn't spoken to each other since the blow-up at the gym, but Shelby and the brunette had talked several times. Wondering if the blonde was still going to be there, Dara showed up an hour into the party with Lesley in tow.

Immediately they both were caught up with chatting with fellow alum, but the brunette kept her eyes out for the blonde who had been in her mind. It wasn't until she had made a full tour of the museum that she found her though. Elisabeth looked off in thought as she studied an exhibit.

Slowly making her way up behind the woman, Dara stepped slightly to the side of her and pretended to be looking as well. Neither said anything for a moment even though she sensed the blonde knew she was there. After an extended pause though, the younger woman said, "Elisabeth, I'm sorry about last Saturday. You hurt me by hiding your current career choice, because I thought you and I were more aligned politically than we really are. However, from a purely career standpoint, I understand why you're doing this. To be of a chosen few to set something of this magnitude in motion is extraordinary, and the significance of that shouldn't be shadowed by my vehement disapproval."

"You know, Dara, one of the greatest things about our country is the freedom to do as we choose. We can express any feelings that we have, and it's protected by our rights as citizens. You have a right to your opinions just as I have a right to mine."

"I know. Sometimes I get overly zealous to make people see things my way that I lose sight of that," the brunette confessed. "I want everyone to be a believer in social justice and equality."

Sighing Elisabeth mentioned, "Dara, I am a believer in most of your social causes. It's just that I value my fiscal opinions more highly. You are just the opposite. You are about social change regardless of the cost. I'm more economical in my approach, as is the President, I assure you. When he says he's a compassionate conservative, he means it."

"I don't buy that, Elisabeth. All he's done is fortify his base conservatives by striking out at certain foundations. What about Roe V. Wade for example? If he had his way, he'd ban abortions. A woman has the ultimate right to choice. And gay marriage? You already know where he stands on that."

"I'll admit he's better at foreign policy than domestic social opposition," the blonde stated.

"Foreign policy? He's alienated most of our allies with the war in Iraq. He lied to the American people. He said Hussein was linked to terrorism and had weapons of mass destruction, which was his justification for going to war. Neither of those things is true."

"He is taking proactive steps to rid the world of terrorism, Dara. He's the only one taking a stand."

"With lives of innocent soldiers. They are going to war for something totally unfounded. This directive from a man that never served in combat. He's sending uninformed young people to die for cause that doesn't exist."

"It doesn't exist?" incredulously the blonde questioned. "You tell that to the families who lost their loved ones on 9-11. Terrorism is something to be faced head on, and he's the only one doing it. What about those peoples' suffering? Tell me, Dara. I'm sure Lesley would agree with me on this. It is important to quash those responsible for the worst action on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor."

"And why do you think Lesley would agree with that?" Dara inquired, wondering where the conversation was headed.

"She was assigned to the Pentagon to pick through rubble, Dara. How do you think that affected her?"

"How did you know that? She's doesn't talk about that to anyone," the brunette mentioned.

"We both worked at the DOJ during 9-11. I've had the opportunity to read her briefs."

"That was way out of your jurisdiction."

"Not then it wasn't. I haven't always worked for civil rights. I transferred to it from domestic terrorism. The point is that the people who died and the people who were sent in to pick up the pieces were altered forever. Our nation's history is forever marred by that horrific incident. It should never be allowed to happen again. That's the President's priority, and he's not the kind of man to just sit back and let other people make decisions. He's made tough choices, but he's done it in the interest of the people."

"He's a liar, Elisabeth, and he's destroyed our foreign relationships. He's ruined our budget. He's bankrupting Medicare. Unemployment hasn't been higher since Reagan was in office. These are the issues people care about, not what happens on foreign soil. He's in Iraq for the oil and to settle a score. That's childish and petty. He's used our country's resources for personal vendetta. It's unacceptable."

"People still support him on the war on terror, Dara. It's his stronghold."

Shaking her head, the younger attorney cleared her head. "You know, Elisabeth, we could go round and round on this and never see eye to eye. We're the worst kind of politicians. We're too set in our ways. I just came up to apologize, and I got dragged into this battle again. That was not my intention."

"I know, and it wasn't mine either. I'm sorry as well for going off on you at the gym. It wasn't right of me, especially since you've been nothing but nice to Shelby and me. I didn't mean it when I said that we didn't have anything else to say to each other. On the contrary, I think there is still a lot left to be said."

"So do I. Do you think it's possible for us to table our political feelings?"

"I'd like to try, Dara. I want to be friends with you."

"I want the same thing but as long as we both kept our political aspirations out of it. Is that a deal?"

"I'll certainly try. Will you?" Elisabeth questioned.

"I'll try as well."

"Great. You know, I believe you promised me another outing."

"I believe you're right. We should plan that. Maybe we should bring Shelby though as a chaperone."

"I think that's a good idea," the blonde answered with a laugh. "Even better we should make it something we both hate so we have something to gripe about other than politicians."

Nodding her head Dara mentioned, "Like blood donation or something."

"Blood donation, that's perfect," Elisabeth stated.

"Except for the fact that I was only joking. I don't like needles."

Laughing lightly the blonde teased, "So, you're scared, huh?"

"I'm not scared, Elisabeth."

"Fine. Then you'll do it," the older woman pressed.

Begrudgingly the brunette nodded. "Oh fine. If I do this, then you have to do something for me."

"What's that?"

"Something you hate."

"I already am, Dara. Who said I enjoy giving blood?" the shorter woman countered. "Look, Shelby is a nurse. We can go to her hospital and get it done. She can chaperone. Then after that we can all go celebrate our accomplishment. What do you say?"

"All right. Set it up then. If that's the only way we're going to make this friendship work, then I suppose that's what we have to do," Dara said.

Smiling at the taller woman, Elisabeth touched her on the arm. "It won't be so bad. You'll see."

"I'm sure I will," the younger woman mumbled.

The following Saturday Dara arrived at Shelby and Elisabeth's house in the afternoon. Shelby had arranged their time slot for blood donation at her hospital, so the three of them went directly there. Upon arrival they had to wait for a few minutes but were then allowed to go in at the same time for their donation.

Seeing several tables set up, Dara waited for Elisabeth and Shelby to take theirs before moving to one on the other side of the eldest blonde. She was silent as the two sisters talked with each other. The brunette was nervous about giving blood due to her needle issue, but she didn't want to look scared in front of either woman, so she tried to act nonchalant about the event.

However, when it was time for her to actually have the needle placed in her arm, Dara felt herself becoming ill. Desperately she tried to focus on something other than what was going on around her. Catching eyes with Shelby, she noticed that both blondes were doing fine, forcing her to try to do the same. Closing her eyes, she made herself relax and think about other things.

Meanwhile as the two sisters chatted, Shelby mentioned, "Do you think Dara is going to be okay?"

Elisabeth shrugged. "I hope so. She doesn't look so good."

"Well, we'll see. The worst part is over. That should help," the nurse answered.

By the time both of the blondes were finished and recovering in their chairs, Dara was almost finished as well. The brunette had managed to make it through the whole process and was getting ready to have the needle removed. Adverting her eyes as it happened, she grimaced when the attending nurse pulled it out and stuck a bandage over the top of it. Feeling relief that the torture was over, the tall woman stood before the nurse gave her permission and suddenly things went black.

Elisabeth screamed in surprise as Dara hit the floor. She wanted to move, but Shelby instructed her to stay where she was, so she didn't faint either from the sudden movement. Gently sliding off own reclining chair, the youngest woman made it to the floor. Checking to make sure Dara hadn't hurt herself, she chuckled. "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

"Is she okay?" the blonde attorney inquired in concern.

"She'll be fine. She just fainted, because she was trying to be tough. She'll come to in a few minutes. Don't worry."

"She really went down, Shelby."

"I know. That's what happens if you don't wait a few minutes while your body recovers. We'll get some orange juice for her, and she'll be better. I promise."

"Well, I'm feeling fine now. I'm getting up."

"Fine but move gently. I don't need you taking a dive either," her sister said as the other nurse came back with juice for Dara.

Elisabeth did as she was told, moving slowly off the chair. Coming to where Dara was, she knelt down next to the tall woman. Softly her hand went to the brunette's hair and stroked it back from her face lightly as she looked on in concern.

Dara flinched slightly before her eyes fluttered open. Looking up and seeing both blondes by her side, she asked in confusion, "What happened?"

"You moved too quickly. Here. Drink this and just relax," Shelby instructed, handing the cup to the brunette. Dara tried to prop herself up enough to drink the beverage, but she still felt too weak. "Let me help you," the blonde nurse suggested, slowly lifting the larger woman up, so she could prop her against her.

Elisabeth took the cup from the brunette. "Here, Dara. Let me get this for you," she offered.

The tall woman shook her head slightly and reached out her hand. "No. I'm fine, really."

"Dara, you're not fine. You just fainted. Let us help you," Elisabeth countered. Sighing loudly Dara didn't fight as the blonde attorney brought the cup to her mouth. She took the straw between her lips and took a sip. All three of them were silent for a few moments. Elisabeth took that time to study Dara. As tough as the brunette appeared, watching her faint humanized her in a way that was flattering to the blonde. It showed that Dara had a vulnerable side to her. Instinctively she reached for Dara's head, running her fingers through the dark locks in affection. "You feeling better now?" she asked when the cup was empty.

"Yeah. Thanks," Dara replied, looking between both of them. Rising to her feet slowly with their assistance, she said, "Sorry about that."

"It's fine. You don't always have to be so tough all the time," Elisabeth mentioned.

"Not a word about this to anyone. This would ruin my reputation," Dara joked lightly as both women escorted her from the hospital.

"We wouldn't tell a soul, Dara," Elisabeth answered with a smile. "But perhaps I should drive. The last thing we need is for you to be light-headed behind the wheel."

Figuring the older woman had a point, the brunette nodded and dug her keys out of her pocket. "Easy with her now, Elisabeth. This is my baby, and I don't let just anyone drive her."

The blonde attorney laughed. "I'll be gentle with her. I promise." When the three of them arrived at Dara's jeep, the blondes got the tall woman situated in the backseat before taking both the front ones.

"This is the first time I've ridden in the backseat," she mentioned.

"Bet you've done lots of other things back there, though," Shelby teased, winking at the brunette.

"Well, that's not up for discussion, but I'd be more than happy to show you some of my moves later," the attorney countered.

"I'll keep that in mind. For now though, let's focus on getting you some food. Where do you want to go?"

"Elisabeth can decide."

"Well, we had decided on going into Tenley Town to have Mexican. Are you still up for that, Dara?"

"Sounds good. Drive on, chauffeur." The brunette spent most of the ride quietly observing the two sisters as they chatted amiably. She found it much easier to deal with Elisabeth with Shelby as a buffer, but she did long for moments alone with the woman she found interesting. After the

incident at the hospital where Elisabeth was stroking her hair, the tall woman wondered what was going on in the older woman's head.

Arriving at the Mexican restaurant, the three of them went to the bar while they waited on a table. Greeting the bartender with a dashing smile, Dara ordered three margaritas for them. When they were delivered the brunette raised her glass, "I'd like to propose a toast on a job well done by the two of you today. You came through like real champs."

"So did you, Dara. Most people would just give up and not go through with it, but you stuck to it until the end," Shelby stated

"Well, next time we decide to do something charitable, let's make it something we enjoy a little better. Let's feed the homeless next time. I'd much prefer that."

"That's a great idea," Elisabeth seconded. "Let's do that."

"Do what?" Dara asked.

"Work with the homeless. I think we should do that."

"Fine. I'll set it up if you just give me some times you're available."

"Me too. I want to come," Shelby jumped in.

"We wouldn't go anywhere without you, Shelby. I can't leave my favorite girl at home while I party with her sister at the local food bank," Dara jested. "It just wouldn't be right."

Smiling at her sister and wrapping her arms around the brunette's shoulders, Shelby asked, "Did you hear that, Lis? I'm her favorite girl. I'm the envy of the entire world."

Giving a demure grin in return, the oldest woman, answered, "You certainly are. You make a good pair."

A few minutes later their names were called for the table, so Dara led the way. Once they were seated the brunette excused herself to the restroom, leaving the sisters to themselves. Making sure Dara was out of earshot, Shelby inquired, "So, how do you think it's going?"

"Good. This is the first time we haven't fought since we met. Having you here has been a real help."

"I'm glad to hear it. I could feel the chemistry between the two of you at the hospital when she had fainted. It's obvious you care about her, Lis. Just take it baby steps at a time if necessary. I think this woman would be willing to wait if she sees your interest."

"Yeah. Let's hope so. Right now I just want to concentrate on being friends, though. If we can do that, we have a chance once the election is over. I still can't forget about that."

"I know. In the meantime though you don't mind that I flirt with her, do you?"

"Not at all. In fact, I think it's helping keeping the tension between us low, which is good for everyone."

"That's the feeling I got as well, so I guess I'm just going to keep doing it then."

"That's fine with me."

"You know, if this evening goes well and then our next little charitable adventure, whatever that may be, goes well, you should think about going out together, just the two of you. I know you think you'll run the risk of arguing, but I think as you two get to know each other, you'll find other things to discuss other than politics. I know you'd like to be able to get to that level with her."

"Yeah, I would. She promised me a ride in her plane sometime. I think I might take her up on that. After all, it's almost April, so the weather should only be improving. Seems like a good next step, especially since I know it's something she enjoys so much."

"Good plan," Shelby seconded.

Several minutes later the brunette returned. "So, what have my blonde beauties been talking about while I was away?" she asked casually.

"Your demise," Elisabeth joked.

"Oh, good topic. Well, if I must go, I'd like to die of pleasure, so please keep that in mind. Being smothered by a set of perfect breasts would be ideal."

"That can certainly be arranged. I happen to have a flawless set on hand," Shelby quipped.

"Maybe I should see for myself to judge," bantered the tall woman with a mischievous grin.

"Later. I don't want to get thrown out of here until I finish at least one more margarita. After you get me drunk, ask again. I'll be much more inclined to be receptive."

"I'll bear that in mind. And what about you, Elisabeth? Anything to offer to this course of conversation?"

"No. I think you're quite capable of carrying this one yourselves. After all, who am I to argue with my sister's claim?"

"Well, you might possibly be the only one who could," Dara mentioned as their waiter came to the table.

All three women ordered their meal and then talked quietly. Dara enjoyed herself immensely during the dinner. Both blondes were equally entertaining by the way they played off each other. She merely had to sit back and watch, issuing commentary when necessary to keep the dialogue going. When the meal was finally over, Dara drove them back to their house. The night was still early, but she didn't want to seem too eager to be in their company. Pulling up to the curb in front of their house, she decided to walk them to the door.

Upon arrival Elisabeth unlocked it before both blondes turned to Dara. The brunette smiled. "Well, it's not often I take two women out at once. I'm not sure of the protocol. Should I say my good byes to each of you in private?" she joked.

"You're not coming in?" Shelby inquired. "It's early."

"Well, I hadn't been invited. One of the first rules in dating is never assume anything and be ready for everything. I didn't know if you two had other plans."

"That's good advice. Come in. I'm staying here tonight. We can watch a movie, make out a little, whatever your heart desires," the younger blonde teased enticingly.

"You don't have to tell me twice. Lead the way, Shelby."

Heading inside Shelby gestured to the couch. "Why don't you have a seat? I'm going to the kitchen. You want anything?"

"A drink would be good."

"What do you want?"

"What are you offering?"

Smiling cunningly she answered, "I already told you, anything your heart desires."

Pretending to ponder the offer, the tall woman finally responded, "In that case, a shot of tequila with Lemon and salt."

"Haven't you had enough tonight?" Elisabeth mentioned as she took a seat in a nearby chair.

"I haven't had that much. Besides it seems that I'm not going anywhere for quite a while."

"Lis, you want something?"

"Water would be good. Thanks, Shelby."

When the two older women were left alone, the brunette asked, "So, do you have any big plans for the night?"

"There is a possibility that I might have to go to a meeting at work, but they'll call me if it's going to happen. Otherwise I'm just going to stay in."

"They would schedule an impromptu meeting on Saturday night? What if people have plans? How does that work?"

"Easy. None of us have lives," Elisabeth joked.

Dara laughed at the attempt to keep things light between them. "And when will you know if you have this meeting?"

Before the blonde could respond to the question, her cell phone rang. Seeing the number on the ID, she mentioned, "Right about now." Getting up and leaving the room, she answered the call.

Dara on the other hand decided to get up as well and moved toward the kitchen where Shelby was. "Need help with anything?"

"No, I've got it, but your company is always welcome."

Moving further into the space, the attorney sat at the table and waited. Shelby joined her after a moment. "Where's Lis?"

"On the phone. I think she is going to have to go to work."

The blonde shrugged. "It wouldn't be the first time. That's fine though. Gives me a chance to get to know you better."

A moment later Elisabeth reappeared. "Looks like I have to go to that meeting after all. Sorry."

"No problem. Shelby and I will be fine. How long is it going to take?"

"I don't know. Could be a few hours. You'll probably be gone before I get back."

"Well, that's all right. There's always next time."

Elisabeth nodded. "Yeah. I'll call you about my schedule."

"Fine. Have fun if that's possible."

Smiling at the two of them, the blonde attorney replied, "It's all business. I'd much rather stay with you two."

Once she was gone, Shelby smiled at her guest. "Well, now whatever will we do with ourselves?" she questioned.

"Don't know. You look as if you have something in mind, though," Dara stated, seeing a quirky

look in the blonde's eyes.

"I do, my friend. I just had a thought. You know, if you keep drinking, you won't be able to leave. It would force you to stay the night here. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"It does have possibilities."

"Then why don't we play a game to help us along."

"What did you have in mind?" gamely the taller woman asked.

"For each shot we take, we get to ask the other a question. It can be about anything, and you can't lie in your answer," she proposed.

"Oh, a little truth or dare without the dare, huh?"

"Well, the daring can come later once we're both smashed. What do you say? Are you game for that?"

Dara shrugged. "Sure. Why not? I'll even let you go first."

"Perfect," Shelby said. She grabbed another shot glass and poured herself some tequila. Quickly drinking it she smiled. "Well, first things first. How many people have you ever had sex with?"

Dara laughed at the question. "Going easy on me, I see. Well, I'll remember this. Let's see. How many people have I been with? I have to think about that for a moment. I would have to say twenty."

"Really? That many? I didn't pick you for that kind of girl. I thought for sure you'd be more conservative in that area."

"Well, I started in high school, and I was pretty wild back then. The older I've gotten the more reserved and cautious I've become. My turn," she mentioned taking her own shot. "Are you as wild as you appear to be?"

"More so. There are things about me that would surprise you."

"Such as?"

"That's a question for another drink," she joked. Immediately Dara took another to have her question answered. "Well, let's start with the most shocking. I'm not just a nurse. Lis thinks that's what I do for a living, but that's not my primary career. I own my own business actually."

"Which would be?"

"I am the sole proprietor of an internet porn site."

"You're kidding. Really?"

Shelby nodded. "Lis is gone so much, she doesn't know the hours that I keep. I set it up a year ago, and it's making me more money than I had ever imagined. I work at the hospital about twenty hours a week just to get out of the house."

"That's wild. Show it to me."

"Sure. Let me get my laptop," the blonde answered, getting up from the table. She returned several minutes later. Quickly she booted up her machine and went to her website. They looked at it together for a few moments. "I've got everything anybody would want that's legal. Pictures, videos, live performances, anything that you want can be arranged as long as it's within the law. You'd be surprised how many people are out there just looking for a safe sexual outlet."

"Are you featured on the site?" curiously the attorney inquired.

Shelby cracked a rakish grin. "I've been known to record my performances and post them. It's fun."

"Is that legal?"

"Yes, it's legal."

"Wow. You really are a wild child. Elisabeth doesn't know about this?"

"No. Please don't tell her. She wouldn't approve."

"I won't. It's not my business anyway."

"So, back to you. Were any of these twenty people men or do you just date women?" the younger woman asked, taking another shot.

"Nineteen out of twenty were women. I was young then and trying to be something I wasn't. It wasn't good, and it left me realizing I could never be anything but what I truly was. What about you? Have you ever been with a woman?"

"No. That's not to say I haven't wondered. I would like to know what the allure is, but I haven't found anyone that I would feel safe with. At least I hadn't until I met you. You seem like the perfect type of woman to be with. It's too bad you've got your sights on my sister instead," Shelby mentioned with a smile as she poured both of them more alcohol. "Still, at night I think both of us Gunter girls are thinking about the same woman as we go to sleep."

Dara flushed brightly. "That's very flattering, Shelby."

The blonde giggled a little. "I think this tequila is definitely starting to get to me. I wouldn't

normally try to put moves on my sister's girlfriend."

"I'm not Elisabeth's girlfriend."

"But you want to be, don't you?"

Dara nodded. "I suppose I do. She's terrific, Shelby, and I can't help but be attracted to her. Enough about that though. Let's get back to you. How much do you want to know about being with a woman? What's it like to kiss or have sex?"

"Yes to both and everything in between. I know we can't have sex but maybe you could just kiss me. That way I would know at least what part of it is like," she proposed.

"Oh, I don't know if that's a good idea, Shelby," Dara resisted.

"Why not? It doesn't have to mean anything. It'll just be a tutorial."

The older woman thought it wouldn't necessarily be a good idea, but the thought of kissing the attractive blonde that so closely resembled Elisabeth intrigued her. It would almost be like kissing the woman she really wanted, her alcohol-induced cloudy thoughts reasoned. "Well, all right," she conceded. Moving from her chair, she came to where Shelby was sitting and kneeled down next to her to look into blue eyes. Leaning in she gave her friend a soft kiss on the mouth.

When the brunette pulled back again, Shelby smiled. "That was nice but not quite what I had in mind. That was just a kiss between friends. Kiss me like I was Elisabeth," she demanded softly.

"I can't, Shelby," Dara objected.

"Come on. One kiss. I'll even make it easier for you. Close your eyes." The attorney did as she was told even though she knew it was going to be a bad idea. She felt Shelby's arms come around her neck and the blonde's breath on her face. Nevertheless, she hesitated. However, then Shelby whispered, "Kiss me, Dara." Falling victim to the seductive directive, the brunette closed the distance between them. In her mind it was Elisabeth with her as she powerfully claimed Shelby's lips in a steamy exchange. Getting lost in the fantasy of it, several moments passed before they had to break for air.

Opening her eyes again, Dara saw Elisabeth's younger sister in her arms. "Oh God. What did I just do?" she mumbled, pulling away and returning to her own chair.

"You just showed me how much you really want my sister," Shelby replied. "That was incredible. You certainly know how to kiss."

"Well, thanks. Don't tell her I did that."

"I wouldn't dream of it. It's our little secret. Although now I wish I knew what the rest felt like. She's really missing out. So, tell me. Now that I know how much you want her tell me if you

fantasize about her."

The brunette shrugged. "Yeah, I suppose I do fantasize about Elisabeth. She's amazing. It's hard not to."

"Do you touch yourself while you think about her?" Shelby asked, taking a sip directly from the tequila bottle.

With a slight blush, the attorney responded, "Don't we all do that?"

The younger woman nodded. After a moment she said, "I'm going to show you something. Come with me." Dara did as she was told, following the blonde who had the alcohol firmly in her grasp. Together they went up the staircase to the second floor, and Shelby opened one of the bedroom doors. "Come on in," she invited. "Take a seat on the bed."

The older woman hesitated a moment at the inducement. She knew that she wasn't capable of thinking clearly with the amount of tequila she had consumed. To be with the blonde in such a space, even though she was Elisabeth's sister, could be potentially catastrophic, because she knew it was in her to pursue something carnal with Shelby even though there was no true interest. Moreover, with the blonde's confession earlier about her sexual curiosity, Dara knew this was a bad mix. "I don't think we should be doing this," she half-heartedly mentioned.

"Dara, trust me. Lie down on the bed and close your eyes. I won't bite unless you ask me to," she whispered.

Going against her better judgement, the taller woman reclined on the bed and shut her eyes. She wondered what was about to happen next between them, because the whole night had been a surprise thus far. She felt Shelby rest beside her. "Shelby, I don't want to do anything we'll regret later," she stated urgently, knowing her willpower was beginning to fall to the wayside now that they were in their current positions.

"Don't worry. Now tell me. Did you look at this room when you walked in at all?"

"Sort of. Why?"

"Because this is Elisabeth's room. You're on her bed right now." The brunette didn't say anything but let herself feel her surroundings at the admission. "If you try you can smell her shampoo on the pillowcases." Dara moaned as her nose did pick up the scent to which Shelby was referring. "Now just relax. I want to read you something."

"Okay." Dara heard the blonde flipping pages for a moment.

Clearing her throat softly, the blonde began to read. "I can't believe what happened the other night. It was like a dream to be that close to her. The way she held my hand and kissed me so delicately on the cheek made me even weaker in desire than I felt like I have ever been. There is just something about her. Something I can't deny. She drives me crazy. Having her dominate my

thoughts has made it difficult to focus on what is supposed to matter in my life right now. All I can really think about is her mouth on my body, her hands on my heated skin. I imagine her with me every night, her strong naked body hovering above mine. I need so badly to feel the weight of her pressed against me. Knowing my needs, she lowers her frame as our mouths come together gently at first and then with more passion as the moments pass. Her mouth tyrannizes my lips, but all I can do is moan in the utter satisfaction and wantonness of her urgency. Quickly she moves along my skin. Her mouth and hands seem to be everywhere at once. Then I can feel the wet heat of her open mouth covering the tip of my breast. I cry out to her, clinging tightly to her dark head while she suckles ardently as if a preface of her talents still to come. I'm insatiable for her touch. It burns me to my soul. Begging for the relief I know she is sure to give, I try to withhold my peak, but she is so persistent. I can feel myself slipping into oblivion, but I beseech her continue her quest before my body surrenders, for I have other wants this night. Immediately I feel her hand come to rest along my thigh. I know she's waiting for a sign from me that this is what I truly want between us. She is that kind of loving caring woman, but we both know permission is not needed. I have been captive since the beginning by her charm, and I willingly give myself to her. I want her inside of me. I need her there. I need to be possessed and taken with her knowing hands. She holds me in a loving embrace as I feel her in me for the first time. She's still for a moment but then gently begins to guide me to that place for which I have craved long before we were even together. I simply know she is the one who will be able to take me to the bliss I always wanted in intimacy. I let my climax enfold me just as her arms to my body. The power of the moment is so overwhelming I begin to cry as if a schoolgirl having just lost her virginity, but the tears I shed are not of pain. They are of joy and sadness. I am overcome by the delight of my ecstasy at her touch. However, there lingers a hint of melancholy, for it is in this moment I wish that she had been my first, my only. However, I am safe in the knowledge that she will be my last. She is now my lover, my life. As the tender moment of our lovemaking draws to a close, I pull her head to my breasts, so she can rest. My hands idly stroke her dark rich hair. We drift slowly to sleep with her still inside of me, where she belongs, her new home. My last conscious thought is to whisper her name lovingly as I kiss the top of her head. 'Dara, my sweet, Dara,' I mumble before we both sink into dreams."

A prolonged silence filled the room when Shelby stopped reading the passage. The whole time she had been talking, Dara had imagined it was herself with Elisabeth, but to have the knowledge of the piece truly being about them proved to be overwhelming to the attorney. "You shouldn't have read that to me," she slowly stated.

"Why not? I wanted you to know how Lis feels about you. Lord knows she won't tell you."

"Those are her private thoughts. I'm sure she never intended for me to be privy to them. How did you even know about them?"

"I found it one day when I came into to borrow some clothes."

"You shouldn't have read it the first time or shared it with me just now. How can I even look at her now? Those are intimate thoughts."

"But for you, Dara. Elisabeth wants you in a way she hasn't ever wanted anyone else, not even

her first girlfriend who she thought was the love of her life."

Sidetracked by the comment, the brunette questioned, "Her first girlfriend?"

"Yeah. Her name was Suzanne. They were best friends in high school, but after they went to college things started to happen."

"Suzanne Howard?" the older woman questioned.

"Yeah. That's her name. Did Lis tell you?"

"No. Suzanne and I went to school together. It's a long story, but it's true then? She and Suzanne were lovers?"

"It's true. That's who Lis lost her virginity to, but it took the forever to do it, though. They were both sophomores in college for goodness sakes."

"And after that? Who else was she with?" curiously Dara inquired.

"No one that I know of. She was devastated when Suzanne dumped her. I'm not sure she ever got over it. As far as I know though, Suzanne was her only lover. Kind of sad to think about really. She just hasn't trusted anyone enough to let them that close. That is until now anyway. Dara, I know the situation is complicated. The political landscape in which you both find yourselves doesn't lend itself for you to have a relationship. I know that, and Lis keeps telling me that. However, in November when this election is over, there will be time to explore everything each of you is feeling. I'm begging you to give her a chance. As hard-headed as she seems right now, she wants to be with you. Promise me you'll give her that opportunity."

Dara sighed as she looked at the blonde. "Shelby, that's eight months from now. Her feelings could change and so could mine. I can't say what the future will be. However, if we're both still interested, and she's open to trying, it would be a great honor to try with her. There are a lot of differences between us, though. Some of those differences are harder to overcome than others."

"I know you believe that to be true, but I'm telling you, Dara, you're closer to each other than you really know."

The brunette just nodded her head even though she didn't agree with Shelby's assessment. Instead she focused on her surroundings. She took in Elisabeth's room for several minutes in silence, studying every bit of the space. On the blonde's wall next to her desk hung her diplomas from high school through law school as well as commendations she had received along the way. "What's up with the wall of greatness? Does she think that highly of herself?" the attorney inquired.

"To the contrary, Dara. Elisabeth has always had a problem appreciating her own value. I'm the one who put up the wall as a reminder to her of what's she's achieved."

"That's nice of you. She doesn't seem like that kind of person, though."

"Maybe not to the outsider, but those of us who are allowed close enough can see it clearly."

"Have you two always gotten along?"

"For the most part. As kids we had our arguments, but now that we're adults, we look out for each other. I can't let anything happen to her. She might be older than me, but I'm the real protector. She's fragile, Dara, emotionally, and I do everything I can to make sure she doesn't get hurt."

"And yet you read me excerpts from her diary? That hardly seems protective."

"You're different. I knew that since the moment she mentioned you. She'd much rather have the protection of your arms than mine. A sister can only do so much, but a lover knows no boundaries."

Chuckling lightly the older woman said, "A philosophical drunk. Somehow I had you marked as a horny drunk instead."

"Well, I'm that too," Shelby admitted. "Trust me. If my sister didn't feel the way she does about you, we'd be in my bed right now instead of hers. Like I already said, you have the imagination of both Gunter girls."

"Yeah, you mentioned that, but I'll confess, right now one looks a hell of a lot more appealing than the other, which is why I really think I should leave."

"You can't drive though, Dara."

"I'll call a cab. I like Elisabeth too much to let my hormones ruin what could be. All this talk about sex is making me wish for someone in my bed, and at the moment I don't even care who it is. I just know it can't be you if I ever want to look Elisabeth in the eye again."

"I understand, and I think you're right. Elisabeth means too much to me as well. However, I think I have a compromise in mind. I'm going to leave you now and go into my room next door. Stay here as long as you want and get a feel for the woman my sister is. Do whatever it is you need to do to regain some control, and I'm going to do the same."

The proposal Shelby stated intrigued the taller woman. She could be alone long enough to squelch any drunken desires she might have for young blonde while at the same time exploring the wonders of Elisabeth's sanctum. Nodding her head in agreement, she answered, "All right but only for a little bit. I don't want to get caught in here when she comes home."

"She won't be home for quite some time. Don't worry about that."

With that Shelby left the room and closed the door behind her. Dara continued to lie on

Elisabeth's bed for a moment. She concentrated on the feel of it under her back as she thought about what Shelby had read her. She imagined the blonde attorney lying in her bed and thinking about the brunette. The idea that the older woman fantasized about her made feelings rush through her body and settle between her thighs. It felt good to know her fervency wasn't one-sided. Elisabeth felt it as deeply as she did.

Getting off the bed, Dara went to the desk. She saw the blonde's college yearbooks on one of the shelves, so she pulled down the first in the series. Quickly she found Elisabeth's picture from freshman year. The girl was astoundingly beautiful, even though there was an innocence about her young face. When she was finished with the book, she put it back and picked up the next. The photo from her sophomore year already showed a difference in her appearance. The long blonde hair of youth was gone and in its place a more mature cut of the college scene. Her eyes were still bright, exhibiting a glow that could easily be seen even in black and white. Dara figured it was because of Elisabeth's relationship with Suzanne that had caused such a radiance. Her junior year book was next. When Dara opened the book to the page where Elisabeth's picture was supposed to be, she was surprised to find another photograph in between the pages. Looking at it, the brunette smiled.

She recognized the location, her own alma mater, and there was Elisabeth with her arms around Suzanne. Her old teammate was in her sweaty soccer uniform, and both of them were smiling brightly for the snapshot. It was clear they were a happy couple. Ironically Dara noticed herself in the background of the shot with other players. It had been her freshman year, and she had the face of adolescence still. Dara's mind drifted to the fact that she and Elisabeth were so close then and never even knew each other. She pondered what fate might have done to them had they met in school, if there would have been as much chemistry as there was now. Would Elisabeth still have pursued Suzanne or would she have wound up in Dara's arms? Would the blonde still have chosen a drastically different course for her life than the one she so obviously wanted in the picture Dara held? The woman in the photo was blissfully content. The corresponding photograph in the class pictures supported that fact.

Finally Dara opened the senior yearbook and looked for Elisabeth's picture. When she got to it, she found it more like the woman she knew presently than those of the previous years. Gone was the innocence and the brightness of her eyes. Instead there was a serious undertone even though the blonde was smiling. Flipping to other areas of the book where the blonde should have been in clubs and organizations, she found the demeanor much the same. Regardless of what the blonde was wearing, whether she was smiling or not, it was obvious that a part of her had been closed off by the virtue of the lack of gleam in her vibrant blue eyes.

Seeing loose papers in the back of the book, the brunette turned to them. There were acceptance letters to various law schools and congratulatory cards from various people, even one from Shelby, on her graduation. However, there was also an unopened letter. The attorney read the return address label, S. Howard, and sighed deeply. She assumed the blonde had never opened the letter from Suzanne out of the pain still fresh from their breakup but wondered what Suzanne could have possibly written. Putting the letter back in the book, Dara carefully placed it back on the shelf.

Her amorous mood had dissipated after the small stroll through Elisabeth's history. She could tell just by the pictures the amount of pain she must have felt at Suzanne's admission of being in love with a man and breaking the blonde's heart. At that age, Dara wasn't sure she would have been able to handle it either. Her own crush on Suzanne Howard-Bell had proved to be difficult to repress back then when they were all much younger and more naive, but unlike Elisabeth, Dara had moved on and found happiness in other college relationships.

Moving on to what appeared to be a photo album, the tall woman opened it to the first page. There was an old black and white photograph the date of which Dara couldn't tell for sure, but she recognized the landscape as Germany. By the clothes of the people and the modes of transportation on display, the attorney figured it was at least the 1920s or 30s. Flipping the next several pages she noticed all of them were from the same time period. However, turning the page once more, she was taken back by what was in the book. A German newspaper from 1935 was hidden in the sleeve folded to display Nazi propaganda against the Jews. Surprised by the find, Dara continued to the next page where she found a Third Reich military ID with the name Gustav Gunter written on it. Even in the faded black and white photograph, the resemblance of the man to Shelby and Elisabeth was undeniable. Continuing on, Dara turned the page and felt her heart stop. There was a full page picture of the man Jews the world over had hated for generations, and in bold handwriting it said in German, "To Gustav, for your loyal service, Adolf Hitler." The brunette felt her stomach turn at the realization of how close Elisabeth's family had been to the monster who had sent some of her relatives to premature extinction. Turning to the final page of the album, there was another picture of Hitler with Gustav and a young boy standing between the two men. Putting the book back where she had found it, Dara took a calming deep breath. Her emotions were whirling within her about what she had just seen. She had never known someone with such a history with the Reich, but it was obvious Elisabeth's family had been involved in the culture of discrimination against many non-Aryans, Jews and gays included. The realization was more than she thought she could bear, because she felt so strongly for the blonde.

Deciding to leave the blonde's room, she went out into the hallway, intent of getting answers from the younger blonde. She could hear Shelby in the room next door and realized that she shouldn't disturb the woman by the sound of things. Instead she headed downstairs to the living room and flipped on the TV. Lying across the couch, she watched the sports channel as her eyes began to close, but the images of what she had seen upstairs stayed with her as she pondered their possible meaning. She knew from conversations past that Elisabeth was adamantly against what the Nazis stood for, but it didn't answer the brunette's questions of why the older woman had such mementos.

Later that night Elisabeth was surprised to see Dara's car sitting in front of the house. It was after midnight, and she had just endured a painfully boring evening with the President. Even though he still hadn't made any sexual overtures towards the blonde, Elisabeth had become more aware of the way his eyes focused along her body as they spoke, leaving her with a nauseated feeling in the pit of her stomach. It made her feel like more of a distraction than a contributor that night during their meeting, which irritated the blonde, especially with how hard she had worked for the position in which she found herself. Thankfully though, other people were in their meeting, leaving no time for anything but professionalism by either of them.

Heading into the house, the attorney heard the TV on in the living room. Going in there, she expected to find her sister and Dara, but instead there was the brunette passed out on the sofa alone. Figuring Dara had been in no condition to drive and had settled down for the night, Elisabeth quietly turned off the television and then turned to the younger woman. She gently removed Dara's shoes to make her more comfortable and then pulled a blanket from a nearby chair over on top of her to keep her warm. She smiled down at the brunette lost in sleep and studied her for a moment. Her heart ached at the sight, because she wanted nothing more than to fall into the brunette's embrace. However, she knew she couldn't.

Finally she dragged herself away and up the stairs to her room. Turning on the lights, she began to shed her clothes and put them away in their proper places. Then she turned to the dresser and pulled out a pair of pajamas. Slipping the cotton top over her bare shoulders, she thought of Dara just downstairs. The brunette looked so sexy and vulnerable lying asleep that her mind instantly started to fantasize about going back to her. Putting on her pajama pants next, Elisabeth went into the bathroom while her mind spun a dream of waking the brunette with a barrage of hungry kisses. By the time she was ready to get in bed, her body was on fire for the younger woman's touch, but Elisabeth knew it wasn't meant to be, not that night anyway, so she slipped under her covers and extinguished the light. Allowing herself the pleasure of her own hands, she fulfilled her needs, all the while whispering Dara's name in longing.

The next day when the blonde attorney arose and made it downstairs, only her sister was around. "Morning," she casually greeted.

"Morning, Lis," her sister grumbled in return.

"Too much to drink last night?" the older blonde teased. Shelby weakly nodded her head. "Where's Dara?"

"She left awhile ago. Said she had somewhere to go. She said she'd call us though about the homeless thing."

"Okay. Good," Elisabeth mumbled, turning to get a bowl from the pantry for breakfast.

Due to the political schedules of both women, they weren't able to find any free time to be together for several weeks, although they had emailed and talked on the phone weekly. By that time the weather had turned bright and sunny on that last weekend in April. On Saturday morning Dara arrived before the sun was even up at the blondes' house. Ringing the bell she was surprised but pleased both women were ready for their outing.

They quietly drove down to the shelter in which Dara had arranged for them to work the entire day, each lost in their sleepy thoughts. However, as the brunette drove she cast a glance at her passenger. She thought Elisabeth looked beautiful drowsy and tousled in her t-shirt and shorts. The thirty-year-old risked a glance at the blonde's legs. She had never seen them before. They

were trim but toned, leaving her with a longing to touch them. Looking at Elisabeth's face, she saw blue eyes on her and knew she had been caught. Nevertheless, she smiled softly and then turned her attention back to the road. Ever since that night Shelby had shared her sister's intimate thoughts, Dara had felt differently toward Elisabeth. She didn't feel guilty sneaking glances at the blonde, and she found it much easier to cast her political feelings aside when thinking of blue eyes.

Once they arrived at the food bank, they were all assigned specific duties that left little time to talk to each other. Nevertheless, Dara still was glad to look up on occasion and see the blondes busily speaking with those less fortunate than themselves in the same bubbly compassionate way that had drawn the brunette to them. It was in those kinds of moments she found Elisabeth irresistible, because the politics didn't matter then. They both were just two women trying to make a small difference in the lives of others, which the brunette found incredibly attractive.

The hours flew by while they were working, but when they were finally released from their duties, Dara went to fetch the two blondes. Leaving the small kitchen area after finishing with the dishes, she meandered into the dining area and stopped when she saw the two of them sitting at a table with a woman and two small children. The thirty-year-old just watched for a few minutes while Elisabeth and Shelby played with the kids and spoke with the woman as they ate. It was in that moment something happened to the taller woman. Her heart melted at the sight of the blonde Republican smiling at the children and making them laugh at something she had said. It was in that instant she knew her feelings for Elisabeth went far beyond physical interest. She was in love with the older woman.

Armed with that knowledge, she crossed the room to the table. Smiling at the group, she gestured to the empty space on the bench and inquired, "Is this seat available?"

Elisabeth smiled at the taller woman. "Of course. You're always welcome."

Thanking them Dara took a seat and greeted the others at the table. For the next half an hour, all of them talked. Dara found it strange that the mother and children didn't want to speak of their plight. It was clear that they felt lucky just to have each other, and the dark-haired attorney realized how fortunate she and the Gunter women were to have even more. Finally when the mother and children left, Dara turned to her other table mates. "So, are you two ready to go? It's already after one."

"Yeah. I suppose," Elisabeth answered, checking her watch. "Are you sure they don't need any more help?"

"Well, I finished all the dishes they had in the back, and they said we could go. If you'd rather stay we can. I'm sure they can always use extra hands."

The blonde shook her head. "That last woman was enough for me. It makes me sad to think I have so much, and she has so little. I feel like I can't ever give enough."

"I know the feeling, but we can always strive," Dara replied, patting the blonde on the hand.

They smiled at each other.

Once leaving downtown, Shelby asked, "What's the plan for the rest of the afternoon? You two have anything going?"

"Not really," answered the brunette.

"Me neither. Why? Do you, Shelby?"

"Well, I was thinking about going shopping myself after lunch and a nap."

Elisabeth nodded her head. "That sounds good to me. I need some new clothes myself. My spring wardrobe definitely could use some improvements."

"Sounds like you two have it planned out then. A little sister bonding," Dara teased.

"Aren't you going to come?" Shelby asked.

"Are you kidding? I hate shopping. I do most of it online to avoid the stores. You two are better off going by yourselves."

Wanting to spend more time with Dara, Elisabeth inquired, "Are you sure? We can do something else instead. What do you want to do?"

"Well, I'll probably go back to my place, have some lunch and then hit the gym. Really you two should go out and have some fun."

"Well, how about later? You want to meet up for dinner or something?"

"That sounds good."

"I've got plans already, so it would just be the two of you," the youngest woman interjected.

Elisabeth and Dara looked at each other. They hadn't had much alone time together, but the oldest woman thought it might be time to test those waters again. "That's fine with me if it is with you, Dara."

Nodding her head, the brunette answered, "Sure. Let's be traditional about it. How about dinner and a movie?"

"Sounds good to me. Why don't you call me later then after you get back from the gym and are ready to go out? I'm sure Shelby and I will both still be shopping, but you can come meet us, and we can go from there."

"All right. I'll do that."

Later that evening, Dara arrived at White Flint mall in Rockville, Maryland where the Gunter women had decided to go shopping. As they had agreed, Dara drove up to the third floor, where Dave and Busters was, to meet them. Walking into the bar of the place, she pocketed her sunglasses as she scanned for the two blondes. However, she was surprised at the sight she saw.

There was Elisabeth sans Shelby sitting at the bar chatting with a guy sitting next to her. It was quite obvious to Dara by the way the man was leaning towards the blonde that there was interest on his part, and it filled her with an unfamiliar feeling. She could feel her body begin to tense in a pang of jealousy as she neared the older woman. Her instincts took over as she approached and placed a possessive hand on the shorter woman's shoulder. The man and Elisabeth both looked at her. With a glare for him and a soft gaze and smile for the blonde, Dara said, "Sorry I kept you waiting."

"It's okay. I've only been here a few minutes," Elisabeth answered, casting a look back at the man sitting next to her.

"Hi, I'm Dara," the brunette introduced coldly, extending her hand to him.

He shook it but then quickly excused himself, making the blonde chuckle. "Do you always have that affect on men?" she teased.

"Only with the ones sitting in my seat," she responded more lightly than she really felt as she slipped onto the barstool. "Where's Shelby?"

"She already left. She was meeting friends for dinner. How about a drink?" Elisabeth suggested. She found Dara's jealous display oddly comforting, for it said what the brunette never had. There were growing feelings between them. In fact, she actually enjoyed the way the younger woman had lay claim to her when she came up to them.

When the bartender came over, Dara ordered herself a beer and then turned to her date. "So, what kind of stuff did you buy today? I only see one package."

"Shelby took them with her. I just got some new blouses and a pair of linen pants. I also got some great new sandals."

Giving a playful grin, Dara commented, "You and Shelby probably cleaned out a few stores. What did she get?"

"A lot more than me. She went crazy. We got you a little something, though. The minute we both saw it, we thought of you. Here."

Taking the package from the blonde, Dara pulled out the shirt box. She opened it carefully before picking up the item. "Well, this certainly is nice. Thank you," she said at the green knit short-sleeved shirt.

Immediately Elisabeth took it from her and held it up. "It brightens your eyes."

"Perhaps I should put it on then, so you can see what it looks like?" she suggested, beginning to untuck the shirt she was wearing. Elisabeth flushed slightly as Dara pulled her shirt over her head, revealing a white tank top. She couldn't help but notice the fabulously cut muscles of the brunette's shoulders. Quickly the younger attorney donned the new shirt and tucked it into her khaki pants. "Well, what do you think?"

Smiling brightly Elisabeth answered, "It looks as good as we imagined it would." She brushed imaginary wrinkles from the taller woman's shoulders.

"Well, thank you very much for this. I like it a lot."

"We knew you would."

They made small talk the rest of the time they drank their beverages before deciding to find a place for dinner. Agreeing upon PF Changs downstairs, they made their way across the mall to the Asian fusion restaurant and placed their names on the waiting list. Since it was still early enough, they were seated fairly easily. Getting to the table, Dara pulled out the blonde's chair for her. Blushing lightly the older woman thanked her as she sat. The taller woman then took her seat across the small table.

Elisabeth smiled at her companion for the evening. As she and Shelby had suspected, Dara looked incredibly sexy in the shirt they had bought her. What made the gift even more special though was the brunette's speedy desire to show it off for her benefactor. The blonde attorney looked at her menu, but within moments her eyes strayed just over the top of it to her table mate. Dara was so consumed with studying her choices that she didn't see the eyes upon her. Elisabeth took the time to truly scrutinize the younger woman, and there wasn't one thing she could find wrong with the woman about whom she cared so much. Dara was compassionate and benevolent in her charms, not to mention incredibly attractive to the sight, and the shorter woman knew she was falling hard for the dark-haired attorney.

"So, what are you in the mood for?" Dara asked, breaking the silence.

Focusing on her choices, the older woman mentioned, "I don't know yet. You know what's really good? The vegetarian lettuce wraps. Have you ever tried them?"

"No but we can get some. I'm game for whatever."

"Great. You'll like them. I promise."

"What about for a main course? What speaks to you?"

"Well, I always say I'm going to get something new whenever I'm here, but it never happens. Their Mongolian beef is just too good to pass up. It's my favorite."

Dara laughed lightly. "No way. It's my favorite as well. I also like their crab rangoon. I think we

should get that too."

Nodding her head in agreement, the blonde replied, "You can have whatever you want."

"That's a dangerous thing to say," the brunette flirted lightly, testing the waters to see what reaction she might get.

"I think I know you well enough to know exactly what you want," Elisabeth quipped.

"That's always been my problem. I'm too predictable. I have no edge."

"That's not true, and we both know it. You have plenty of edge to you. It's part of your charm."

"You're going to make me blush," the younger attorney stated with a light chuckle.

Once their waitress took their order, the two of them just looked at each other for a moment. Elisabeth smiled at her companion. "So, how was your workout today?"

"Good. I did a lot of lifting, working on my arms, shoulders, and back. Then I did a spin class, which totally threw me. I thought I was in better shape, but that trainer was brutal. I'm sure if she wasn't so gorgeous people wouldn't sign up," the younger woman joked.

Feeling a little stab of insecurity, Elisabeth tried to casually ask, "Is that why you did?"

Dara shook her head. "I just wanted a good substitute for my usual leg lifting. I love bike riding, so I thought it would be a good change. Little did I know she was going to murder us. I had to get a massage after it just to be able to walk again."

"A massage? Such a tough life you do lead," the blonde joked. "What kind of massage? Was the masseuse some Swedish blonde with legs that go on for days?"

Looking at her date, the younger attorney thought she heard cynicism in the shorter woman's voice. Remembering Shelby's comment about her sister's emotional fragility, she shook her head. Fibbing she answered, "No, it was some sweaty bald guy with a gut that went on for days."

"I don't believe you," Elisabeth mentioned. "Aren't you the one that says no good comes from hiding the truth?"

Dara shrugged. "Well, I might have overstated that just a bit. Women don't like to talk about other women. I'm not stupid. I actually want to go out with you again after this," she said with a brilliant smile.

Demurely nodding her head, the older woman said teasingly, "That's only because I bought you clothes."

"Well, that and you're irresistible," she said, deciding to see what her true feelings would do to

the blonde.

The blush that ensued assured her that Elisabeth found her charming. "You're sweet, Dara. I bet you talk to all the girls like this."

Shaking her head the brunette replied, "That's simply not true. I don't talk to my sisters or my mother that way."

"Um, I suppose not, but I still think you pay them the respect they deserve."

"Always. A lady is just that, a lady. I'm not keen on making a woman feel less than she is. In fact, I always try to make her realize her fullest potential, because most women feel themselves lacking due to society's standards, and I for one believe that's just a man's way of keeping the most powerful half of the species down."

"A feminist on top of it all? I wouldn't have guessed it," the older woman mentioned with a smile as she took a sip of her beverage.

"And you're not?"

"I'm a Republican, Dara. I think women should be bare-foot and pregnant all the time. Careers for women just shouldn't be allowed," she teased mockingly.

"Of course. I can see that about you." Both of them laughed lightly as the waitress came to the table with their appetizers.

With that they began to focus on food. "You were right. These vegetarian lettuce wraps are good. They taste like chicken."

The blonde looked at the taller woman as her mind unconsciously flitted to what some other things tasted like, mainly the brunette's mouth as she watched Dara eating. Deciding to take the conversation another direction before she got herself into trouble, she mentioned, "You know, you once promised me that when the weather got warmer you'd take me up in your plane. Do you plan on keeping that promise?"

"Oh, of course. I'd love to take you up in the plane. We should see when our schedules mesh, so we can plan a day together. I already know where I want to take you, but the weather has to cooperate first."

"Great. I can't wait."

"Me neither. It's been a long time since I've had a passenger. Do you think Shelby would like to come as well?"

"You can invite her if you want. I don't mind sharing you with my sister."

"Fine then. For now though, let's talk about these movie choices. I have the list here in my pocket." Pulling out a slip of paper, she said, "I'm up for whatever. The selection leaves a little to be desired though."

Taking the paper from Dara, Elisabeth perused it for a moment. "You're right. I don't have to see any of these. If you just want to can the movie and do something else, we can. I'm up for ideas."

"Well, we can go back upstairs to Dave and Busters. You a good pool player?"

"Not at all. I'm much better at darts."

"Do they have any of those up there?"

"I don't think so, but they do have a whole game gallery. I'd be willing to cream you in any video game up there," challenged Elisabeth.

"Well, that offer seems too good to pass up. You're on, Miss Mighty Republican. You elephants might be strong, but we donkeys are stealth."

Laughing Elisabeth mentioned, "You know that's not what we call you. We have other more color phrases for you donkeys."

"I'm sure you do. Well, we'll just see who's left laughing after dinner. I guarantee I can whip up on you on anything we play."

"We'll see. Maybe we should put a wager on it," Elisabeth challenged.

"Fine. What do you want to bet?"

"Let's see. If I win you have to cook dinner for me."

"All right. And if I win? What do I get?"

"What do you want?"

Raising her brows up and down quickly, Dara answered, "As if you have to ask."

Elisabeth flushed at the thought of what Dara was proposing. "Something I might actually do," she corrected. "How about the same? I make dinner for you?"

"Oh, fine. If it has to be that way. Leave it to you to spoil it," the younger woman teased. Once dinner was complete, the couple went back up the Dave and Busters. Heading to the adult game area, Dara took some bills out of her wallet and exchanged them for quarters. "All right, Ms. Gunter. You choose the first game."

"All right. How about air hockey?"

"Fabulous. I can beat anyone at that. Lead the way."

Heading over to the machine, Dara placed the appropriate coins into it before taking a position at one end of the table. Elisabeth grinned wickedly at her challenger before beginning the game. Soon a fierce competition unfolded as the two of them battled for points. However, it was the blonde that was victorious. Screaming in excitement, she said, "Take that, Rosenthal."

"Oh, you are asking for it now, Gunter. My turn to pick a game. Basketball. I know you can't beat me in that." The brunette's words proved to be true, and she easily defeated the blonde in her favorite game. Smiling cockily, she asked, "Next?"

"I've got one. Let's find one with guns. I have some aggression to take out on you."

"Fine. I know I can beat you at that too." The blonde led them over to one of the military games that they could play at the same time, and the younger woman fed the machine the money to start. It quickly became obvious that the shorter woman had a way with a sidearm as she quickly started to dominate the game. "You're pretty good with that thing. Please tell me you aren't a member of the NRA. I mean I can look past the Republicanism, but to be one of those groupies would just be more than I could bear."

"Well, rest assured, I'm not a NRA member. Those people are whack jobs."

"I'm sure you're boss feels differently."

"A lot of people feel differently. Enough about that though. Let me finishing kicking your ass quickly, so you can choose another game," the blonde said with a laugh.

"Fine. I'll make sure to pick something you have no chance of winning."

"Bring it on, Rosenthal. I can keep up with anything you dish out."

Once Dara had conceded defeat in their present game, the brunette said, "All right. Now for a game women can't win. Auto racing."

"What kind of remark is that? You think I can't drive? I'll leave you in the dust. Just watch me," Elisabeth answered, heading off to the game of Dara's choice. Settling in their respective seats, they prepared to race.

It was a close one, much closer than the taller woman thought it would be, but at the last second, she pulled out a close victory. "So, we're tied now?"

"Yeah. What else do you want to try?"

Dara shrugged. "How about we try something neither of us has played before? That way we won't know how good or bad we'll be."

"Good idea. Let's look around." It took them several minutes before they found themselves in front of the golf simulator. "Well, I've never played this one," the blonde mentioned.

"Me neither. I'll admit though that I'm pretty good in real life."

"So am I."

"Shall we try it then?"

Elisabeth nodded. "Winner takes all?"

"Loser makes dinner." Putting the money into the machine, Dara gestured to the older woman. "Ladies first." For the first several holes, both women were keeping up stroke for stroke with each other. "You really are quite good," the taller woman mentioned.

"So are you. Maybe we should play together for real sometime?"

"That would be great, but first I have to beat you in this." As Dara sunk another putt, she pondered the advantages and disadvantages to having Elisabeth make dinner for her. Thinking on it though, she came to the conclusion she might actually enjoy having Elisabeth over to her place for once. Figuring the best way to do that was to lose the game, she decided to throw the match.

With the last hole left, both women teed off perfectly. They stayed even all the way onto the green, and then the moment of truth was upon them. Since Elisabeth had the longer shot to take, she went first. Taking her time, she lined the ball up with the hole before taking her stroke. It lipped the cup softly before falling into it. "Yeah! Try to follow that!" she yelled happily.

Smirking at her competition, Dara took the club from the blonde for her shot. She knew she could sink the putt she had, but having decided on a course of action, she lined up just far enough that when she made her stroke, she missed the hole by a few inches. Taking her second putt, she sunk it before smiling at the blonde. "Well, I guess I lost," she mentioned with a smile.

"You choked is what you did," the older woman teased. "Now you have to make me dinner."

"Yep. Seems that way."

"So, what are your plans for the rest of the night? Anything in mind?" Elisabeth inquired.

"Well, it's not exactly my idea of a good time to spend the whole evening at the mall. Maybe I should take you home or better yet we could swing by the theater close to your house and see if any better movies are playing."

"Yeah, let's do that."

Going to the theater in Bethesda near the blonde's place, they found a movie they could both agree

upon, so they decided to see it. For the first time that night, the older woman got money out of her wallet to buy them both tickets, but Dara quickly stopped. "And just what do you think you're doing?" she questioned with a smile.

"Let me buy the tickets, Dara. You always seem to buy everything when we're together."

The taller woman shook her head. "I can't let you do that. It's against my moral ethics."

"What? Don't be ridiculous. It's not like we're on a date."

"No, Elisabeth. I want to buy. It makes me feel good. We've discussed this before."

"But that was a date, Dara. This isn't."

"Fine. It's now a date, and I'm paying," the younger attorney bantered as they moved up in line to the cashier. Dara quickly asked for two tickets and handed over the money before Elisabeth could do so.

Huffing at the woman, the blonde said, "You can't just arbitrarily decide this is a date, because you want to pay for everything. You didn't even ask me. Man, your ego needs adjusting, or is this just pay back for whipping up on you?"

"Yeah. That's exactly what it is," Dara replied with a smile as she got her change. "Come on now. Let's stop arguing. You already know I'm not going to try to kiss you at the end of the night unless you want me to, so stop being so anxious. Shelby's not nearly this hard to deal with. She's open for everything."

"Yeah, well, that's because Shelby's a slut. Don't compare me to her," Elisabeth asserted.

Hearing the edge to the shorter woman's voice, Dara knew it was time to back off on the game. "All right. You win. You can buy the drinks and popcorn," she said, raising her hands in surrender.

Heading inside they stood in line for snacks. Neither said anything while they waited until it was their turn at the counter. The older woman ordered first before turning to Dara. "What do you want?"

"Nothing. I'm fine."

Elisabeth rolled her blue eyes. "You are being a shit, Dara. You're worse than some guys I've dated. Drop the egotism and give your drink order."

"Fine. A large coke."

"Anything else?"

"That's all, but just for this, I am going to try to kiss you at the end of the night," she threatened.

"Oh, I'm really scared now," the older woman joked with a laugh. On the inside though, she could feel the temperature of her body rising at the thought of Dara doing such a thing.

After getting their drinks, they proceeded to the theater. The brunette stayed on her best behavior for the rest of the evening. However, when she dropped the older woman off at home that night, she thought about her threat at the theater. She really did want to kiss the blonde, but she could see in blue eyes that the moment wasn't quite yet right for such an overture, so she simply walked her to the door and gave her a hug. "So, I'll look at my schedule and see what weekends are good for our plane flight. You'll let me know what works for you?"

"Of course. I can't wait. I'll call you on Monday."

"Sounds good. Sleep well."

"You too, Dara," the shorter woman replied. She could tell Dara had no intention of trying to kiss her, so she shook off her disappointment and smiled. "Good night."

Continued...

**Alex Tryst's Scrolls
The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

~ Political Crossfire ~

by Alex Tryst
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Disclaimer: See Part 1.

Part 2

It was the second weekend of May before Elisabeth and Dara saw each other again. Even though the brunette knew she still owed the older woman dinner at her place, she decided to forgo those plans and take the blonde on the plane ride she had promised her instead. She knew that the night she had the shorter woman over for dinner, she was going to try to make things more intimate between them if she continued to see openness in the blonde, which she had observed ever since Shelby had revealed Elisabeth's secret.

However, this day would test their relationship in a way it hadn't yet, given that Dara had

planned a whole day's worth of activities for just the two of them. Their outings so far had merely been several hours at a time, but this day she had plans she was sure would appeal to the blonde. After getting dressed early that Saturday morning, she turned her attention to the clothes she would need throughout the day. She wanted to look good for their time together but also be comfortable for their various activities, so she was torn about what to bring.

Over at the Gunter household, Elisabeth was faced with the same problem. "I just don't know what to wear for dinner," she mentioned to Shelby, who was lying haphazardly across her sister's bed with clothes strewn all around her. "She said it was going to be formal."

"Let me get this straight. She's taking you by plane somewhere of which you have no idea. You're having lunch at a place that has a dress code. Then you're going horseback riding, and after that you're going to a formal dinner?"

"That's what she said. I sure hope she had primping time scheduled as well. I'm not going to be in any shape to go to dinner after riding without a shower at least."

"Knowing her she's thought of it but that still gives us no idea where she's taking you. Not to mention isn't it suppose to rain today?"

Elisabeth shrugged. "Well, I'm assuming that it won't be raining where we're going. Come on now. Help me decide on a dress. I've narrowed it down to these three," she said, holding the first one up for her sister.

"Too proper. This isn't a state dinner. You look like a matron," complained the younger woman.

Holding up another black dress, she inquired, "Okay. How about this?"

"Again too prudish. You can show a little cleavage. She'd probably enjoy that."

Smirking the older blonde quipped, "I'm sure she would. That leaves us with this blue one."

"That's the one. It's perfect. You're showing just enough to be alluring and yet are still well within the confines of your so-called friendship."

"Shut up, Shelby. You know as well as I do that this is all we can have at the moment."

"Sure, yeah, I know, but both of you are struggling in vain with your resolve. One of you is going to combust before it's all over, and I'm willing to bet it's going to be you," her sister teased.

"We'll see about that. All right. Now to figure out what to wear to lunch."

"What was the dress code for that?"

"No jeans, no shorts and shirt collar required."

"How about your new linen pants? Wear them with your blue sweater set."

"I was just thinking the same thing. I suppose that's as good a choice as any."

"What about your riding clothes? What are you going to wear?"

"The usual."

"Chaps included?" Shelby questioned in interest.

"Yeah."

"Oh, I would love to see the look on Dara's face when she saw you in those. Talk about walking sex. She's going to cream."

Elisabeth sneered at the comment. "Would you please stop saying things like that? You're so crude sometimes."

"I'm just telling you the truth. And don't pretend for one moment that the thought didn't cross your mind either."

"Well, for only a second. I just happen to know my butt looks good in them. All right. I need to shower now. She's going to be here soon."

Forty minutes later Elisabeth heard the doorbell as she was putting the last few things in her bag. Picking up her pace, she zipped it and then headed downstairs, so Shelby couldn't put any wild ideas into Dara's head while she wasn't there. However, she appeared to be too late she saw them snickering over something in the foyer.

The brunette looked up when the blonde entered the room and smiled. "You look nice," she complimented, reaching for the older woman's bag.

"Thanks, so do you."

Smiling at Shelby Dara said, "We'll see you later. I promise to bring your sister back in one piece."

"Have fun and don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"You're leaving the door open on that one, aren't you?" the younger attorney jested as she opened the front door.

"Get out of here," Shelby said before hugging her sister.

Getting into the car, the shorter woman asked, "So, will you tell me where we're going now? I've been dying to know."

"All right. I'm taking you to The Greenbrier."

"The Greenbrier? In West Virginia?"

"That's the one."

"Wow. I've always wanted to go there."

"It's nice. You'll enjoy it."

"I've always wanted to go on the Bunker Tour."

"Well, perhaps you'll get a chance to go that today," the younger woman stated. She hadn't gotten reservations for the tour but quickly decided she would try to work it in if it was what Elisabeth wanted. "We just have to be mindful of the weather. I've been studying it for the last few days, and it seems like we'll just miss it. Keep your fingers crossed anyway, because I don't want to fly in the rain."

"I don't blame you. I wouldn't want to either."

Heading off to the airport, Dara parked her car in the lot and then picked up their bags to the trip. Quietly she escorted the blonde to her plane. "Feel free to look around or whatever. I just need to do a pre-flight inspection. It'll only take about twenty minutes or so," Dara explained as she unlocked the doors. She carefully stowed the luggage in the back, and then meticulously began her inspection of her plane.

The older woman just stood off to the side and observed. She noted that the brunette took great care in looking at every detail of the aircraft. She hadn't thought much about the actual flight they were taking together, but as she watched Dara, she felt more comfortable with the idea of being with her in the small four-seater. Curiosity getting the better of her, the blonde ducked under the wing and opened the passenger's side door to look at the inside. The plane was immaculate, further solidifying her feelings that the younger woman took her position as a pilot as seriously as she did her other professions.

When Dara was finished with her examination, she looked at the blonde and smiled. "So, are you ready for this little adventure?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"Great. Then let's get out of here. Hop in while I remove the blocks." Elisabeth did as she was told, taking a seat in the plane and closing her door. The taller woman joined her shortly there after. They didn't talk to each other as the brunette wrote some things down in a log and then put on her headset. "Here. If you put these on, it'll help with the noise," she said, extending another headset to the older attorney.

At first the blonde was hesitant, because she thought they would mess up her hair, but she figured it would be better than being subjected to the noise the entire way to West Virginia, so she put them on over her ears. She was pleasantly surprised to realize she was able to hear Dara more clearly with them on as the pilot began to speak to the air traffic controller.

The flight to The Greenbrier was without incident. The two of them chatted amiably on the way, and when they had landed, the younger woman quickly ushered them to an awaiting car to take them to the resort only a few miles away. Allowing a bellhop to take their bags, Dara led the way into the establishment up to the check-in desk where they were greeted politely.

Smiling brilliantly Dara said, "Hi. Checking in please."

"All right. What's the reservation name?"

"Dara Rosenthal," she replied, looking over at Elisabeth. She could tell by the look in the blonde's eyes that she was puzzled by the development. Hastily she rationalized, "This isn't what it looks like. We just needed a place to clean up and change for dinner."

The shorter woman nodded in understanding. Even though she hadn't thought any differently, it was surprising to her that Dara would reserve a room at the five-star resort just as a place to change clothes. Her mind drifted to other things they could do together in such a setting as the brunette completed their check-in. When it was complete, Dara took their bags and led the way to their room. Elisabeth took in the décor, which didn't seem to faze the younger woman at all, making her wonder if Dara had been there previously.

Ten minutes later they arrived at their designated room. "Here we are," the brunette mentioned, unlocking the door and then opening it for Elisabeth to enter first.

The older attorney stepped into the room and flipped on the lights. It was elegantly decorated with pastels and florals just as she had read about in magazines. Going over to the window, she opened the shades to reveal a picturesque view of the mountains and golf course. Meanwhile Dara was busy putting her clothes on hangers, so they wouldn't be wrinkled later. "You want to hang anything in your bag?" the brunette inquired.

"Oh yeah. My dress is probably a mess by now. Hopefully it won't be too bad by dinner," she answered, unzipping her luggage.

They worked in silence putting their belongings away before Dara said, "All right. It's a little after eleven now. I reserved some horses from noon to three. Then we have the Bunker Tour at five, followed by dinner at seven thirty."

Looking at the younger attorney quizzically, Elisabeth asked, "And what time did you plan on leaving here tonight to go home?"

"Well, I figured if we can be at the airport by nine, nine thirty, I could have you back at home in your bed between midnight and one in the morning."

"That's a long day. Are you sure you're going to be up to it?"

"Of course. Don't worry. I've done it before."

"All right. I trust you. Let's get some lunch. I'm starving," the shorter woman joked.

"You're not the only one." Since both of them were anxious to move on to their outdoor activities, lunch was a quick affair and then it was back to the room to change into riding clothes. Dara let Elisabeth have the bathroom while she changed into her jeans. Since she was already wearing the shirt the older woman had given her, she figured she would just continue to wear it. Dara was just putting on her boots when she heard the bathroom door open. Her eyes went from the floor up a pair of leather clad legs, making her heart start pounding loudly in her chest. She had never seen anyone looking so dangerously sexy as Elisabeth did in her chaps and jeans. "Nice pants," she managed to state as she stood from the bed.

Smiling at the sight of the woman she wanted, Elisabeth replied, "Thanks."

"Are you ready?"

"Yeah. Just let me pull on my boots."

When they were ready, Dara led them out of the room. The blonde started back toward the lobby when the younger woman stopped her. "We can't go that way. Jeans aren't permitted in the lobby. Besides there's a faster way out to the stables."

First the first two hours of riding, the women simply talked about different people they both knew back at law school and what their peers were doing with their degrees. When they weren't focused on their own careers, they found it easy to get along, so with unspoken agreement, they stayed away from the topic of the election or social politics. However, as their last hour on the riding trail began to pass, it started raining. Not only was it raining though, thunder accompanied the unfavorable weather, making them decide to head back to the stables earlier than planned. By the time they arrived, both women were drenched. Immediately returning to their hotel room, Dara suggested they take the opportunity to shower in order to warm themselves after being subjected to the cold spring rain. Elisabeth nodded her head in agreement.

"You can go first. Take one of the robes from the closet," Dara offered.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I'll be fine. Go on. I'll just sit here and watch TV while you're in there."

"All right. I won't be long." Going into the bathroom, Elisabeth stripped off her wet clothes. She knew she should be getting into the shower to warm her body, but her mind kept wandering to the fact that just on the other side of the door from where she stood naked was the woman of her fantasies. She wanted nothing more than for the brunette to walk in upon her just then and sweep

her into a passionate embrace, but she knew Dara would never be so bold as to act that way. The Dark-haired attorney had proved her chivalry time and again, so the blonde understood if she wanted something, she would have to seek it herself, and she wasn't prepared to do such a thing, at least not yet.

While Elisabeth was in the bathroom, Dara peeled off her wet clothes, laying them over the chairs by the table and pulling on one of the hotel's plush robes. She then stood looking out the window, watching the weather as she thought about the blonde. She was just a few feet away, separated by only a wall completely wet and naked. The younger woman let herself fantasize about what Elisabeth might look like in that shower, the way the water cascaded down her fair body as she washed her hair and soaped her skin. The image left her weak in her legs, making her seek the bed for support. Lying back on it, she closed her eyes as she listened to the sounds of the water and imagined the two of them together making love in that small space as hot water sprayed over the both of them. It left her with an agonizing ache. She knew it was getting harder for her to control herself around the older woman. She thought that she would be able to handle the restrictions of allowing the blonde to go at her own pace, but it was proving to be difficult.

Elisabeth turned off the water when she was finished. Even though she could have stayed in there much longer, she knew Dara was waiting to get warm as well. Putting on the robe the hotel had provided, she wrapped a towel around her blonde hair and then stepped out into the room. She just stared for a moment at the sight before her. There on the bed fast asleep was Dara, her body clothed in only the robe. Her legs were staggered enough to allow the older woman to see an expanse of toned thigh she had only dreamed about before. Debating on whether to wake her companion or not, she returned to the bathroom to dry her hair, figuring the sound of the hair dryer would wake Dara naturally, so she wouldn't have to. She wasn't sure she would be able to restrain herself if she had to awake the enticing sleeping woman. Correct in her assumption, by the time her hair was dry the taller woman was awake again and ready to take her shower. Once both women were dry and changed into warmer clothes, they had about half an hour before they were scheduled for the Bunker Tour, so Elisabeth asked the younger woman to take her on a tour of the famous hotel, to which Dara readily agreed, because she didn't want to be in the room alone with Elisabeth and nothing to do any longer than necessary.

The tour of the hotel and then the famous Bunker Tour took the next several hours. In the meantime the rain had moved out of the area, clearing into a clear cool evening. After their tour the women returned to their room to change for dinner. Both of them could feel a palpable tension as they dressed. Even though neither of them spoke, and they dressed in different areas of the room for privacy, something about the air around them had been charged since they had gotten back from riding, making the blonde wonder about the rest of the night. She knew it was getting harder for her to keep her feelings platonic, especially since she knew her interest was returned, but she wasn't ready to declare anything yet. It was still too risky given her career situation. Knowing she had to remain strong, she took a deep breath and prepared for another torturous night on her emotions as she stepped out of the bathroom.

Dara was sitting on the sofa watching the weather on TV when the blonde appeared. She couldn't help herself as her eyes perused her company's outfit. "You look fabulous," she complimented. "That dress really sets off your eyes."

"Thank you. You look very nice too."

"Thanks," the taller woman replied standing to give Elisabeth the full view of her black silk pants and coordinating blouse. "You ready?"

"If you are. What are you watching the weather for?"

"The system is moving toward D.C. I was just tracking its pace. There could be a slight problem, but I don't want to worry about it now. Hopefully it will have passed by the time we need to go home. For now though, let's just enjoy our dinner."

"Sounds good to me."

With that the brunette led the way down to the formal dining room for dinner. Elisabeth found all the haughtiness of the place amusing, and yet she could tell there were several people that took the superior air of the resort seriously. The Greenbrier was more than just a hotel but a way of life for the wealthy divisions of society of the Mid-Atlantic region of the country. It made her wonder about the younger woman's finances, because she felt extremely familiar with the resort as if she had been there on a number of occasions.

After they were seated, Elisabeth decided to find out more, so she asked, "I've been meaning to ask you this all day. How many times have you been here before?"

"More than I can probably recall. This is my parents' favorite place to vacation. They used to drag us here as kids. We hated it then, but I've grown to appreciate it now. It's a great place to network and fundraise. However, if I had my choice, I'd pick a little cabin in the mountains over this colossal facility."

"I would too. I like more rustic environments. This is way too civilized to be in the middle of nowhere."

"I agree. Although it's nice to go celebrity spotting. They come here for the solitude," Dara mentioned, looking at her menu. "I'm surprised we haven't seen any."

"The trip's not over. There's still time. However, I'm not here to see them. You're the only one worth seeing."

Casting a small smile at the blonde, she stated, "That's just about the nicest compliment I've gotten in awhile. It means even more coming from you. Now what looks good to you?"

Dinner was a quiet yet pleasant affair between them. Due to the fact that they were scheduled to fly shortly after dinner, Dara didn't drink but had encouraged the older woman to do so if she wanted. As much as the blonde did want to sample some of the wines on the menu, she figured it was better not to do so. She knew it would be harder for her to keep herself in check that way, so she too passed on alcohol. However, both women dined on the decadent menu offered. Around

8:45 Dara requested their tab, knowing they had to head to the airport soon. Quickly she paid it and then escorted the blonde back to the room, so they could pack their belongings.

When they reached the room, Elisabeth slowly began to pack her bag. As she did it though, she desperately tried to think of a reason to stay at the hotel. She didn't want the evening to end with Dara. Even though she knew she wasn't ready to initiate more between them, she still longed to be close to the brunette. Hearing the TV on, she stuck her head out of the bathroom to see Dara watching the weather again.

"What's going on with the storm?" the shorter woman inquired curiously.

"It's still over the D.C. area. I'm contemplating our options right now."

"Which are?"

"Well, we can go for it, but I don't want to get caught in a storm. I really don't like to fly in bad weather. We'll catch some rain, but it might not be too bad. However, it could be bad. We just won't know until we're in it really."

"What are the other options?"

"Well, I can fly us a different route home, but I'm not sure if that's a good idea. Look at the line of the storm," she pointed out on the TV screen. "It goes all the way from southern Virginia into Pennsylvania. I don't like the look of it."

"So what's your bright idea?"

"Wait it out. We stay here for another few hours and then leave. The storm is expected to move out by two."

"You'll be too exhausted to fly by then, though. Can't we sleep here and then just go back early in the morning?"

Dara nodded. "We have this room until noon tomorrow. I didn't want to assume anything. I know this looks bad, but it wasn't my intention to keep you hostage here overnight."

"I'd hardly consider staying at this resort being held hostage," Elisabeth joked even though her heart rate had sped up at the thought of them staying the night together.

"Well, if that's okay with you, then I'm fine with it as well."

"Yeah. I think that's the best choice we have, Dara. The weather is just not cooperating, and I don't want you to fly if you're not comfortable with it. I'll just call Shelby and let her know we're staying here, so she won't worry."

"Okay. I really do think it's for the best."

"Fine. That's what we'll do then. The only bad thing about this is that I don't have anything to sleep in."

Nodding the brunette went to her bag. "I think I can help with that."

"If you have pajamas in there, I might start to get suspicious," she teased.

"Sorry, none of those. However, I do have some lightweight sweat pants, a pair of shorts, and a few extra t-shirts. You can wear whatever you want."

Picking up a t-shirt and the pants, the blonde answered, "Thanks. I'm going to just call Shelby now."

Nodding her head, the brunette turned her attention back to the TV while the older woman went to make her call. Heading into the bathroom, she changed her clothes and then dialed her sister on her cell phone.

"Hey. How's the date going?"

"It's been great so far. Listen. I just wanted to call you and let you know that I won't be home until the morning."

"That good? You two are spending the night together?"

"Well, out of necessity really. The weather isn't cooperating."

"Likely story," Shelby teased.

"How's the storm where you are?"

"Actually the power is out at the moment. It is probably best you stay there in the strong arms of your beloved."

"Shelby, this isn't some ploy. She's just uncomfortable with the idea of flying in this weather, and I happen to agree with her."

"Well, I'll give her that. I wouldn't want you flying either. It's just convenient that you're alone together."

"I know. This has been an incredible day, Shelby. It's been perfect even if we did get caught out in the rain while we were riding. I'll tell you. I almost had a heart attack seeing her all wet in only a robe."

"I'm sure. Well, you two enjoy yourselves and travel safely tomorrow."

"We will. See you then."

"Good night."

"Night, Shelby."

Once the call was complete, the blonde opened the door leading back to the bedroom. Dara was putting her suit on a hanger in the hallway, leaving her in only a t-shirt and a pair of gym shorts. Elisabeth snuck a look at the taller woman's legs. She could easily see the younger woman had kept her soccer player's body from college with her powerful muscles.

Turning and gazing over her shoulder, the younger attorney saw blue eyes were looking. Instead of mentioning it though, she simply smiled and said, "You know, since we're staying here, it's a little early to be going to sleep. Would you like to watch a movie? I can order up some dessert for us if you want."

"That sounds good."

"Great. I was wanting some ice cream myself. The menu is over on the table. Just let me know what you want," she requested as she brushed by the older woman to go into the bathroom herself.

Elisabeth went to study the menu for a few minutes before deciding on something decadent-sounding. Then she turned her attention to the TV to find them something suitable to watch and made herself comfortable on the small sofa. Within a few minutes the brunette returned and placed their order for room service before joining the shorter woman on the couch.

Both women were quiet after agreeing on what to watch. Dara felt strange sitting next to Elisabeth now that they were in much more casual clothes. She stole a glance at the blonde. The older woman looked adorable sitting in a white t-shirt and a pair of her sweats. The brunette noticed though, by the way the cotton clung to the blonde's torso, that Elisabeth hadn't bothered to take off her bra, leaving the younger woman with slight disappointment. She had badly wanted to see more of the woman who she fantasized about often, but it appeared that she would not get the opportunity.

The rest of the night passed in silence with the exception of the TV. Finally around midnight Dara suggested they go to sleep, so they could go back early the next day. Nodding her head in agreement, Elisabeth contemplated what was to happen next. Her eyes found the queen sized bed. Knowing she would have to share the space with the brunette, she took a calming breath. It was going to be a difficult night for her with Dara in such close proximity, but she knew she had no other choice.

Seeing where the blonde's eyes were, Dara sensed a problem. Feeling as if she should offer some sort of alternative, she said, "You know, I could sleep here on the couch."

Elisabeth smiled when she heard the proposal, for she knew Dara was trying to be sensitive to

her needs as always. However, she knew it wouldn't be right to subject the woman to a sleepless night on a sofa that was too small to hold her tall frame. Shaking her head in answer, she replied, "Don't be silly. You can't even fit on this couch. We'll share the bed."

"If you're sure. I don't want to make you uncomfortable."

"I'm not uncomfortable with it. On the contrary, what would make me uncomfortable would be to let my hostess sleep on the couch when I had a cozy bed that was meant for two."

"Fine then. Let's get to sleep. All this activity today is making me sleepy."

Moving to the bed, Elisabeth slipped into the side closest to the window, leaving Dara closer to the hotel bathroom and door. The brunette waited until the older woman seemed settled before turning out the light and intentionally turning her back to the blonde even as much as she didn't want to do so.

The shorter woman lay in the dark for a moment before whispering, "Good night, Dara."

"Good night, Elisabeth. Sleep well."

All was quiet then in the room. Neither woman spoke, but both were wide awake with their thoughts. Elisabeth's were running rampant as she realized her fantasy of having the brunette in her bed was actually upon her. Dara was so close she could feel the younger woman's back just inches from her body, and it began to fill her with an edgy need. The more she tried to control her thoughts, the more her body reneged as she began to tremble with unfulfilled desires. At first it was just a shiver and then all out shuddering began to occur. Curling up in a tight ball, she willed herself to stop shaking.

Dara felt Elisabeth's quaking beside her. She wasn't sure what to do at first, because she didn't want to embarrass the blonde by alerting her to her acknowledgment of the situation, but after several minutes, she realized it would probably be better to reassure her. Turning over so she was facing the shorter woman, she gently placed a hand on Elisabeth's arm. The blonde yelped in surprise, causing Dara to start apologizing profusely. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. Are you cold? Do you want me to turn on the heater?"

"I'm a little cold," she lied.

Immediately the brunette tried to move out of the bed to go to the heater, but she was held back by a hand on hers. She noticed that Elisabeth held Dara's hand firmly to her arm where she had first placed it. Figuring this was as close as the older woman was going to get to giving direction, Dara stayed where she was for a moment. When Elisabeth kept the taller woman's hand on her arm, she considered that a sign that she was to remain there. Deciding to take a chance, Dara lay back down again and slowly slipped her arm from the blonde's around her waist. She could feel how tense Elisabeth's body was against her own, not assuring her that this was what the older woman wanted, so she softly inquired, "Is this okay?"

Swallowing her nerves, the blonde nodded in the dark. "It's fine," she managed to respond.

"Well, you let me know when you're warm enough. I'm quite the space heater."

Laughing lightly in an effort to relax in the brunette's embrace, the older woman focused on the warmth that was quickly suffusing her back from Dara's body against her own. "You certainly are that."

Feeling the tension slowly starting to fade from her company, Dara whispered, "Well, sweet dreams, Elisabeth."

"You too, Dara." Closing her eyes, the blonde concentrated on the glorious feeling of the taller woman's body against hers. She had dreamed of it so many times, and it was finally a reality. The more accustomed she became with the idea of them being that close, the more her body relaxed enough to enjoy the moment. As she devoted her attention to every place their bodies melded together, she realized she could hear the brunette's breath in her ear. Dara was taking painstakingly slow deep breaths. Elisabeth quickly realized the younger woman was trying to control her own body's response to them being that close, and she found strange comfort in Dara's obvious want and disciplined resolution not to advance their relationship even though she felt sure more than ever that the younger woman knew of her own desires. She knew she was safe in the arms of the woman she secretly loved.

When the alarm started beeping in the morning, Dara grumbled incoherently as she slapped at it irritably. She hadn't gotten much sleep during the night. She was far too awake at the feeling of Elisabeth sleeping her arms to fall asleep herself. She was sure she hadn't drifted off until well after three in the morning, and now at nine her body regretted the decision to forgo sleep in favor of indulging in her secret reverie. Her sleepy thoughts were broken by a tiny mewling sound.

"Just a few more minutes," the blonde begged drowsily.

"We don't really have to get up now. We don't have to leave here until noon actually, so we could sleep a few more hours," Dara tried to justify.

"Good. Let's do that," Elisabeth commented, snuggling against the brunette's shoulder.

Knowing she would much rather go back to sleep, the younger woman quickly reset the alarm for later that morning and drifted back to dreams. About an hour later, though, the shrill of the blonde's cell phone awoke them both. Groggily Elisabeth managed to get out of bed and answer it. Dara could tell just by the look on the blonde's face that it wasn't a good phone call.

"Sir, I'm sorry I can't make it to the meeting. I'm out of town," she explained to the caller. "Yes, sir. I know the importance of being at your disposal, but I am entitled to a life outside of the campaign. This is the first weekend I've gone away since starting. I've been dedicated, but I'm telling you I'm not going to make it today. You'll just have to fill me in later," she stated. Dara wondered who the older woman was talking based on the way she spoke. Even though her words were firm, her tone was subservient, peaking her interest. "Sir, I'm at The Greenbrier. It would

take me hours to get back. Just have the meeting without me." The blonde listened for another moment before repeating, "Sir, have the meeting. Fill me in tomorrow. I apologize for not being there, but I'm unavailable."

After a few more exchanges the call ended and the women looked at each other. Seeing the distress in the blonde's eyes, Dara inquired, "Something wrong?"

"A last minute campaign meeting. These people think you have to give your life to the cause. For once I would just like to relax on the weekend and do my own thing, and I'm getting a hard time about it. It's nothing. I'll do some kissing up when I get back, and it'll be fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Even if I wasn't, there is nothing I can do about it now. Just forget it even happened. I'm still tired," she mentioned, coming back to the bed. Both of them settled down again, and Dara was asleep within minutes. However, Elisabeth's mind was on the call. That was too close for her. Just when she was beginning to feel comfortable with the brunette, the President had a way of making himself known. The phone conversation had rattled her more than she cared to admit, especially since she had just told him she was unavailable. Knowing she had to figure out a way to make it up to him, she wondered what she could do to get back on favorable terms as she drifted off to sleep once again.

By the time the women got back to the older woman's house that day, it was almost noon. Dara dutifully carried her bags to the door and then waited as Elisabeth unlocked it. Placing them in the foyer on the floor, the younger attorney smiled at her company. "Well, I'm sure you have a lot to do today, so I'm going to go."

"Thank you, Dara, for the wonderful time. The whole thing was just amazing."

"I'm glad you had a good time. Listen. I don't know if you have any plans for the Memorial Day weekend, but my sister, Leah, and I are going to throw a little barbeque pool party at our place that holiday Monday. I would like it if you and Shelby would come. It'll be fun."

"I'll ask her and get back to you. I'm not sure of my schedule yet."

Nodding the brunette contemplated what she should do. After spending the night together, she felt as if she could hug the blonde without any negative response, but she still wondered if a more intimate farewell would be all right. Reaching for the shorter woman, she embraced her in a hug quickly and just decided to test the waters. Placing a kiss on top of the blonde's head, she said, "Well, I'll talk to you later. Have a good day."

"You too. Thanks again," Elisabeth managed to reply, but her heart was pounding wildly at the feeling of what Dara had just done. She waited until the younger woman had pulled away from the curb to close the door and then headed upstairs with her bags.

She was met in the hallway by her grinning younger sister. "So, tell me. Was it as good as you

hoped it would be?"

"Shelby, get your mind out of the gutter. We didn't have sex."

"You're kidding. She drops several hundred dollars on a date, and you don't put out. I'm ashamed," the younger blonde joked.

"More like a couple of thousand. I've never been treated like that in my life. It was the perfect date. She took me on an incredible day, and the night was just as good."

"Yeah, well, it's the night I'm most interested in. Did you at least make out?"

"You know I can't do that with her right now. I'm at a point that if I start I might not be able to stop, and I can't have that happen. It's already bad enough that the President woke me up from her bed this morning. If she knew that it was him, I'm not sure how she would take it."

"You're going to have to tell her at some point. The longer you hide it, the more it's going to hurt her in the end."

"I know, but I'm not sure how yet."

"Well, I'm sure you'll figure it out, but for now, give me the dirt. Tell me everything."

Smiling at her sister, Elisabeth started, "She was so sweet the entire time. Last night we slept together in the same bed, and I'm embarrassed to admit it, but I freaked out. I started to shake so badly. I just couldn't help myself. It's the first time in my life my emotions just made me feel out of control, but she held me. She didn't try anything, just held me all night, and it was heaven. It was even better than the fantasies of us being together. I've never felt so safe and loved."

"That's sweet. She's wonderful, Elisabeth. I really hope you two can make it until November. I know you have so much potential, but I'm still worried about you blowing it. You're not telling her the complete truth."

"I'm going to tell her, Shelby, when the time is right. On a side note though, she invited us to a party at her house Memorial Day. Please tell me you don't have plans."

"No plans. Are we going?"

"Yeah. I just didn't want to tell her in case you were busy. I don't want to go alone. Her sister Leah will be there."

"Cool. Can't wait."

On Memorial Day Elisabeth and Shelby were both excited about the prospect of going to Dara's

house for the party. They had never been there before, and it was a chance to meet one of her sisters and learn more about the brunette. However, trying to figure out the best outfit for the day was a large task for the older blonde.

Shelby was sitting in her usual spot on Elisabeth's bed helping her sister with the options. "Show me your bathing suit options first, Lis. That's most important."

"All right. That's my biggest problem actually. I want to show a bit but not be too flashy. The first one is this one piece," she said as she took off her clothes to try on the suit.

"Well, it's all right. I mean it looks good on you but is a little conservative. I mean I can't even see your cleavage."

"Okay. Next is this two piece. I think it has potential." Slipping it on, she turned to look in her full-length mirror. "No, wait. My butt looks big in this one. Forget it."

"I agree. Next," Shelby stated.

"Now this might be too revealing for a party. I mean I don't mind the idea of showing off this much for her, but I don't know who else is going to be there."

"Try it on and we'll see."

Elisabeth put on the two piece blue and white striped seersucker suit and turned for approval. "Well?"

"You look incredible, Lis. That's the one you have to wear. It's perfect with that faux tan you sprayed on. You look like a goddess. Perfect cleavage, great line with your legs. It has to be this one."

"Are you sure? I don't want to look like a slut, Shelby."

"You don't. You just look stunningly beautiful. Dara is going to die when she sees you. Now we have to figure out what to wear over it. Do you still have that blue and white wrap skirt you bought a couple of years ago?"

"Yeah."

"Try that on with it and let me see."

Doing what she was told, the older woman looked at her sister. Placing her sunglasses on top of her head, she questioned, "Do I need a top of some sort?"

"And cover up those incredible assets? No way," Shelby teased.

"Seriously, Shelby. I think I should at least until I am comfortable with my company."

"Fine. Let's see what you have," her sister said, getting up and moving to the closet.

Once both blondes were dressed, Elisabeth drove them over to Dara's house. As they entered the brunette's development, the older one asked, "Where are you taking us, Shelby? Are you sure these are the directions?"

"This is what they say. Dara never mentioned anything about living in these mansions. Makes me believe my theory is true."

"What theory is that?"

"The girl has money. I mean the weekend trip to The Greenbrier was a sure tip off."

"That's true, but still she doesn't seem the type with what she does. I guess we'll see."

A few minutes later when the duo pulled up to the house on the directions Shelby laughed.

"Well, it's the largest house on the street. You still think she doesn't have money?"

"How could she afford it in her line of work?" curiously Elisabeth questioned aloud. She knew people working in the non-profit sector were not well paid. Hearing voices coming from the backyard, she mentioned, "Dara said just to go around the back." Moving in that direction, both women noticed that the party consisted of all women. However, she saw several familiar faces of women she'd been introduced to previously. Shouldering her bag Elisabeth opened the gate. Immediately she saw Dara look in her direction.

"Well, if it isn't the prettiest girl to join the party. How are you Shelby?" she teased, coming over to them. "Elisabeth, how are you today?" she questioned with a smile. "I'm glad you could make it. You look great."

"Thanks. You certainly look different out of a business suit," she joked as she tried to calm her racing heart at the sight of the taller woman in her swimsuit, which consisted of a pair of tiny form-fitting shorts and a tankini top that left her abdomen exposed.

"Come on. Let me introduce you all to the others." Making the rounds with the blondes, she left her sister for last. "Leah, I want to introduce you to two special ladies. These are the infamous Gunter girls I've been telling you about. This is Shelby and Elisabeth."

Smiling at her guests, Leah extended her hand. "It's great to meet both of you. Dara has told me so much about you that I feel like we're already friends. I'm glad she finally got up the nerve to invite you over. She's been so nervous about you finding out we live at home."

Looking at Dara Elisabeth saw her blush lightly. "Oh, well, she hadn't mentioned that part."

"Yeah, I was going to. I figured you'd realize it when you drove up, but I assure you it's not as bad as it sounds. In fact, why don't I give you a tour to prove it?"

"That would be great. Lead on," Shelby suggested.

Taking the two blondes into a door close to the patio, she said, "This is where Leah and I live. It's a basement apartment completely separate from our parents. I don't even see them."

"Wow. It's actually quite large. Look at all this space you have," Shelby mentioned, walking further into the apartment.

Quickly Dara showed them all the rooms except for her own bedroom before proposing, "Why don't we head outside now so I can start on the grill?"

However, Shelby shook her head. "You've forgotten to show us the most important thing. Where is your love nest?"

"It's a little bit of a mess."

"So? We still want to see it. Right, Lis?"

Even though Elisabeth was curious, she didn't want to push the issue. "Only if you want to show us."

"Come on, Dara. Just let us take a peek," the youngest woman pressed.

"Fine. It's over here by my office." Opening the door she allowed both Shelby and Elisabeth to look into the room.

Taking note of the queen-sized bed on the far side of the spacious room and the dark furniture that suited the owner, the older attorney knew she would be having a fantasy about Dara later with the visual input of what her room actually looked like. About that time they heard Leah calling from the door of the apartment, "Dara, get out here. We're hungry, and Allison is threatening to take over the grill. You know what happened last time. She almost set the place on fire."

"We should get back outside. I promised to wait until you got here but not a second more to start on the food," she explained. "You can leave your bag inside if you want though or take it with us. I have towels and sun screen outside already."

Heading back to the pool, the brunette started her task of grilling the hamburgers that had been previously prepared while Leah attended to the other food. Most of the women lounged in chairs close to the water's edge chatting, so Elisabeth and Shelby decided to join the fray of conversation.

As Dara manned the grill, she kept her eyes on Elisabeth. The blonde appeared to be having fun with the other guests, which pleased her greatly. However, she was intrigued by the older woman's outfit. She could just see that the blonde attorney had a suit on under her clothes, but

she desperately wanted to know what it looked like. Shelby had already made herself comfortable, shedding her outer layers for just her bikini, and Dara figured if the older woman looked half as delectable as her younger sister, she was not going to be disappointed. It was a matter of making Elisabeth comfortable enough to lower her guard and relax though.

Once the hamburgers were finished, all of the guests got their plates and circled the buffet table to serve themselves. Dara and Leah stood off to the side a moment just watching when the older sister whispered, "So, what do you think?"

"She's fabulous, as is her sister. You didn't tell me so much about Shelby."

"Oh, well, I didn't think it was important at the time. Why do you say that anyway?"

"Remember when I said I sometimes wondered what it would be like to jump the fence?" Dara nodded skeptically. "Well, something tells me Shelby is the same way."

"She is, but she's pretty wild, Leah. She might be more than you bargained for. Trust me on that."

"Oh, come on now. How wild can she be? Tell me I have your approval though. I wouldn't want to mess anything up between you and Elisabeth."

"Go ahead. Have fun. Just use protection please. She's quite the player too. I don't want either of you getting hurt."

"Enough said. This is going to be fun. Thanks, sis."

"No problem."

"Now would you get after your girl? She needs some encouragement to get more comfortable," Leah teased before joining the group of girls around the table.

Dara was the last in line for food. As she filled up her plate, she noticed that some of her friends were vying for the blonde's attention as they ate. Chuckling to herself Dara made her way over to Elisabeth's chair to assess the situation further. Several of her friends were firmly planted in seats near the attractive woman, leaving Dara nowhere to sit even remotely close to her. Enjoying the view of the older woman entertaining people, though, she simply sat across the circle and tended to her own food. Every once in awhile she would look across the way and catch blue eyes.

Elisabeth was mildly disappointed that she couldn't sit next to the brunette, so she kept seeking her out with her eyes as often as she could without it seeming like she was staring. She smiled every time she noticed Dara's eyes on her in return. As she sat there, she got to feeling more comfortable with her company. It had quickly become obvious that everyone at the party that day was a lesbian with the exception of Leah and Shelby, but it didn't bother her as she thought it would that many women were showing her attention. She felt flattered by it, but yet at the same time, she wished it was Dara giving her such notice. The lingering gazes she felt from the

younger attorney, though, were enough for the moment.

Feeling curious and playful as well as hot from the sun, the blonde decided to see what would happen if she took off her outer layers. Even though she knew it was going to have an effect on all those around her, the only opinion that she cared about was the taller woman's. She wanted to exhibit some of her attributes to the brunette much in the same way Dara had put herself on ravishing display with her suit. Trying to act casual about it, Elisabeth set her plate and cup aside on a nearby table. Leaning back in her chair, she continued to talk to the woman next to her but slowly reached up to the top button of her white cotton blouse. As if it were an unconscious act, she leisurely began to play with it before slipping it from its hole. The next button followed a few moments later and so on until they were all undone, but Elisabeth intentionally left the material closed for the meantime. Her eyes flitted over to Dara to make sure she was paying attention. The brunette did not disappoint. In fact, it was obvious what her display was doing to the younger woman. Even though the brunette's demeanor hadn't changed, Elisabeth could see the pulse of her neck pounding rapidly.

Deciding on a next course of action, the older woman fished an ice cube from her cup and leisurely ran it along her neck. The heat of the day and the temperature of her body quickly started to melt it into water. Moving her hand down a bit, she brushed open her top as she trailed the ice cube teasingly along the slope of her breasts. Her eyes went to Dara's to see her reaction.

The Tall attorney sat perfectly still in her seat mesmerized by the demonstration. She watched carefully as the trickles of water cascaded slowly from the swell of the blonde's chest down into her cleavage. Just the image of it sent her body into a heat wave as wetness settled between her thighs. She hadn't wanted Elisabeth so much as she did in that moment. She desperately wanted to be that water taking that path and exploring the crevices of the blonde's body. She just didn't know if she could control herself if she watched any longer, so she abruptly stood from her chair.

"I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm going for a swim. I think it's sweltering out here," she mentioned, putting down her plate. Not even waiting for any sort of response from anyone, she made her way over to the deep end and promptly dove in. Staying under the water, Dara swam the length of the pool in order to cool off from the blonde's teasing. She wasn't quite sure if Elisabeth knew what she was doing or the effect it was having, but she knew she had to regain some control of her raging desires or else there could be trouble.

Elisabeth watched her do laps for a few moments before her sister's voice interrupted her thoughts. "Did you have to mess with her so badly, Lis? Look at the poor woman," she teased, to which a round of laughter erupted.

The older sister blushed but didn't answer the quip. Instead she stood up from her own seat and took off her top the rest of the way as well as her wrap skirt before moving over to the shallow end of the pool. She wasn't quite ready to celebrate her victory yet. She wanted to play with the younger woman a little more first, so when Dara had made a turn to swim back to the deep end, Elisabeth tentatively stepped into the pool. It took a moment to get used to the cool temperature, but she sat on the stairs in the water and waited for the brunette to swim back her way.

As Dara swam back to the shallow end, she could see a pair of legs crossed at the knee under the water. Swimming up curiously next to them, she raised her head out of the water as she reached the stairs. Surprised by what she saw, she took a swift exhale. There was Elisabeth leaning back against the side of the pool, her arms extended along the pool edge, exposing her perfect femininity. She smiled sexily at Dara and whispered, "Hi."

"Hello," carefully the younger woman answered as her eyes strayed to the blonde's breasts and the water lapping gently against the bottom edge of the blue and white top. Knowing it would be best to swim away, Dara started to turn for just that purpose but a hand on her shoulder stopped her.

"Don't go. Sit and talk to me," Elisabeth requested.

The younger woman nodded slowly and uneasily before taking an uncertain seat on the stairs next to the blonde. "Hot weather we're having," she mentioned, not knowing exactly what to say and yet feeling completely ignorant at the comment that had just escaped her. She knew she could do better than that, but the sight of Elisabeth's body had cut off the functioning in her brain and shifted it to areas south of where it usually was.

The shorter woman chuckled at how adorable Dara was when she was nervous. "It is a little on the warm side. However, let's talk about something other than the weather."

"Such as?"

"I don't. How about Leah? Tell me more about her."

Dara shrugged as she looked to the woman in question. Her sister was talking to Shelby in what seemed like an intense conversation. "Um, what's to tell? She's my kid sister and a med student. She's pretty terrific actually."

"I can see that. I wish I had met her sooner, but you hadn't exactly invited me over."

"I know. I just wasn't sure how you would react to me living at home. It makes me sound like a big loser. Here I am thirty and living in my parents' basement."

"Oh, don't be so hard on yourself. As you said, it's completely separate from them. It's one of the nicest apartments I've ever seen."

"Well, we do pay rent and utilities. It's not like we're just living off of them," Dara further defended.

"Well, it couldn't be much better. You have all the amenities. If I could live with my mother, I'd do it. She's just in Atlanta. If it makes you feel any better though, my mom owns the house Shelby and I live in, and we don't even pay rent, just utilities."

Dara nodded her head. Looking back at their sisters, she said, "Tell me something, Elisabeth. Do

you think your sister would ever sleep with a woman?"

"What? Why are you asking me that?" she inquired, suddenly worried about Dara's intentions.

"My sister seems to think so and has decided to give Shelby her best seduction. I'm just curious as to if it will actually work."

"Leah's a lesbian?"

"No, not at all. She's just one of those free-spirited curious types, and she's always wanted to know the allure. Seems to me Shelby is the same way."

Elisabeth nodded in agreement as she looked at her sister in conversation with Leah. "Well, Shelby is the most sexually open person I know. I'm not sure if she would ever go that route, but I don't think I would be surprised if she tried it. I know she has a crush on you," she hesitantly mentioned.

Wondering why the blonde chose to admit that puzzled Dara. However, she quickly decided to nip any notions of her and Shelby before the idea flourished in Elisabeth's mind. "Yeah, well, she's too much woman for me," she joked. "I'm looking for a more serious kind of relationship myself. I'm at that place in my life where I'd like to sort of settle down with someone and start a family."

"I'm in the same place. I promised myself that after the election was over, I'd reconsider my goals. I need to find the right person though. That would make a big difference."

"I know the feeling. I know exactly what I want, but it's a matter of her coming to me," Dara confessed, risking a glance at the blonde. Their eyes met for a moment before she turned her gaze further down the pool.

Elisabeth didn't know how to respond to the comment. She knew when their eyes met that Dara was speaking of her just in the openness of her gaze, but she knew to offer any sort of assurance wouldn't be possible. An awkward moment passed before she decided to switch the direction of the conversation. "So, tell me. You still have an outstanding wager to make me dinner. When do you intend to follow through with that?" she joked as lightly as she could.

"Oh, I don't know. This week is really hectic for me. I'm giving a big speech for the American Jewish Committee on Thursday, and I haven't even finished writing it yet."

"What's it about?"

"Where Jews should stand on the election. The President's recent alignment with Israel really puts Jews in a predicament as far as their feelings about the candidates. We're traditionally Democratic by nature, but with the plight of Israel playing a part in the President's re-election campaign, it's become quite a challenge for Jews to decide on what matters most. My speech is about weighing the importance of the factors and hopefully still coming up with the Democratic

approach. We can't lose the Jewish vote and still win."

"And how do you propose securing it so faithfully?"

"By comparing the President to a man all Jews hate."

Quirking her fair brows in worry, Elisabeth knew exactly what Dara was about to say. Nevertheless, she hoped the brunette would not actually do something so manipulative. "It isn't who I think it is, is it?"

"If you think it's Hitler, then you'd be right," the younger woman stated.

"Are you crazy? The President is nothing like Hitler."

"Oh no? Not the way I see it. He's exactly like Hitler in pre-World War II Germany. He's taken control of the country with a firm authority, claiming that he's a uniter of the people while trying to squash any dissension to his rule. This speech is about the equality for all people, Elisabeth, not just Jews. That's the point I'm trying to make. Hitler blamed Germany's problems on various groups, Jews, gays, gypsies, anti-Nazi activist. If they weren't Aryan, they were the source of discrimination. The President has aligned himself with the same policy. He blames gays for the fall of the institution of marriage. Well, more than fifty percent of marriages are ending in divorce not because of the fags in this country. We don't have anything to do with it, but he needs someone to blame. He couldn't find Bin Laden, so he turned his attentions to Iraq, thinking the people would just forget the sole purpose of his justification for war. The floundering economy is still a source of contention, but he can't give the people any indication of a realistic policy for correcting it. We have the largest budget deficit in almost twenty-five years, and he blames it on the Democrats. He deflects his failure onto others just the way Hitler did, and the Germans bought it just as the Americans are buying it. He claims to be a leader of the people while discriminating against everyone that isn't a WASP. He's just using the Jews for our money and influence. He doesn't really care much about Israel as he does winning the election. He can't persist on this course."

"You can't be serious about this, Dara! Hitler was a monster!" she exclaimed with a rising temper.

"As is the President! If I say he's a modern Hitler, they're going to pay attention! That's the point of the speech! To persuade them that regardless of where he stands on Israel, he's doing more harm domestically than good abroad! We're making enemies faster than making friends in the international community. He's taking us down a path of isolation in the same manner the Third Reich did to Germany. Am I saying he's going to start killing people? No! What I am saying is that he's going to extinguish any political opposition in a similar manner. A perfect example is that he's using 9-11 propaganda to secure a second term. His ads of Ground Zero and coffins draped in the flag are sending a signal to our country. At the same time, he's done all he can to keep similar images of Iraq out of our newspapers. He'll show the dead if it suits his purpose, but he won't let Americans see the true toll of the war righted to us by the Freedom of Information Act! Ask yourself why, Elisabeth! It's so he can stay in control and run our country into the

ground! I won't stand for it! The man is a Nazi in my speech and so he will remain as long as I win supporters for the Democrats!"

Angrily getting up, Elisabeth stormed out of the pool. "What you're doing is sickening! Talk about a gross exploitation of people's opinion! You're manipulating people into thinking the President is a Nazi, and he isn't! He never will be!" she screamed.

With indignation coursing through her, Dara leapt from the pool after her. "Elisabeth, a person of your heritage should be able to recognize real evil when they see it! I know how you feel about Hitler! Why can't you see that the President is following a path of isolation and destruction in a similar manner?"

Turning cold eyes on the brunette, Elisabeth gave her a seething stare. "What did you just say?" she yelled. "Did you just make a Nazi reference about my family?"

"Elisabeth, neither one of us can change history! It is what it is! You can't change the fact that you were born into a family that supported Hitler! All you can do is see that you don't support someone with the same propensity!" Dara yelled with conviction.

The blonde started to tremble in rage and despondency at what the woman she loved had just said. Going with the infuriation she felt though, she shoved the taller woman. "Fuck you, Dara! You're a zealot more concerned with gaining votes than anything else! You don't care about anything other than defeating this man, and you certainly have no concern for those people you might hurt in the process! What you're doing is wrong, and I want nothing to do with it or you any more!" she shouted as tears came to her eyes. Unable to take another moment, the older woman turned and fled into the apartment, leaving a stunned brunette behind.

"What the hell did you just do to my sister?" Shelby angrily inquired. "I told you she was fragile emotionally."

Dara shook her head as she looked around at her guests. "Sorry about all that. Elisabeth and I have a tendency to get overly fervent in our debates," she apologized. Looking at Shelby though, she said, "Help me out here, Shelby. What just went wrong?"

The blonde shook her head and sighed loudly. "Why should I? You just insulted my family."

"That was not my intention, Shelby. I was merely making a political point."

"You have no idea the hurt you just caused Elisabeth, Dara."

"Then explain it to me, so I can go apologize to her," she requested.

Nodding her head, Shelby got out of her chair. "Fine. I'll tell you." They moved off away from everyone before the blonde looked at the attorney. "It's true that our grandfather was a Nazi. Even more our father was part of Hitler Youth, and he's kept his anti-Semitic feelings his entire life. When we were growing up, before our parents divorced and our dad moved back to Berlin,

we were subjected to his doctrine. Fortunately it had completely the opposite effect he had intended. Both of us are adamantly supportive of the Jewish cause, Elisabeth more so than anyone else in our family. She hates the fact that she was born into a society she loathes, but you're right. We can't change history. We can't change the fact that our grandfather assisted in horrendous crimes. All we can do is make sure it never happens again. Elisabeth has spent her life in politics for the sole purpose of making sure discrimination of any sort never occurs, and you just said she was helping a Nazi stay in office. You just said she supported someone who discriminated in a similar manner to Hitler. I'm pissed, and it wasn't even directed at me."

"I'm so sorry, Shelby. I didn't realize how personally she really took stuff. I knew how she felt about Nazism, but I didn't truly appreciate the depth. I didn't mean to insult your family or either of you. It's hard for me to accept your family's past, but I'm willing to try to move beyond that to win her. I know the two of you have nothing to do with your grandfather's or your father's actions."

"Well, I'm not nearly as sensitive as she is about it. I've come to terms with my past, and I know I can't reconcile my grandfather's and father's sins, but she hasn't, and I hurt for her because of that. The truly grievous part of this is that you've now lost her over this. She will not forgive you for what you've just said. The woman she loved has just destroyed her. It's over, and you're both worse off for it."

"It can't be over, Shelby. I can't lose her, not when we've come this far. I love her."

"Then you better get in there and try to apologize. Your efforts will probably be in vain, but then you can at least say you tried, and then the downfall of your relationship will be on her head."

Knowing that she had to try, Dara went up to her apartment. She knew she had to try to make things right with the older woman in any way she could. Opening the door she stepped inside and called the blonde's name. Hearing talking coming from her study, she moved in that direction. Standing in the open doorway, she saw Elisabeth standing in the middle of the room, looking out the window, oblivious to her presence. The blonde was on her cell phone, talking and crying to the person on the other end of the line.

Elisabeth tried to keep her emotions under control, but she hurt so badly at the confrontation she and Dara had just had. "Are you sure you're all right?" the voice on the other end of the phone inquired.

"I'll be fine, sir. You just caught me at a bad time."

"Anythin' I cain do to help?"

"No, Mr. President, but thank you anyway. That's sweet of you to ask. You just have an uncanny ability to call when I'm not doing so well, but I assure you that I'll get over it soon."

"Well, I was actually callin' for a reason. I need to see ya tomorrow at the Oval Office, ten in the morning alone. Cain you make it?"

"Yes, I'm available for you."

"Good. There's somethin' we need to discuss."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you worry now. Everythin' will be fine. You'll see."

"Thank you, Mr. President."

"You know, are ya ever gonna start to call me by my real name? I asked you several times already."

Sighing into the phone, Elisabeth said, "Very well, George. Now I'm sure you have some obligation to get to today."

"I do, but this call was more important. I look forward to seein' ya tomorrow, Elisabeth."

"I look forward to our time too, George. See you then," she answered, knowing that regardless of how she felt at the moment, she still had a job to do. She was intrigued at the development of him requesting her presence alone. They had never done that before, she wondered what he wanted to discuss.

When the conversation was over, Elisabeth closed her phone and then turned away from the window. Seeing Dara standing in the doorway, she jumped in surprise. "How long have you been standing there?" she asked in irritation.

"Long enough. I understand now. I can't believe I didn't put it together on my own. You and the President have a relationship."

"What we have is none of your concern, Dara," she quipped indignantly.

"Are you sleeping with him?" the brunette asked, more in jealousy than curiosity.

"That's none of your business."

"It's the people's business if the President is having an affair. People have a right to know."

"No, they don't."

"The Republicans made sure of that when they impeached Clinton. If you are involved with him, I'd like to know before I take this to the DNC. It will get ugly."

"Do whatever you think you have to in order to win those votes, Dara. As far as I'm concerned, we have nothing left to say to each other."

"Well, if that's the case, then you better be going."

"I'm just collecting my things," the blonde informed, picking up her bag.

Knowing she had one chance at making things right again and that she was blowing it, Dara said, "Just one thing before you go, Elisabeth."

"What's that?"

The tall woman sighed. "I just wanted you to know how sorry I was for what I said outside. I didn't mean to infer things about your family or you. Shelby explained why you take this stuff so personally, and I understand it. I take it personally too, because I had family die at the hands of the Reich. It's the reason that I'm in politics. I don't ever want that to happen again to anyone, and I get so afraid when I see leaders move in a direction of discrimination. That's why I'm so overly ambitious with this election. However, my feelings for those politicians have nothing to do with my feelings for you. Neither of us can change the families into which we were born. It's a part of us, but it doesn't have to define us. You can't atone for your grandfather's or your father's transgressions, only they can, and furthermore, I wouldn't want you to try. You are your own woman, Elisabeth, and I know in my heart you believe in the betterment of our country. You wouldn't be in politics if you didn't think you could make a difference. We don't support the same man, and we never will. You're going to do whatever you have to in order to get your candidate elected as am I. That alone makes a friendship between us difficult, but I still would like to have one. Shelby told me that you would probably never find it in your heart to forgive me much less desire my company after what I said, but I hope you can at least accept my apology and know that I am always here if you ever would like to try again," she stated in soft sincerity.

Looking at the woman she loved, Elisabeth was torn as to her feelings. She had never been hurt so badly by someone she cared about so much. Not even Suzanne had come close to the pain Dara had bestowed. A broken heart was nothing compared to what had just transpired. Not knowing what to say, the blonde's tears began again as she mumbled, "I have to go."

The younger woman watched the woman she loved walk out of her house. When she was alone she too started to cry as the realization that she just demolished the relationship she had been nurturing for three months came upon her. She had single-handedly destroyed what she had fought so hard to build, regardless of how much both women had resisted at first.

The next day Elisabeth went to the White House as she had promised the President. She hadn't sleep much the night before and knew she looked terrible for their meeting. Nevertheless, she knew she had to focus on the task at hand. She figured the President had requested her presence in order to share some sensitive information with her, so she needed to be at peak performance in her sincerity of his best interest, even though at the moment all she truly wanted was to give up her pursuit and go back to her life before she had started leaking information to the DNC. The web had gotten too complicated when Dara had entered the picture, and now Elisabeth didn't even know how she felt about anything any longer. Being escorted into the Oval Office, the

blonde put on the best professional face she could. The President was sitting behind his desk but stood as she entered and then requested they be left alone. He moved across the room to her with a cautious countenance.

Regarding her for a moment, he mentioned, "You don't look well rested, Elisabeth."

"No, sir," she answered but was completely taken by surprise when his hand moved from his side and cupped her face. He had never touched her before, and it left her with a sense of confusion and vulnerability. She always knew she ran the risk of enticing the man she was secretly trying to topple to a point of a physical relationship, and at the moment of that discovery she had been prepared to make any sacrifice, even that of her own career, if meant taking him out of his seat of power. However, now as he initiated the contact, it only left her with sadness, because it only made her think of her desires for Dara's hand to rest in the same place. Instantly her blue eyes began to tear.

"Oh, don't cry, my dear," he softly said, bringing his other arm around her body. As soon as he did that, Elisabeth only started to cry harder as she instinctively leaned into his body. He held her a moment as his hand trailed comfortingly through her blonde hair. "It'll be all right, Elisabeth. I'll take care of you," he whispered, kissing her on the top of the head. The blonde looked up into his face. For a moment they just gazed at each other, their faces mere inches apart. This was the moment for which she had been preparing herself, because it would ensure his downfall if he fell to the temptation. Thinking of Dara Elisabeth thought of the cause for which both of them strived, the ruin of the most powerful man in the world, and mentally prepared herself for the intimacy she was sure to follow.

However, after a moment he shook his head slowly. "You know, I'd hardly be a man if I told ya this wasn't temptin', but I know somethin' about ya that stops me from this," he said, releasing her from his embrace. However, he didn't move out of her personal space.

"What's that, Mr. President?"

"You're a lesbian."

Horrified that he knew such a thing about her when so few people did, she quickly refuted it defensively. "I am not, sir. What ever gave you such an idea?"

"Elisabeth, it's okay. I like that you're a lesbian."

"But I'm not."

"Not according to my sources."

"Your sources? What do you mean?" she questioned.

"My sources tell me that you're in a relationship with a Dara Rosenthal. She works for the HRC apparently. You were with her at The Greenbrier a few weekends ago."

"You investigated me? Why did you do such a thing?"

He shrugged. "Because I was jealous," he admitted. "I thought we could have somethin' more than a professional relationship, but once I found out about Dara, I realized what an opportunity this was. I need you, Elisabeth, now more than ever."

"Mr. President, I am not in a relationship with Dara. We're old friends. We've know each other for years. My best friend went to undergrad with her, and then we both went to Yale Law together. We are not having a relationship."

"And what of The Greenbrier?"

"We were there together. That's true, but it was just us hanging out as friends."

He looked discouraged at the news. "This is the absolute truth?"

"Yes, sir. Dara and I are not involved."

"Shoot. That spoils everythin'," he mumbled.

"Why? I thought you'd be relieved."

"Well, in a way I am," he confessed. "But I was hopin' to use you for a better purpose. I need gay votes, and I had hoped that if you were a lesbian you'd be able to brin' them back to the right. I can't afford to lose any ground here. The race is tight as it is."

"This is about votes? You wanted to out me for votes?" she inquired incredulously.

"Well, yes, but now I don't have that option. Tell me somethin' else, Elisabeth. This friend of yours, Dara Rosenthal, has been making quite a stir from the way I hear it. She's quite the left-wing activist."

"Yes, sir. That's true."

"You two don't discuss business, do you?" he asked seriously.

"Not at all. We don't discuss politics. Both of us so strongly believe in the opposite of the other that the topic is off limits."

He nodded. "Elisabeth, I need help here. I need these votes. How do I get them?"

"The only way to get them is to support a gay marriage initiative, and since you can't do that, you're going to have to do without them. You'll have to find votes elsewhere."

"That's not the answer that I wanted."

"Well, it's the truth, sir."

He looked around his office for a moment before meeting her eyes again. "Elisabeth, you know this is a very sensitive time in the election for me. I need your absolute loyalty. Promise me that you will not share anythin' with anyone of what we discussed today."

"I would never do that, Mr. President. You have my total faithfulness," she stated as neutrally as she could.

"Good. You will be rewarded when I win. I pledge that to you," he said as his arms came around her body again.

Looking into his eyes, the blonde knew this truly was the moment she had been prepared for since she started her mission. Knowing she had to go through with it, especially having denied her feelings for Dara, Elisabeth closed her eyes as he leaned toward her. He pulled her closer, so their bodies meshed firmly as their mouths came together in a sensuous lock. Keeping her body from physically convulsing at the repulsive act in which she was participating, she simply waited until the kiss had come to its natural conclusion before stepping out of his arms.

"Well, I'm sure you have quite an agenda today, so I should leave you to it," she said with a smile she didn't feel.

"All right. Thank you for comin'. This talk certainly cleared some things up for me."

"You're welcome, Mr. President. Have a good rest of the day."

"You too, Elisabeth," he replied as she moved toward the door to escort herself from the office.

She kept her emotions to herself until she was back on the busy street alone. It was only then that she contemplated the weight of what had just taken place. She had trapped him and now there was only the delivery to the DNC. His indiscretion would be for the world to know once Chad had decided on an appropriate course of action. Immediately calling him on her cell phone she relayed her news.

He was interested but less than pleased that the fall woman had been Elisabeth. "Sweetie, you know I care about you. If this comes out, I'm worried your own career could be over before it's come to fruition," he said.

"Chad, I did this for the sake of the party. You knew I was willing to sacrifice everything to get this man."

"But what about Dara? How is she going to take it?"

"What do you mean? Why does she even come into play?"

"Well, you're in a relationship. She's going to suffer some public humiliation as are you."

"Why does everyone keep saying that? Dara and I are not in a relationship."

"Well, you fooled me then. Elisabeth, I don't want to bring down the President on your back. As much as I would love to get him on something like this, the fact that it's you puts me in a quandary."

"Chad, this is what you need to defeat this man, and I'm offering it to you freely. Now if you won't take it, I know of someone who will put it to use, and I'm on my way there now. You think about it, and I'll call you back in an hour."

"Elisabeth, you think about it. Your life will be over," he pressed.

"I've lost Dara, Chad. My life is already over. At least with my sacrifice I can make a difference. Take what I'm offering, or I'll give it to someone else who will."

"Fine. Let me think about it."

"Good. I'll call you in an hour," the blonde said before hanging up her phone and hailing a cab.

Over at the brunette's office, Dara had just answered a call from Chad Peterson. "Chad, hi. To what do I owe such a call?" she asked.

"Hello, Dara. I'm sorry to disturb you, but I had something urgent to discuss. Have you spoken to Elisabeth Gunter today?"

"No. I haven't. I haven't seen her since yesterday," she answered in confusion. "Why?"

"I have reason to believe she's on her way to your office as we speak. She called me saying she had some information about the President and that if I didn't want to capitalize on it, she would take it to someone who would. Given your relationship I thought of you."

"Our relationship? We have no relationship. We were friends at one time, but that is not the case any longer. Why would Elisabeth Gunter call you? And even more, why would you take her call?" she questioned.

"Only Elisabeth can answer that, Dara. It's not my place. All I can say is that she's not all that she seems. Please listen to whatever she has to say. Weigh it carefully and then report back to me. I'm asking you this as a favor. She said she'd give me an hour to contemplate her offer, but I need another opinion. Am I able to count on you?"

"Certainly, Chad. I'm your woman, but are you sure she's coming to me?"

"No doubt in my mind."

"All right. I'll get back to you as soon as possible."

Hanging up the phone, Dara felt more confused than ever. The fact that Elisabeth and the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee had been involved in a phone conversation left her bewildered. Hoping that Chad was right about the blonde's intentions, she began to pace her office nervously. Suddenly she was being dragged into a political drama that she hadn't imagined, which excited her, but the fact that it included the woman she loved left her anxious.

Fifteen minutes later the receptionist buzzed her and announced Elisabeth's presence. Heading to the lobby, Dara tried to take a deep breath to calm herself. When she saw the blonde, she could tell something was wrong, but she didn't ask. Instead she merely greeted the older attorney politely and then suggested they go to her office to talk.

"You don't seem surprised to see me," the shorter woman mentioned.

"Well, I am. After yesterday I wasn't sure I'd ever see you again. Elisabeth, I can't tell you how sorry I am for what I said about your family," she apologized again.

The blonde nodded. Knowing that Dara was sincere, she answered, "I know, Dara. I spent most of the night thinking about it. We come from different backgrounds, but we both feel so strongly about the preservation of equality and the extinction of discrimination."

The younger woman nodded her head in understanding. "So, are we still friends?" hesitantly she inquired.

Elisabeth sighed. "I'm not sure that's possible, Dara."

Feeling her heart sinking, the taller woman questioned, "Why not?"

"Because you don't know the real me and I'm not sure you would like the real me."

"Try me. I'm willing to accept just about anything."

"Yesterday you accused me of having an affair with the President. As of today that statement could be accurate."

"What? What are you saying?"

"I've had sexual interaction with the President," she confessed.

Dara could feel her heart ripping, but she kept a strong face. "And you're telling me about this? Why?" she asked, taking a seat on the edge of her desk.

Elisabeth stepped toward the brunette and leaned down so they were on eye level. Staring into dark eyes, she replied, "Because I want you to bring him down."

"Bring him down? I don't understand, Elisabeth. You work for the guy on his re-election campaign. Why would you want him to lose?"

"Dara, the man is a monster, and I've spent the last six years of my life trying to ruin the Republican Party from the inside out. When he took office, I knew I had to put a stop to it anyway I could. I had a contact in the Democratic party to help me figure out the best way to help bring him down."

"Chad Peterson," the brunette supplied as the pieces started to fall into place in her brain.

"Chad is a friend of my mother's, has been for decades."

"Did he put you up to this? Did he convince you to spy on the Republicans?"

"No. It was completely my idea. I used to be a staunch Republican. I believed in the party, but that all changed when I saw what was happening to Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky investigation and impeachment. I knew then they were no longer in touch with the people. They were bitter old men who just wanted to draw blood for the sake of ruining a President that was doing so much for our country. Then when the current President started messing with pro-choice rights, I knew it was time to make a change."

"So, let me get this straight. Now you've entrapped the current President into a sexual relationship, and you want me to take the information to the people."

"It's what you do best."

"What about you, Elisabeth? You do understand that if I do this, you're going to go down with the ship. Your life will be over. Your career will be finished. Are you willing to walk away from everything for this?"

The blonde nodded. "I'd sacrifice everything for this election, Dara. It will alter the course of our country's history. I have the information you need, and I want you to use it."

Gazing at the blonde, Dara contemplated the offer. She knew what the blonde was proposing had potential ramifications for the betterment of the Democratic cause, which greatly intrigued her. However, the fact remained that Elisabeth was at the center of the possible media storm. She didn't want the shorter woman to suffer for what she had done.

Standing up Dara started to pace her office. "Elisabeth, you've completely baffled me. I don't know what to make of this. All this time I thought you were one of them, and now you're telling me we've been on the same side all this time."

"That's right."

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I couldn't. I knew it had to be completely secretive. Chad is the only other person that knows."

The younger woman shook her head. "Elisabeth, I hope you understand that I'm not sure I can believe what you're telling me. You've been deceitful with me since we've met. How do I know this isn't a ploy? I take gossip like this to the media and have it be wrong. That would hurt me politically. It would hurt the party."

"I know that, Dara, but it's the truth."

Turning to look at the older woman, the taller woman questioned, "How much have you told Chad?"

"Just that I have information to bring down the President. I didn't get into the specifics."

"What are the specifics? Exactly what kind of interaction did you and the President have?" she inquired stoically.

Elisabeth looked at the woman she still had feelings for, even after all they had been through and hesitated in answer. She knew she would have to confess to Dara what she had done, but at the same time, she felt guilty like she was confessing a sin to a lover. "We kissed," she answered.

Nodding her head, the brunette took in the information. It hurt to hear the words coming from the blonde, but she didn't let that show. Instead she pretended to think on the admission. "How far are you willing to go to bring him down, Elisabeth?"

"I'd do anything."

"Anything? Would you sleep with the man?"

"If I could guarantee the success of the Democratic Party with that action, I would, Dara."

"And it wouldn't bother you to have relations with someone you hated?"

"Don't get me wrong. It would bother me. It would weigh on my conscience, Dara, but some things are worth the sacrifice."

"Even if it goes against your very nature?" Dara asked quietly, wondering to what lengths the older woman would really go to in order to secure the election.

"What kind of question is that? What are you really asking me?" Elisabeth inquired in confusion.

Deciding to come clean about some of the things she knew about the blonde, Dara answered, "Elisabeth, I know about Suzanne. I know that you loved her and were completely devoted to her. You are interested in women, not men. How can you so easily turn your back on that to lure a man to his political death?"

At the mention of her ex-lover's name, Elisabeth gasped. "Who told you?"

"I remembered. Suzanne and I went to a small school, and I started asking questions of my old buddies. I remember you, Elisabeth, a fresh faced twenty-one year old with love in your bright eyes. I recall you and Suzanne together around campus. You were in love, weren't you?"

The blonde nodded her head slowly. "I was, Dara. I was young and in love for the first time in my life. I thought Suzanne and I would be together forever," she admitted as tears came to her eyes. "But she left me."

"And you lost faith in women?"

Shaking her head, the shorter woman said, "I lost faith in love."

"I know what that's like. I lost it too somewhere along the line. I started jumping from bed to bed looking for a substitute, but I never denied who I was. Tell me the truth now. Do you still have hope of finding a woman to be your soul mate?"

"I had lost that feeling a long time ago, but in meeting you, I've realized that maybe it's still possible. I look at you, Dara, and I want to have the life you have, the freedom to be who you are and to love who you want."

Moving back to the edge of her desk, Dara sat and inquired, "Was that a yes?"

"It was a yes I suppose. What about you? Do you still have hope?"

Smiling demurely Dara answered, "I had lost it until I met you, Elisabeth. However, somewhere in the midst of fighting with you and us having a tentative friendship, I've realized I found it again." Hesitating for a moment, the brunette decided to be forthright about her feelings. Tentatively reaching for the blonde and wrapping an experimental arm around her waist, she confessed, "Elisabeth, I found it in you. I fell in love with the obnoxious Republican, deeply in love in a way that I never have. As much as I hated your politics, I couldn't help myself. You captivated me as much with your forceful party line rhetoric as with your emotional vulnerability. That's why it pains me so much to think that same woman would throw her self-being out just to bring down my sworn enemy. Elisabeth, I have to be honest with you. I'd rather have the President win another four years than destroy the woman I love."

Elisabeth felt her knees weaken at Dara's words. She closed her eyes for a moment as she allowed the admission to settle in her heart. "You love me?" she whispered, eyes still closed afraid the brunette would be gone if she opened them again.

"I do love you," Dara replied, wrapping her other arm around the blonde. She pulled the older woman closer, so she was standing between her legs. Their bodies brushed softly. "I love you, Elisabeth, so I can't do what you're asking of me. I can't take this information to anyone. Even more I can't bear the thought of that man having his way with the woman I adore, the woman I want." The blonde blushed at the taller woman's words. "Elisabeth, please tell me if you feel

anything for me."

Finally opening her blue eyes, Elisabeth smiled down at the younger attorney. "I love you, Dara. I've loved you since you kissed me at the HRC banquet," she acknowledged.

Returning the smile the older woman was giving, the brunette cupped Elisabeth's face in her hand. Elisabeth felt her body temperature rise at the touch. Earlier she had imagined the gesture, and now it was really happening. "I've waited so long to hear that. I wanted it to be true," the younger woman stated.

"It's the absolute truth, Dara."

Before anything else could be said, the intercom on Dara's phone buzzed, and the receptionist announced that Chad Peterson was on the phone. "I need to take this," she said, standing up and moving to her chair.

"Should I go?"

"No. We're definitely not finished," she responded with a smile. Picking up the phone she said, "Chad, hi. I was going to call you back in a few minutes. You were right. Elisabeth came straight here and is standing in my office right now."

"Well then? What's going on?"

"I don't think we've decided yet. I'm going to put you on speaker, so we can all talk about it if you don't mind." Doing just that Dara stood on one side of the desk while Elisabeth on the other.

"Elisabeth," Chad began.

"I'm here, Chad. Dara and I have been talking about the information I had."

"And?"

"I don't want to use it, Chad," Dara stated.

"Good, neither do I. Elisabeth, I can't let you be the fall person for this," the chairman explained.

"It's okay, Chad. Dara just told me something that changed how I felt about it as well."

"As long as you're not going through with this, that's all that matters to me."

"Actually, I was just thinking that maybe Elisabeth could continue on course. I mean not with the physical relationship part but stay with gathering information. That's if she wants to anyway," Dara proposed.

"It's completely up to you, Elisabeth."

"I'm going to have to think about it. If I left now the President would be suspicious. The key is to back out of this relationship part in a way that doesn't cut me off from him."

"Well, I'm sure you'll think of something. All I needed was reassurance that you were not going to proceed with this course of action."

"Not at this time, Chad."

"Good. Dara, thank you for whatever you said. I care about Elisabeth like she was my own daughter."

"I care about her too, Chad. We have a conversation of our own to continue now."

"Very well. In the event you do come up with something else, I look forward to hearing it, Elisabeth. Talk to you two later."

Once he had hung up, Dara looked at the older woman. Moving back to the blonde's side of the desk, she took a seat again and proceeded to wrap the shorter woman in her arms once more.

"Well, what were we discussing before we were interrupted?"

Blushing shyly Elisabeth replied, "I was hoping that you were about to kiss me."

"And I was going to," the brunette answered softly. Cupping the blonde's face in her hand, she leaned in and gently pressed her lips to Elisabeth's. The tiniest of whimpers escaped the older woman at the feeling as she brought her arms around Dara's neck. It was a sweet kiss, full of innocence and tenderness. Breaking away slightly Dara whispered, "Are you okay with this?"

"I've wanted you for so long," the blonde replied as she went in a second time, allowing her true emotions to finally pour forth.

The taller woman groaned as their tongues met. Suddenly things began to move in a more intimate direction as both of them started to delve deeper, probing each other's mouths as if it was the last kiss they would ever share. Neither wanted to break it. Dara's hands roamed over the blonde's back, feeling the material of the older woman's navy dress. Elisabeth ran her hands through the dark hair she had dreamed about for months as they finally had to pull away for air.

"I thought this would never happen, Elisabeth. Since the moment we met, it's all I've thought about."

"It seems like such a long time ago," Elisabeth mumbled, caressing Dara's face lovingly.

Smiling at her the younger attorney mentioned, "As much as I would like to keep doing this, we do have something serious we were discussing."

"I know. What to do about the President. Any ideas?"

"As Chad said, it's completely up to you. I don't want to see you get hurt, Elisabeth. This isn't child's play. People get assassinated over this kind of sedition. The last thing I want is for you to end up in the Potomac River."

"Well, I'm going to have to figure out a way to fend off advances while keeping the President's confidence."

"Are you sure he has confidence in you, or do you think it was your looks that intrigued him all along?"

"I hadn't thought about that. I guess we'll see. I should probably get going. I haven't even gone to the office today. I should at least stop by and do some work."

Nodding her head Dara stood. Smiling down at the blonde, she couldn't help herself and embraced her again. "This really is like a dream," she confessed.

"Except this is actually real."

Leaning down the brunette kissed the older woman gently. "I wish you didn't have to go."

"I'll call you tonight," Elisabeth promised, regretfully pulling away from the woman she loved.

"Do you have to work this weekend? I believe I still owe you dinner at my place."

"Oh, so now you want to make me dinner?" the shorter woman teased. "Fine. I'm pretty sure I'm available on Saturday, but I'll let you know for certain later."

"Sounds good. I can't wait."

"Neither can I," the older woman admitted. "Have a good rest of the day."

"You too, beautiful. Talk to you later."

That Saturday night Dara eagerly awaited Elisabeth's arrival. Since that Tuesday when the relationship between them took an unexpected but wonderful turn, the younger woman couldn't stop thinking about being alone with the blonde. She couldn't wait to hold her and touch her without the fear of the shorter woman's reaction.

Around seven that evening, Dara was just putting the finishing touches on dinner when she heard the doorbell of her parents' door. Rushing to it she prepared a smile before pulling it open to see Elisabeth. The older woman was dressed casually in a pair of long khaki shorts and pastel blue cotton top. On her feet she wore stylish sandals, and her hair was pulled away from her face with sunglasses.

"Wow. You look incredible," the brunette stated, letting her eyes roam freely.

Elisabeth blushed. "Thank you. You look great too."

"Thanks. Come on in. Sorry we had to change locations. Leah begged me to move our dinner up here. She said she was having some special company and wanted privacy. It's kind of weird actually, because she's never cared about me being around her dates before."

Nodding her head, Elisabeth mentioned, "Curious you say that. I was just about to ask you what my sister's car was doing in the driveway."

Dara stepped outside to see for herself. "I don't believe it. She had me move our dinner, so she could have Shelby over. That's her hot date?"

"You don't actually think it's a date, do you? I mean, neither one of them is gay."

"But they're both curious. I suppose it makes sense. I know both of them want to know what it's like, and they did hit it off at the party on Monday. As long as Shelby doesn't turn my sister into more of a slut that she already is, I'll be okay with their relationship," Dara teased.

"Shelby? What about Leah? She was the one trying to put the moves on my sister at the party," Elisabeth joked.

"Well, I guess if we hear a ruckus going on later we'll know what they're doing. However, enough about our free-spirited siblings. Come into the house and make yourself comfortable," the younger attorney suggested, taking the blonde by the hand. Together they made their way into the kitchen. "What can I get you to drink?"

"What are you serving?"

"Well, let's see. We have ice tea, Lemonade, spring water, sodas, wine. Anything sound good?"

"What are you having?"

"I decided to break into the white wine myself while I was cooking."

"Then that's what I'll have as well," the older woman answered with a smile as she took a seat on a bar stool at the island.

Dara got the beverage, placing it down in front of the blonde before going back to the refrigerator for the appetizers. She set an intricately designed plate of assorted cheeses and fruit down in front of her guest before asking, "Do you have a preference for salad dressing?"

"Not really. Whatever you have is fine. This is quite an impressive spread. Did you make this yourself?"

"Yeah. I know it's hard to believe, but I'm quite a good cook actually. Why else would I want to cook you dinner?"

"You're cooking because you lost," the older attorney teased.

"But how do you know that I didn't do that on purpose, so I could have you here?"

"You wouldn't throw a game."

"How can you be sure? After all, I was secretly lusting after you and wanted a reason to get you alone in the privacy of my home," she taunted.

Elisabeth looked at her date for a moment as she considered what was said. "I suppose it's possible, but I'd prefer to think I beat you fairly."

Smiling at the smaller woman, Dara answered, "Then think what you will."

Taking some of the cheese from the plate, Elisabeth inquired, "So how did that speech of yours go for the American Jewish Committee?"

"It went well I think. I was writing it until that day though. So much was going on politically with Iraqi prisoner abuse and the bombings in Gaza that there was just so much I wanted to add. I think I made my point though. I hope I did anyway."

"Did you still make President Minion out to be the Nazi you had originally planned?"

"I backed off on that a little. I mean Secretary Defense Lemon really gave me much more fodder, especially with the way he has handled the abuse scandal. Going to Baghdad and then setting some of the detainees free from Abu Ghraib prison didn't sit right with me. I mean why hold them in the first place if they didn't pose a threat and why let them go if they did pose a threat simply because of abuse? Something isn't right with the way things are being handled. The President has this time line of a June 30th handover date, and it's just not reasonable. There's no way we can give the government back by then and expect it to thrive. On the other hand, our troops staying there only causes more violence. That idiot has put us in this situation, and there is no good resolution. It's cost every international incumbent politician that has supported the effort his office. I just hope that holds true when it comes to our own election."

"One can always hope," the blonde seconded, taking a sip of her wine.

Dara cracked a smile at her date. "You know, now that we've come clean about each other's stance, does that mean there aren't going to be any more heated debates? I mean I just called your boss an idiot."

"I know, and I happen to agree with you. I'm glad you backed off on the Minion-Hitler analogy. As much as I don't like the man, I still thought it was a little too far."

The taller woman shrugged. "It's all about the presentation and moving people to action. If a speech can do that, then it's a success. That's all I wanted to accomplish. Now tell me. How are things with you and George? Anything happen since Tuesday?"

"No. There hasn't been much opportunity though. I still haven't thought of a good way to side-step his advances yet, but I figured I'd deal with them as they arose. He might be the idiot you think he is, but I think I know him well enough that he'll take no for an answer. I already have him on the kiss. That's enough to hurt him. Forcing himself on me would certainly not go over well."

"Not at all. I'd have to kick his haughty middle-aged ass," the brunette mentioned.

"I'd love to see that," the blonde stated with a laugh. Changing the subject she asked, "Do you need help with anything?"

"I'm just about finished actually. Thanks though." Dara put the last touches on their salads before picking them up to take them to the table. However, as soon as she turned, she found herself a lot closer to her favorite blonde than moments before as Elisabeth moved into her personal space.

Caressing the younger woman's hands, the older attorney said, "Here. Let me take those."

Both of them made their way to the table that had already been set for the evening. Dara pulled the older woman's chair out for her before taking her own. Raising her glass in toast, she said, "Thanks for coming over."

"Thanks for finally asking." Taking a bite of the salad, she mentioned, "This is fabulous."

"Thank you. I'm glad you like it."

"So, tell me something, Dara. Once this election is over, what are your plans?"

"Oh, I don't know if I really have any set plans. Why? Do you?"

The blonde shrugged. "I guess I'm going to go back to the DOJ. Although I promised myself that after all this was over I'd reevaluate my life goals."

"Which are?"

"Finding someone, settling down."

"That sounds good. I've been thinking that way myself, but my political aspirations keep me from doing that just yet. I'm not quite settled on my path to greatness," she teased.

"What path is that exactly?"

"Well, I always wanted to be the governor of Maryland, and I also wanted to be in the U.S. Senate. Right now I'm contemplating how to make that happen. I think I need to start with running for Senate on the state level to get myself into the system. The HRC said they would help fund my campaign when I was ready."

"And are you ready to make that move?"

"Not quite. I'm still gathering support where I can find it. I'm also waiting for the incumbent in my district to move on, which should be in another year or so. I think by the next election I might be a prospective candidate."

"Wow, that would be great. I'd love to help you with your campaign if you'd like."

"That could be interesting. I don't know what kind of message it sends to have a Minion campaigner on my own campaign, but it'll probably be water under the political bridge by then."

"Well, I think you could forgo my party line for my experience," Elisabeth challenged.

"I think I could as well. But back to you. After the campaign it's back to the DOJ. Then what?"

"I don't know. I haven't quite given up on my domestic dreams yet of getting married and having children, but I don't want to do that until I meet the right person. Fortunately a very good candidate did present herself," she teased, lightly touching Dara on the arm.

"Well, I know I look forward to us having some time together after November. Right now I'm finding it difficult to compete for time with the most powerful man in the world. Seems like all I really want to do is spend time with you, and you're off with George of the Jungle."

"I feel the same way," the older woman replied. "I really can't wait for it to be all over. After all the dust has settled, I hope that we can really get a chance to spend time getting to know each other as well as I think we both would like."

Taking a hold of the blonde's hand, the taller woman brought it to her mouth and kissed the back of it softly. Unable to control herself, she brushed the back of Elisabeth's hand against her own cheek. The older woman smiled as she cupped Dara's face in her hand. "I think I'd like to know you a lot better right now," she admitted. "It's just too bad that we can't get serious about this until the election is over."

Elisabeth gave a faint nod, but she knew just by looking at the younger woman they both were not going to be able to restrain themselves from venturing further. "You know, Dara, I've been hurt before, and I never really thought I'd be able to trust someone or love someone else that way again, but you make me feel so safe. Even with Suzanne, I never felt this way."

"I've never felt like this either, Elisabeth. From the moment I saw you on The Mall, I wanted to know you desperately. Who knew I would be lucky enough to get that chance?" she questioned as caressed the blonde's hand she still held. After a moment of just gazing into each other's eyes,

the brunette said, "I have to admit something to you, Elisabeth. I don't want to scare you, but I want to be absolutely honest."

"What is it?" hesitantly the older woman inquired, unsure of what her beloved was about to say. She hoped it wasn't anything that would alter her feelings.

Dara scooted her chair closer to her date and wrapped an arm around her shoulders. Sighing she stated, "Shelby and I have been in cahoots with each other regarding you. In fact, she told me how you really felt about me."

The older woman blushed and looked away. "That bitch. I'm going to kill her," she whispered uncomfortably.

Dara reached for Elisabeth's face, cupping it gently and bringing their gazes back together. "Please don't. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't know how you felt. I really wasn't sure if you even liked me, but I was desperately pining after you."

"When did she tell you?"

"That night I slept on the couch at your house. You had gone to a meeting, and Shelby and I drank and swapped gossip. She told me after putting me through the grand inquisition about my feelings for you."

"What did she tell you?"

"Just that the interest was returned and that you did like me in the same way."

The blonde shook her head. "That doesn't sound like my sister. She's the type to tell all."

"She was just trying to help both of us."

"So you knew about all this before we went to The Greenbrier?" Dara nodded her head. "Oh, God. Now I am embarrassed," she confessed.

"Why?"

"That night."

"What about it?"

"You know what I'm talking about, Dara."

The taller woman nodded. "I knew you were nervous, but I was nervous too. I didn't want to do or say the wrong thing and scare you. You were just so vulnerable, and I just wanted to console you. However, it was quite difficult to keep my hands to myself," she conceded. "And now that we both know the truth, it's even harder. I can't stop thinking about kissing you senseless," she

added softly, leaning in to catch her date's lips in a kiss.

Both of them moaned as their mouths came together. This kiss was different than the ones they had shared earlier in the week. Whereas those were comforting and assuring, this one was laced with primal lust as their tongues met slowly at first but then with growing ferocity. Elisabeth felt her head spinning as she pulled Dara closer, wrapping her arms around the brunette's neck. She couldn't remember the last time she had ever been kissed in such a manner. Her body instantly ignited into an inferno as heat began to permeate through her entire being. Dara was relentless with her oral assault, breaking for air only briefly before diving in again to consume the blonde's lips.

The younger woman could feel her control beginning to wane as she felt her date pulling her even closer as the moments passed. It was clear Elisabeth wanted this as much as she did. With her right arm still around the blonde's shoulders, her left went to the older woman's waist. Enticingly she caressed under the hem of Elisabeth's top, her hand finally able to touch the soft skin she had fantasized about for months.

Feeling Dara's left hand slowly tracing a pattern along her bare hip and up her side, Elisabeth began to tremor in nervous ardor. She had dreamed of the younger woman's touch so many times. When the brunette's mouth broke from hers and began to travel down her neck, Elisabeth could only moan in need. This was what she wanted. Those lips that spoke such intelligent controversial opinions now adored her body, and it was heavenly. Feeling the attorney's left hand venture over the contour of her breast, the blonde cried out lightly but quickly realized things were getting out of control. Reluctantly she put her hand on the brunette's left forearm and gently removed Dara's hand from under her clothes.

Blue eyes met dark ones. Unsure of whether she had done something wrong, the younger woman quickly started to apologize. "I'm so sorry, Elisabeth. I don't mean to be pushing you."

"No, it's okay, Dara. You're not pushing me. I want the same thing," she affirmed breathlessly. "I just think we should slow things down a little."

"You're right. I'm sorry."

Pulling the younger woman into a tight embrace, the blonde pressed her flush cheek to Dara's and took a deep breath in an effort to compose herself. "Stop apologizing. You didn't do anything I didn't want you to do. It's just there are so many reasons we shouldn't be doing this right now. Jobs aside, I haven't been in a relationship for quite some time. As much as my feelings are there, I need to move slowly. I want to do this with you, and yet the idea of it scares me, because the last time I was in this position I was hurt so badly."

"I understand. I promise we'll take it at whatever pace you want," Dara vowed.

"Thank you. You're incredibly sweet, Dara. That's one of the reasons I love you as much as I do."

"I love you too, Elisabeth."

Looking into brown eyes, the shorter woman smiled. "I really do know that, Dara, and that makes me the happiest woman in the world. I don't want to lead you on. I swear to you that I have thought about this so many times, and I want to be with you in every way there is to be with someone. It's my fantasy," she admitted with a slight blush. "Us together. I want that. I just need time and a natural progression even though I'm dying for you."

Dara nodded. "That's fine, sweetheart. We'll go slowly." Holding each other for a moment more until they were both calmer, Dara moved her chair back in front of her food. Cracking a light smile, she joked to break the tension, "I guess I was asking a little much for our first date."

Elisabeth laughed. "I guess this is our official first date. However, we've already had dates in my heart."

"Oh yeah? Which ones would those be?" Dara asked in interest.

"I would consider that night we met at Dave and Busters to be our first date. The look on your face when you saw that guy talking to me was priceless. I loved how you intimidated him. Then you took off your shirt, and I wanted to just die. It was so sweet of you to put on that shirt I bought for you. At dinner I couldn't take my eyes off you. You just looked so sexy. Then at the movies when you were being a little shit and threatening to make our outing a date and try to kiss me, you had no idea how badly I wanted you to do just that."

The brunette laughed. "Sounds like we both were feeling it that night. I wanted to as well."

"The Greenbrier would have been our second date and what a fabulous event that was. That night I was so nervous, because I was feeling so strongly for you. Sleeping together almost put me over the edge, because I didn't think I'd be able to handle being that close to you."

"Me neither. It took all my self-control not to do anything but hold you, and even that was difficult."

"I know. I listened to you breathing. You were taking such measured breaths that I knew it was as hard for you as me, and I loved you even more for your restraint."

Taking the blonde's hand, Dara smiled. "You're sweet to me, Elisabeth. I just want to assure you of my love and respect. I know it's going to be quite some time for some reasons we can't even control before we can really be together, but I'll wait as long as we need to. You're worth every moment."

Blushing yet again, Elisabeth nodded her head. "So are you, Dara. Now we better eat this great dinner you prepared." Once dinner was over, the brunette and blonde made themselves comfortable on the living room sofa in front of the television. Both of them rested with their bare feet on the coffee table as they held hands. "So, any other surprises for me this evening?" Elisabeth inquired.

"Well, this is the part where I subject you to torture. At least all my friends think it's torture."

"Oh? And what might that be?"

Smiling at her girlfriend, the younger woman turned on the DVD player and TV. Instantly the screen came to life. "My Jodie Foster obsession," she admitted.

The shorter woman laughed lightly. "Oh. I knew there had to be a flaw somewhere. What is it with lesbians and Jodie Foster? Why is she everyone's favorite actress?"

"Because she's the quintessential lesbian. She's sexy, intelligent, and she has that voice that makes you so hot."

Laughing Elisabeth asked, "So what movie are you subjecting me to then?"

"Well, you have a choice between 'Panic Room' and 'Silence of the Lambs.' Those are my two favorites."

"Great. Both of them are scary. Fine. 'Silence of the Lambs' I suppose, but if I can't sleep tonight, I'm calling and keeping you awake with me," she teased.

"Don't worry. I'd be happy to stay up all night with you. It won't be so bad. You've seen it before, right?"

"Most of it but in pieces. I've never made it through the whole thing."

"Well, I'll be here to protect you. Nothing will happen while I'm around."

"Don't patronize me, Dara. I can handle a scary movie," she maintained.

"We'll see about that," the brunette responded, stretching her frame out along the couch. She patted a spot next to her. "Come here."

Elisabeth smiled at her girlfriend before lying down next to her. Immediately the brunette's arm came around her body. "This is nice. I could do this all night," she whispered.

"Yeah, well, that still doesn't get you out of the movie," Dara joked as she pressed the play button.

Over the course of the next hour and a half they were quiet as they watched the film. Even though it was not exactly the kind of movie that Elisabeth liked, she enjoyed being with Dara too much to protest. When things got too gory and scary, she found herself hiding in the brunette's shirt until she was assured the moment had passed. The taller woman would just chuckle at the antics but secretly enjoyed the feeling.

When it was over, the older woman sighed. "All right, Dara. Just a few ground rules here. We'll

watch as many Jodie Foster movies as you want as long as they aren't scary. Is that enough of a compromise?"

Rolling her eyes playfully the younger woman nodded. "Fine I suppose." Looking back into blue eyes, she smiled. "You're beautiful," she whispered, running her hand through golden locks.

"Thank you for thinking so, Dara. You're quite the attractive one yourself," she responded as she fiddled with the younger woman's shirt collar before moving on to her dark hair. Unable to resist she pulled Dara's head down for a kiss. The exchange began softly but quickly escalated. Soon Elisabeth realized that she had managed to pull the taller woman's body on top of her own, and their legs were rubbing together seductively as Dara's weight pushed her deeper into the cushions. Knowing they needed to stop, she pulled back slightly for air. Dara knew that was her cue and backed off slightly. She didn't reposition herself though, keeping her body pressed firmly against the one she longed for so much. Nevertheless, she didn't try to kiss Elisabeth again for a few moments. "So, what do your weekends look like over the next month?" the older woman questioned, trying to break the tension that was building.

"Not too busy. I'm actually pretty free until the last Saturday of the month. I have to go to Roanoke."

"Oh? Why? What's going on there?"

"I'm actually being inducted into my school's Athletic Hall of Fame."

"That's so neat. For soccer?"

"No, for basketball actually. I played both, but I was much better basketball player. I actually hold a couple of school records for most points in my college career and most rebounds. I wanted to ask you to go with me."

"I'd love to. That sounds like so much fun."

"There's a slight problem though," the brunette hesitantly stated.

"What's that?"

"Suzanne is going to be there," she confessed. "She's being inducted as well for soccer."

Feeling her heart drop, the blonde mumbled, "Oh."

"Look, Elisabeth. I'll understand if you don't want to go. It's supposed to be a fun event, but I don't know how you feel about seeing her again after all these years."

"I don't know, Dara. I never imagined that I ever would see her again."

"I know. That brings me to a bigger issue than just that weekend. Suzanne and I aren't friends,

but we do see each other occasionally. We both volunteer for Hollins with recruiting and fund raising. We don't hang out, but we do see each other a few times a year. If we're going to be together, you need to know that there is a definite possibility of seeing her at some point."

Elisabeth nodded. "I hadn't thought about that. I'm not going to shy away from you because of her though. She may have hurt me when we were kids, but I'm an adult now. She's not in our relationship. As far as seeing her though, I really don't know how I'll feel until I'm actually standing in front of her."

"Is that something you might be willing to do in a few weeks?"

The blonde shrugged. "Will you let me think about it?"

"Of course."

"Thanks." Looking at her watch, she mentioned, "So, are you going to subject me to another Jodie Foster movie?"

"Well, I don't think you're going to like 'Panic Room' if you couldn't sit through 'Silence of the Lambs.' Perhaps we should find another activity," she whispered, raising her brows playfully.

Elisabeth smiled at the younger woman. "I can only imagine what you mean," she feigned innocently.

Sighing the taller woman said, "It's going to be a long wait."

"I know. I have an idea. Why don't you give me a tour? Show me where little Dara used to dream of running the world."

Nodding her head, the brunette got off the couch and helped Elisabeth do the same. Together they made their way through the large home, Dara telling tales of her family. Elisabeth was enjoying the glimpse into her girlfriend's past. Making their way through the ground floor, they took the back staircase upstairs. However, the older woman made her stop and explain most of the pictures on the staircase before making it to the second floor. Leaving her bedroom for last, she announced to her guest, "This is where all my dreaming occurred. A lot of interesting things happened in here."

"Such as?"

Laughing the brunette answered, "Lots of things my parents didn't know about. I'll just put it that way."

"Like what? Did you lose your virginity in here?" Elisabeth teased as she took in the room. It didn't look like much had changed since Dara was a child. It was still decorated with what was obviously high school and college memorabilia.

"Yes, actually I did," Dara admitted.

"And just what was her name?" Elisabeth asked as she looked at some photographs on the bookshelf.

"Actually, his name was Steven. He was a friend of my brother's."

Taken completely by surprise, the older woman turned and furrowed her brows in obvious confusion. "What?"

"I was sixteen, and I wanted to prove that I was normal. Needless to say it didn't work. I was left more confused and frustrated than ever."

"Did you ever tell anyone?"

"My brother. He happened upon me that afternoon not long after Steven had left that day. I was upset and crying, and he listened. I told him the truth. I told him what we did and that I could never do that again. I remember he was so supportive. He kept telling me everything would okay. He helped me come out to our family, and he even kicked Steven's ass. After that all hell really broke loose. My parents probably wished they could just lock me away until I went to college, because then I was bringing all kinds of women in here. My mother caught me on more than one occasion messing around with someone."

Shaking her head, the blonde said, "That's so hard to imagine you being that scared and confused. It's a far difference from the woman you are today."

"Well, we all have our burdens. Fortunately mine was resolved fairly quickly and without a lot of heartache. Some people aren't so lucky."

"Very true. All right. So there was Steven. Who was your first woman?"

"That would have been Amy. I thought I was in love with her, deeply in love in fact. We made love for the first time on that very bed, and it was fantastic. Little did I know that I wasn't in love, just feeling the effects of raging hormones in a seventeen-year-old body. It didn't last long, but it was great while it did. What about you? There was Suzanne. Who came after her?"

Flushing slightly Elisabeth didn't quite meet Dara's gaze as she answered, "It's just been Suzanne. I didn't trust anyone else."

"Did you date men after her?"

"I tried. It just didn't work for me. The first time they would try to make a move was the last time I would see them. I knew I didn't want to be intimate with them, but I thought it would help me get over Suzanne. It never worked. In fact the only person who has gotten close to me since is you."

"And it took a lot of kicking and screaming to do it too," the dark-haired woman teased as she plopped down on her old bed.

Joining her the older woman answered, "I'm glad you stuck it out."

"Me too. You are definitely worth it," she said, pulling the smaller woman on top of her. Once again their mouths found each other ardently. Both of them moaned as Dara situated one of her legs between the blonde's. Her thigh pressed against the juncture of Elisabeth's legs. Using her right hand, the brunette began to knead her girlfriend's lower back, instinctively pushing the blonde's hips down into her own. The older woman groaned wantonly as she felt the strong thigh rubbing against the seam of her shorts creating a mind-dizzying feeling in her body. Impulsively Elisabeth's body began to respond. Her hips undulated slowly against the stimulus as their mouth continued to assault each other.

Dara could feel her restraint waning again, especially when it was clear Elisabeth wanted more contact as well. Giving in to what she thought they both wanted, the brunette once again let her hand wander under her girlfriend's clothes. This time it started caressing the blonde's back. Several minutes passed with both of them growing more torrid in their kissing, so again the younger woman took a chance. Feeling the clasp of the older woman's bra under her hand, she gently released it. The shorter woman didn't seem to notice at first, but as soon as Dara's hand found its way around to the front of her body to her bare breast, Elisabeth gasped loudly and started to pull back. However, this time the taller woman continued in her pursuit, sitting up as her girlfriend did and kissing her persistently along her elegant neck.

"God, this is impossible," Elisabeth groaned in indecision. "I can't seem to keep you out from under my clothes."

Dara whimpered, knowing the blonde was right. However, she didn't pull away just yet. Instead she stayed where she was, hand lingering on her girlfriend's chest. Elisabeth's body was responding to her gentle touch, but she knew she had made the older woman a promise. "I'm sorry. I just don't seem to think clearly when you're so close."

"Not to mention I'm such a willing participant. You feel so good, Dara," she confessed as the brunette loitered a little longer taking in the crest of Elisabeth's breast with the palm of her hand as her mouth started to kiss down over her clothes. "We just have to stop. I can't sleep with you on our first date," she joked.

Dara whined but reluctantly released her willing captive. Both of them just sat there a moment. "When can we? How long do we have to wait?" she questioned in frustration.

Reaching back to put her bra back into place, the blonde sighed. "We really should wait until the election is over."

"That's five months."

"I know. It seems like forever to me too but think about it. I have a job to do, and I can't do it if

I'm sleeping with you. The President thinks we're just friends. If he learns anything to the contrary, I'm in serious trouble. If he catches me lying, he won't trust me anymore. I might get fired, or worse he might out me to help his own campaign. That was his original plan when he thought we were in a relationship. Right now I have him where I want him. He's interested in me sexually as well as professionally. If we're going to take him down, it needs to remain that way. No one can know about this for now. As you said the other day, this isn't child's play. There is a lot at stake."

"I know, but the only thing I'm concerned about right now is you. I don't want anything bad to happen to you, Elisabeth."

"Then let me do my job," she said quietly.

Nodding her head, Dara sighed. She smiled at the woman she loved to let her know she understood. "I'm surely going to die from sexual frustration before this is all over," she teased.

"You and me both. I guess if all else fails, I still have George," she jested. "You on the other hand have nothing but your imagination."

"It's going to be put to good use tonight. I'll tell you that."

Checking her watch the blonde noticed it was getting late. "I should probably go. It would help ease the tension."

"You're probably right even though that's not the way I prefer to do things."

Both women reluctantly got off the bed and made a move downstairs again. Heading back into the kitchen, Elisabeth asked, "You want help with the dishes?"

"No thanks. You better get going before I try to jump you again," she quipped.

Grabbing her keys off the island, Elisabeth took Dara's hand as they both walked to the front door. The brunette escorted her date out to her car and opened her door for her. Turning to the woman she loved, the older woman smiled. "Well, thank you for this wonderful evening."

"It was my pleasure. I hope we can do it again soon."

"Me too."

"Call me when you get home, so I know you made it all right."

"Of course," Elisabeth replied. Seeing her sister's car still in the driveway, she mentioned, "I guess by the fact that Shelby is still here, their date is going better than ours."

"Ours couldn't have been much better. Just having you around is heaven, Elisabeth, but right now if you don't get out of here, I will be tempted to drag you back inside and love you unconscious."

"You'll get your chance, Dara. I promise," Elisabeth whispered as they leaned to kiss each other softly. When it ended she murmured, "I love you."

"I love you too. Good night."

"Good night, Dara."

Dara waited until the older woman's car had disappeared from view before going back into the house. She quickly did the dishes and locked up her parents' house before returning to her own. All was quiet when she entered, so she assumed Shelby and Leah had moved their activities to Leah's bedroom. Going into her own, she quickly prepared herself for sleep and crawled into bed just as the phone rang. Speaking to Elisabeth for a few moments, they bid each other good night once again before Dara was left with her thoughts in the dark. Making the most of it, she fantasized about her girlfriend for awhile, exerting her sexually charged body before dropping off to sleep in exhaustion.

The following morning the brunette awoke to the feeling of someone in bed with her. Sleepily she opened her eyes to see bright blue eyes gazing at her quizzically. "Shelby, what are you doing here? You're in my bed," she yawned, needlessly pointing out the obvious.

"Leah's making breakfast and wanted me to ask you if you wanted any," the perky blonde answered as she reached over to touch Dara on the stomach.

The attorney flinched as Elisabeth's sister's hand came into contact with her bare skin. "Um, I don't think that's such a good idea, Shelby. I'm naked."

Smiling sexily the younger woman growled, "I know. Having a little fun last night, were you?" she asked, her eyes turning to the night stand where Dara had discarded one of her sex toys from the night before.

"So? You think you and Leah can have all the fun around here?"

The blonde smiled at her friend and then proceeded to draw back the comforter, leaving only a sheet over Dara. The brunette looked at her in confusion as the younger woman made a move to straddle her body. Taking a seat on the taller woman's legs, Shelby crossed her arms across her chest and inquired, "So? How did it go?"

The older woman shook her head to clear her thoughts. Having a woman that looked exactly like the one she loved sitting on top of her while she lay naked in bed was making it difficult to concentrate. Nevertheless she knew Shelby really was not an option as she gazed over her friend's attire. "Nice shirt," she mentioned, taking in the fact that the blonde was dressed in only one of Leah's old soccer shirts and nothing else. "You know, Shelby, this could be misconstrued as you hitting on me."

Smiling the younger woman leaned forward, letting their bodies brush lightly as their faces came

inches from each others. The younger woman whispered, "You'd know it if I was hitting on you, Dara. Now tell me how it went."

Stacking her hands behind her head in order to keep them from the shorter woman's body she said, "Things went well. I'm glad it's all out in the open now."

"Tell me more than that," Shelby whined.

"Why don't you tell me about your night? You and Leah have a good time?"

"What do you think?" she answered with a smile.

"Well, by the fact that you're wearing her shirt and not a whole lot else, I would say you blew each other away last night. Was the sex good?"

"Fantastic," Shelby moaned. "She was definitely a prime pick. Did you teach her some moves?"

"Whatever she did was of her own imagination. Glad it worked out for you two though."

"Did it work equally well for you and Lis?"

"Well, we didn't sleep together," she admitted as the blonde idly began trace her fingers along her jaw. "But we did have fun."

"You made out then?"

"A little. We're taking things slowly, Shelby. This isn't some one-night stand we're plotting. Elisabeth and I are serious about a long-term relationship. We both want that. Under the circumstances, we think it's better to wait until we're intimate. We love each other, but we understand that there are factors outside our control right now that are making us have to wait. We're not in our mid-twenties anymore. It's too late in the game to make a foul, not with so much at stake. We're talking marriage and kids here if things go well. It's what we both want, and we both seem to sense we could have something special. It takes time to foster something like that."

"So in the meantime you both have to find your fulfillment at your own hands," she mentioned. "What a pity."

Dara took a measured breath as Shelby continued to stroke her jaw line and ear. "Shelby," she began. "I like you. In fact, I like you a lot, but I'm in love with your sister. Not only that you just had sex with my sister. You really can't mess with me like this. It's not nice to tease me," she stated.

"But it's so fun."

"Yeah. Well, Elisabeth would kill the both of us if she saw us like this. If I marry your sister, are you still going to flirt with me so much?"

"If you marry my sister, I'll keep my hands to myself. I promise."

"Good. I'm going to hold you to that."

Before anything else could be said, Leah appeared in the doorway. "What's up with this?" she questioned with a smile. "One night with me and you're already making moves on my sister? She doesn't have half the moves I do."

Both Shelby and Dara laughed. "Well, it's too bad I can't be the judge of that. Lis and I will just have to compare notes sometime."

"I asked you to come in here and ask her about breakfast, not give her a morning snack. Get on out of here before she loses her self-control," Leah stated, shooing the blonde from the room.

Shelby smiled at both the brunettes and then leaned to peck Dara's lips before scampering to the door, leaving the dark-headed sisters looking at each other. "Well?" Dara questioned.

"You are right. She is more than I can handle, but I'm going to have fun trying. You, on the other hand, should know better. Her older sister is at home while you put the moves on this one," she teased.

"Did it look like I was putting on moves? My hands were nowhere on her body. How can I compete with someone who is apparently fantastic in bed?"

"Did she say that?" The older sister nodded. "Cool. I was afraid I wouldn't be that good. I'm so used to guys."

"As is she. I thought she had a boyfriend." Leah shrugged. "I hope you at least used protection."

"Don't worry. I raided your stash before we went to bed. Of course half of it I didn't know how to use until we were in the moment."

"As long as you did use it."

"How did things go with Elisabeth?"

"Really well, actually. It felt so good to be able to finally hold her and tell her how I was feeling."

"I'm glad."

"What do you think is going to happen with you and Shelby now? Any plans?"

Cracking a grin, Leah answered, "Well, I hope she will want to stick around awhile. Last night was incredible."

"I want the details later. For now though get back out to her and leave me alone," Dara said with a smile.

"No breakfast?"

"No thanks. Right now all I really want to do is fall back into the dream I was having about my girlfriend."

"Fair enough. We'll talk later."

Later that day the Rosenthal sisters sat around the pool just talking when Dara said, "All right now. It's time to spill the dirt. What happened with Shelby?"

"It was the most unbelievable night I've ever had, Dara. We had dinner and watched a movie. Then we got to talking about you and Elisabeth. Of course that turned to sexuality in general and curiosity. Next thing I know we're on the sofa kissing. She has amazing lips. They are so soft. Things just sort of happened. I mean we both wanted it to happen I think, so it felt perfectly relaxed. However, once we got into the bedroom, wow. I have never felt the need to be as aggressive or giving as I was with her."

"Did you go down on her?" the attorney inquired in interest.

"We did to each other. I went first. It was surprising the way I was able to make her feel things with just the softest of touches. She was so wet and warm. It was like nothing I've ever experienced."

"Did you make her come?"

Leah nodded. "That was strange. It felt so much more intimate than with a guy. She was shaking, and I wrapped her in my arms. I felt so protective of her."

"And how was it on the other end?"

"It was good. She definitely knows how to use her mouth. She was gentle and caring. She seemed to know what I needed instinctively. Is this what it's always like with women?"

"No, but it's like that a lot. After all, you have the advantage of knowing what you like. Usually, she'll like it as well. When you really care about someone, it can be unbelievable, but it's like that with a man as well I suppose. Are you two going to date now? I mean what's the intent?"

"We don't really have one except to see each other again."

"And you're all right with her lifestyle?"

"What lifestyle are you talking about?"

"Her career choices."

"She's a nurse. What's the big deal about that?"

"She didn't tell you about her other career?"

"You mean her porn site? She told me."

"She told you that she was a feature presentation?"

Leah nodded. "It's okay. I don't mind. She's only doing solo on camera, nothing with others."

"As long as you're being honest with each other. I want you to be happy."

"I want you to be happy too, Dara. If my relationship with Shelby starts to get in the way, I want you to tell me."

"I don't see how it will but thank you."

"So, tell me about Elisabeth. What happened?"

"We had a good evening. I made dinner, and we talked. We were completely honest with each other for the first time I think. We both admitted that we loved each other and were serious about a relationship after the election is over. Of course, that's going to be difficult considering we can't seem to keep our hands off each other," she said with a grin.

"Really? You got in her pants then?"

"No. We promised each other that we would wait until the election was over to make love for the first time. She's under a lot of pressure at work with Minion's re-election campaign, and she needs to focus on that."

"What? That's a load of crap. She's just putting you off," Leah protested.

"No. She's really not, Leah. I can't give you all the circumstances, but I understand her position. This is what is best for her right now, and I'm more than willing to wait now that I know she cares about me. Our feelings are serious."

"How serious?"

"Well, for the first time in my life I can see myself marrying someone. She's the type of woman I've always thought would complement me. We want the same things. We have the same goals."

"But what about the political differences?"

"We're closer together politically than either of us realized. I'm more than willing to forgo that for her. I'm in love with her, Leah. That means everything."

"Wow. That's great. I'm so happy for you. It's too bad for Shelby though. That girl has a major crush on you."

"How did you know that?"

"She told me."

"And yet you still slept with her?"

"Why not? I know it's not serious between us, and I'm as close as she's ever going to get to you. She also knows her sister is mad about you, but she still admires you."

"Yeah, well, if circumstances were different, I'd admire her too. She's quite the looker."

"So is Elisabeth. Although I have to say Shelby got the better part of God's gift of breasts. She's considerably larger than Elisabeth."

"I noticed," Dara admitted. "But Elisabeth is just perfect for her. Trust me. Her breasts are flawless even if they are smaller."

Shaking her head, her younger sister said, "You must really be in love. After all you are the breast aficionado. You have always liked them bigger."

"Well, so what? Elisabeth's a small C. There's plenty to get my hands and mouth around. Besides, I've already taken them on a test drive. They handle well."

Leah laughed. "Took them on a test drive? They aren't a car. We're talking about a woman's body."

"And what a body it is too," the older brunette murmured, thinking about her girlfriend in her swimming suit.

"You're right. She is pretty perfect outside her small chest. Shelby on the other hand,"

Cutting her sister off, Dara responded, "Shelby, on the other hand, is too wild for both of us combined. Large breasts or not she's more woman than we can handle."

"So true, Dara, so true. Anyway, so when are you going to see Elisabeth again?"

"Soon. What about you and Shelby?"

"Friday."

"Well, have fun while it lasts. Just don't get too emotionally attached. I don't want you to get hurt."

At the end of June Elisabeth decided to join Dara on her trip to Roanoke. Even though they both knew they had to pretend to only be friends for the sake of the blonde's political mission, the older woman wanted to spend time with her girlfriend in a place that held so many memories for them both. Leaving town late Friday evening, the younger woman drove them down to Roanoke for the induction the following morning.

It was late when they reached the city, so they decided it would be better to just retire and get up early to see the campus. Dara took the liberty of checking them into their room before grabbing their bags. Quietly they made their way to their quarters. Elisabeth turned on the light as they entered and then held the door for the brunette. Neither said much being so tired from working all day and then taking the five-hour drive. Without discussion they both prepared for bed.

Being that it was the first time they were sleeping together since all their feelings had been brought into the light, Elisabeth felt nervous about it. She knew with the way she felt there was a possibility of them getting carried away with each other and doing something they weren't ready for yet, even as much as they both wanted it. She also knew that it wasn't just Dara who was struggling with the emotions of being intimate. The blonde wanted to know her girlfriend in that way desperately.

Once Dara had come to bed and turned off the light, the two of them lay in the dark for a few moments in silence. Sensing something wrong by the older woman's tense frame, the taller woman asked, "Do you want to talk about what's bothering you?"

"It's nothing. I'm just coping with feelings."

"What kind of feelings? Are you anxious about seeing Suzanne?"

"Yes, but that's not what I was thinking about though."

Turning onto her side so she could see the blonde in the dark, Dara curved an arm around her waist and inquired, "Then what are you thinking about?"

"You," she confessed.

"What about me?"

"How much I want you," Elisabeth whispered. Dara moaned when she heard the acknowledgment. Hearing her girlfriend's response, the older woman went a little further in her explanation. "How much I want to feel you inside of me."

Dara groaned loudly. "Oh, God, Elisabeth. You have no idea what that does to me. I want that so

much."

"So do I, Dara. I can't wait four more months."

"You know I'll give you whatever you want, Elisabeth. If you really want this, you can have it, but I thought you wanted to wait because of that lunatic."

"Don't even mention him right now. The last thing I want to think about is him," she said. Sighing she mentioned, "I know you're right though. This is just so hard. Chad warned me about how difficult this would be, but I never imagined that I would feel like I was going crazy. It's such irony that a man we both hate is keeping us apart."

"Not for much longer. Look, honey. We can be intimate without having sex, or if you really are ready, we can make love tonight. I'll give you whatever you need, Elisabeth, but I just want to make sure it's the right decision. We have all the time in the world. A few more months isn't going to make a difference in the long run, but it will affect your ability to do your job, I think."

"I know it will too," the blonde mumbled, reaching for her girlfriend. She lovingly caressed her cheek. "The problem is I don't think I'll be able to stop if we venture even a little. That's how much I want you."

"The feeling is definitely mutual, sweetie, but I will stop us. As much as I want you, I do have enough self-control to go around. I'm just afraid it will leave us more frustrated than anything to have to stop."

"You're probably right," Elisabeth agreed softly. Neither said anything for a moment as they continued to gaze at each other in the dark. However, after a lengthy pause, the older woman leaned over and slowly kissed her girlfriend.

Dara moaned lightly and pulled her closer as their kiss deepened. For a moment the brunette allowed it to continue, but when Elisabeth's hand slid under the hem of her t-shirt, she gasped. "Elisabeth, are you sure about this?"

"I trust you, Dara. I trust your restraint. I won't make it if you don't touch me right now," she explained between kisses.

With that permission the younger woman allowed her hands to roam over her girlfriend. Each other leisurely took in the landscape of their lover's body as their mouths continued to explore each other. Longing to feel her lover more intimately, the taller woman gently raised the blonde's shirt over her head. Elisabeth allowed her to do so and even reciprocated in action, leaving them both naked from the waist up. Dara groaned as she felt their naked torsos brush together for the first time. The older woman's skin felt so soft and inviting that she had to investigate further. As their kissing began to strengthen in intensity, the brunette's hands became active along her lover's body.

Elisabeth moaned in wanton need as she felt Dara cup her right breast for the first time. The

emotions were just running rampant through her frame as she instinctively arched toward the caress. Wanting to feel her girlfriend, she responded in kind, trailing her hand from Dara's back around to the front of her body. Her touch was greeted with a shudder of want from the taller woman.

Going with the feelings coursing through her, Dara's lips moved from Elisabeth's and began to travel up toward her ear before moving down along her neck. The tiny whimpers urged her further as she rolled the blonde onto her back. Pulling herself on top of the smaller woman, Dara delved back into her lover's mouth.

The older woman groaned at the feeling of Dara's body on top of her. She had fantasized about what it would feel like so many times, and finally she had the chance to feel their frames meshed together, the weight of her lover firmly against her. It made her more anxious to feel the rest of Dara's body. Tracing along the strong back she had dreamed about for so long, her hands found their way down into the back of the brunette's sleeping shorts. Instantly the younger woman growled as Elisabeth's hands began to knead the muscles. Breaking away from Dara's mouth for a moment, the shorter woman huskily demanded, "Take them off."

The younger attorney immediately complied with her girlfriend's wishes and shed the last piece of clothing she was wearing before settling her hips between the blonde's thighs again. Instantly their lips were cohered once again as their tongues wrestled more urgently. Dara knew things were quickly spiraling out of control, but Elisabeth felt so good to her. Deciding she needed more before she would be satisfied though, she ducked her head into the blonde's neck again as her hands started to caress the light peaks of the older woman's breasts.

Elisabeth's back arched even more as Dara began to move down her body, her mouth taking in every contour before closing over her left breast. Crying out to her lover, the shorter woman cradled Dara's head even closer as her hips started to rock against Dara's stomach seeking relief. However, the cotton pants she was wearing kept her from the contact she wanted. Whining in protest she murmured, "I need to take my pants off. Take them off me, Dara."

Dara paused for a moment, knowing that if she did what was asked of her she may not be able to stop herself from taking what she wanted. "Are you sure?" she whispered.

"Yes. Now," Elisabeth insisted.

Following directions, the brunette rolled off her lover to assist her out of her final article of clothing. As she discarded it haphazardly on the floor, she took a moment to evaluate the situation. She knew she had to be the strong one between them and that Elisabeth would regret it if they went too far due to her job regardless of how much they truly wanted each other. Fortifying where she would draw the line between them if she had to, Dara leaned in again.

This time Elisabeth wasted no time and grabbed her lover around the back, pulling her body down against her own. Naturally Dara's body came to rest between her legs. The older woman's eyes rolled closed in the ecstasy of the feeling of them naked in each other's embrace. It was just as she imagined it and yet even more pleasurable than she had conceived.

Going back to task, Dara's mouth kissed over the blonde's body in unbridled fashion. The older woman just felt so good that she couldn't seem to get enough of her delicate skin against her lips. She thought her body was going to combust with the heat passing between them. Feeling Elisabeth's hips again grinding into her stomach, she growled torridly. She could feel how excited her girlfriend was becoming by the wetness that was suddenly coating her skin. "God, you feel so good, Elisabeth," she whispered as her mouth managed to settle once again on her lover's chest.

"So do you," the blonde managed to breathlessly reply.

Wanting to get even closer contact between them, the taller woman let her right hand trail over the blonde's side, over her hip and to her thigh. Instinctively Elisabeth's leg bent slightly as the brunette lifted it and wound it around the brunette's hip, bringing their bodies into even closer contact. Letting her hand stay there, she began to fondle her lover's leg, tracing light patterns over the back and inner portion of her thigh. As soon as her fingers skimmed close to where Elisabeth desperately wanted them, she cried out her girlfriend's name longingly. Dara knew the older woman was closing in on a peak just by the way her body was responding.

"That's it, Elisabeth. Let me hear you. You're so beautiful like this," Dara whispered lovingly, trying to give the woman she loved the little push she needed to get the relief her body craved. "I love you so much."

"I love you too, Dara," Elisabeth panted. "Oh, God. Please."

Pressing herself even closer to her lover, Dara murmured, "Just let go, baby. I have you. You feel so good. I can imagine myself inside of you. I want to feel you contracting around me. Can you feel me?"

In her mind Elisabeth could picture Dara just as she described, and it was enough to carry her over the edge. Quivering uncontrollably she allowed the feelings to wash over her as she clung to the woman she loved. The brunette just held her for several moments as she felt Elisabeth's body tensing sporadically. Neither said anything for a few moments. Finally as Elisabeth came back from the induced euphoria, she sighed as she tried to catch her breath. "Oh God," she mumbled.

"Are you okay?" Dara asked sweetly.

"Better than that. I never thought it could be like that. I can only imagine what it's going to be like when we really can be together completely. That was incredible."

"Well, glad you enjoyed it."

"You should be a phone sex operator in your spare time," the blonde joked as she stroked the dark head that was resting against her shoulder. Wondering if her girlfriend had gotten satisfaction out of their activities, she quietly asked with some uncertain hesitation, "Did you enjoy it?"

"Tremendously, Elisabeth," she assured, because she could tell the blonde was suddenly nervous.

"But you didn't...", she started.

"It's okay, baby. I don't need to. This was about your needs," Dara explained, even though her body was taut with sequestered passion. As much as she would have loved to have reached climax, she didn't want to push her lover into something if she wasn't ready for it.

"That hardly seems fair. You give me an unbelievable orgasm, and I let you roll over and go to sleep without the same treatment. I'm not some prima donna bitch, Dara," she stated. "You deserve a little something for your efforts. I don't know who you've been dating in the last decade, but the last time I did this, it was a give-give situation, and I want to give you as much as you have to me."

Feeling the blonde's thigh maneuver its way between her legs, Dara gasped. "I swear I'm about to explode if you touch me like that," she admitted.

Laughing lightly Elisabeth replied, "Let's just see about that, shall we?" Taking the lead between them, the older woman put both hands on the brunette's hips, forcing them to grind against her thigh. Dara groaned loudly, but it was quickly muffled by a fiery lip lock. For the next several minutes Elisabeth toyed with her lover, bringing her close and then backing off just before the imminent moment until the younger woman finally begged for release. Quickly the older attorney obliged her, making her as breathless as she once had been.

When Dara had come down from her own climax, she rolled off the shorter woman. "Oh, man. Shelby was right," she mumbled still gasping for air.

Curling up against the brunette's shoulder, Elisabeth questioned, "What was she right about?"

"You are a tomcat disguised as a Republican," she jested.

Elisabeth laughed at the joke. "I bet old George would just hate it if he knew I was in bed with his worst enemy," she teased.

"Oh no. You are his worst enemy, Elisabeth, and that's what so ironic about the whole thing. He can't stay away from you, and yet it's going to be you that brings his downfall."

"Yeah, well, let's not talk about him. I'd much rather lie here in your arms and listen to you breathe."

"That makes two of us," Dara admitted, wrapping her arms securely around her lover's bare body.

The following morning the two women slept in a little before deciding to get dressed for the day. The brunette decided to shower first, leaving the blonde to ponder her outfit choices as she went

into the bathroom. However, she had only been in there long enough to wash her hair when she was startled by the curtain being flung open. Elisabeth stood there with a seductive smile and nothing else. Dara gasped audibly at the sight of the woman she loved completely naked. She had never seen her before, and she could feel her knees beginning to weaken at the sight of her on perfect display.

Eyeing the woman she loved, the blonde felt her stomach churn. Dara was even sexier without clothes than she ever fantasized. "Room for one more?" she questioned breathlessly.

"Sure. Of course. There is always room for you," Dara answered in pleasant surprise. Shelby had told her Elisabeth was going to be a hot lover, but she hadn't actually pondered it until the previous night. Now after their impromptu session the night before and this morning's shower, she knew she was going to be in for an exciting ride, especially when they could consummate their relationship fully. As the older woman stepped in, she closed the curtain behind her. Dara immediately wrapped her arms around the smaller woman's body and smiled. Lightly she asked, "Miss me already?"

"Always," the older woman mumbled as she intently began to kiss the brunette's neck.

The younger woman moaned at the gesture, because it was clear Elisabeth wanted more of last night. Knowing they had the time for it, the brunette indulged her girlfriend in the moment, catching her mouth for a searing kiss. Quickly things escalated as usual, but both of them found quick peaks before settling down to just hold each other in the warm spray of the water.

Embracing the woman she loved in her arms and feeling Elisabeth's heart racing, the younger woman knew she was so far gone she may never return from the bliss they had found together, and it was in that moment she realized she did want to hold this woman forever. Elisabeth was the one she wanted to be with for the rest of her life, and the thought suddenly frightened her, because the older woman was playing such a dangerous game. In fact, her life could be at stake if she was ever found out by the wrong people. As much as she thought the President ignorant, she worried what he was capable of should he discover Elisabeth's true intentions. However, she also knew she couldn't dissuade the blonde from her mission. The older woman wanted to go this course, and all Dara could do was support her.

Knowing they had somewhere to be soon, Dara eased out of Elisabeth's embrace far enough to finish bathing. The blonde did the same, and they were both quietly contemplative for the rest of the shower. Dressing and breakfast followed much in the same fashion. When it was time to head over to the college, Dara reminded herself what she had to do. They had agreed to pretend to only be friends as long as they were around others for the sake of Elisabeth's career. However, at the turn in events it was the last thing the brunette really wanted, even though she knew the necessity of it.

They arrived with only a few minutes to spare, leaving them just enough time to find their seats before the program began. As Dara looked at the program they had been handed as they had entered the gym, Elisabeth looked around at the other attendees, and her heart stopped momentarily. Sitting two rows in front of them and off to the right was her first love. Suzanne

was sitting around some other women chatting amiably, oblivious to the blonde's presence, giving Elisabeth ample time to just gaze at her. She didn't look as if she had changed much over the years. She still had her figure and personality it appeared. Suddenly the blonde found herself caught up in the recollections of the two of them together, their friendship in high school, the prom, first day of college, and their first kiss all came flooding into her mind. As she continued to stare, the intimate memories followed, the first time Suzanne had ever touched her, the feeling of Suzanne inside of her for the very first time, making love in the barn at school. All the emotions she had ever felt for her long-time acquaintance came rushing into her heart. She and Suzanne had promised each other forever when they were young, and back then the blonde had wanted it to last that long.

Sensing something change in her lover, Dara looked over at her to see what was wrong. Seeing eyes elsewhere though, the brunette cast her glance in the same direction and saw Suzanne as well. Instinctively she knew what was bothering the older woman. Leaning to her ear so no one could hear them, she whispered, "Are you all right?"

Hearing the voice Elisabeth turned and met a concerned dark gaze. The woman sitting next to her loved her so dearly, and she knew it, but her eyes couldn't stay away from what she had once had. Blue eyes went back to Suzanne, watching her every move. Dara sighed, knowing this was not something with which she could help. Only Elisabeth could battle her feelings herself. It hurt Dara a little to see the apparent longing in her lover's eyes as she continued to look at Suzanne. She knew that the blonde loved her and furthermore her old college buddy would never look at Elisabeth the way she had a decade ago, but it still stung to see the unresolved feelings play across her girlfriend's face.

Throughout the next hour and a half Dara tried to focus on why she was there. She was to receive an award, not watch her girlfriend gawk over an old flame. When it was time for the inductees to receive their awards, Dara's name was called last, because they were being called by class year, and she was the youngest. Coincidentally that placed her next to Suzanne as they all stood with the awards for photographs.

As the two old teammates stood close to each other listening to their old athletic director speaking about them, Suzanne leaned closer to Dara and inquired, "Dara, who is that woman you are sitting next to?"

"An old friend of yours," she mumbled, looking over at Elisabeth and seeing the blonde gazing in her direction. Although she wasn't sure if those blue eyes were looking at her or Suzanne. With the way Elisabeth had been acting, she figured they were on Suzanne.

"Elisabeth Gunter?" The brunette nodded. "She looks fabulous. Are you two dating or just friends?"

"We're just friends," Dara lied, not wanting to but knowing it was what was expected of her.

"Is she married?"

"No."

Seeing Dara and Suzanne whispering to each other as they stood in front of their audience left the blonde feeling awkward. Both women were staring at her just as intently as she was at them, so she wondered what was being said.

Finally when the induction was over, all the athletes went outside for more pictures. Elisabeth just hung around inside the gym watching them from afar. She was surprised at how well Dara and Suzanne got along. Both of them were chatting easily as they posed for pictures. Once those were complete, the athletes and their families were invited to a small reception. During that time Dara introduced Elisabeth to everyone they spoke to, but Suzanne steered clear of the two of them, although the blonde noticed her ex-lover looking at her constantly. The taller woman noticed it as well and figured she should be the most mature of them and allow the two to speak. Directing her girlfriend that way, Dara smiled at she reached Suzanne.

"What a great reception this is," she mentioned to try to get the two of them to talk.

Suzanne nodded. "It is nice." Looking at the blonde, she softly greeted, "Hi, Elisabeth."

"Hello, Suzanne," coolly Elisabeth responded.

An awkward moment ensued. "Well, I know the two of you have some catching up you would like to do, so I'm just going to go talk to coach," Dara mentioned with a smile for both of them which she didn't quite feel before leaving them alone.

Suzanne watched her leave before nervously smiling at the blonde. "Well it's been a long time."

"Yes, it has."

"Still mad at me, I see. You did swear never to speak to me again."

"I know, and if it weren't for Dara, I'd have kept that promise."

"She knows about us, doesn't she? That's why she came over here."

"She knows. My sister told her."

"Oh? And how is Shelby? Still the brat I used to know?"

Unable to help herself, Elisabeth chuckled at the description of her sister. "Yes, as a matter of fact. She's been meddling with Dara and me since they met."

"I see, but it hasn't worked. You're not with Dara?"

"We're friends," the blonde answered as her eyes sought out the topic of conversation.

"That's too bad. So, tell me. What are you doing with your life?"

"Well, I'm working on the Minion-Bonaparte re-election campaign right now. After that I'm going to go back to my job at the DOJ."

"You're on the re-election campaign, and you're friends with Dara? Are you sure that woman isn't interested in you? She wouldn't normally stand for something like that. That's not her nature."

"Well, maybe she's changed. People do change, Suzanne," Elisabeth snipped.

"I know. Listen, Elisabeth. I understand why you're still upset with me after all this time, but it was ten years ago. There has been so many times where I've wanted to call or write you and tell you how sorry I was for what happened." Not knowing what to say, the blonde simply nodded. Suzanne sighed deeply. "You know, I had this speech prepared in the event I ever saw you again, but I never thought I'd be able to use it. Could we maybe just step outside in private for a few minutes? There's something I want to say to you."

Casting a glance in her girlfriend's direction, the blonde saw that Dara was engaged in conversation, so she nodded her head. "Fine." Both women left the reception and went out onto the front quad. They walked in silence until they got to a bench. Sitting the blonde looked at her ex-girlfriend and waited for what she wasn't sure. She watched as Suzanne gathered her thoughts.

"I wrote you a letter that you never answered," Suzanne stated. "In it I bared my soul to you, Elisabeth. Did you ever even read it?" The blonde shook her head. She knew exactly the letter Suzanne was talking about, but she had never been able to open it.

"It's probably for the best that you didn't. I said some things in there that could have ended my marriage back then. Elisabeth, I hope you never doubted my love for you. I loved you in a way I have never loved anyone else in this world. You were the best thing that had ever happened to me. Even when we were in high school and both dating boys, I always loved you, and it was my secret hope to one day be able to say that. I finally got that chance, and you made my life heaven by being with me. Then when I met Bryan things began to change. For the first time in my life I found myself in love with two people, both of you very different. I did cheat on you, and for that I am truly sorry. I never told you the complete truth about Bryan and me. You see, the day that we last spoke, I had found out that I was pregnant. It was an accident. I didn't know what to do, and I thought if I married Bryan I could have some normality in life. That's why I broke things off with you. Well, I miscarried, but Bryan still wanted to get married. I had already lost you, so I thought I should marry him. I still loved him, but I also loved you. As it turned out, over the course of time, I realized what a horrible mistake I had made. I loved you more than him, but I tried to make it work with him, because we had kids. I haven't been able to stop thinking about you in ten years, and he finally realized I never would. He left me a few months ago."

"What are you saying, Suzanne?" Elisabeth questioned hesitantly, unsure of where the conversation was suddenly going.

"I'm saying that letting you go was the biggest mistake of my life. I loved you then. I've loved you the whole time I was married to him, and I love you now."

"What? Suzanne, what do you mean? What are you trying to do? Playing with my feelings isn't right."

"I'm trying to tell you that I wish I had a second chance to make things right, but I know that I don't. Your heart belongs to someone else," she said, taking the blonde's hands. "Elisabeth, listen to me. Don't make the same mistake I made. Don't let love slip away, because you're too worried about what people will think or your career or any other reason. Do whatever it takes to make sure you and Dara are together," she insisted.

"What?"

"Don't pretend to be something you're not. You're going to lose her. Trust me on this. I can tell you love her just by the way you look at her. You used to look at me that way. Furthermore, it's obvious that she feels the same. That's all that should matter. She's a lucky woman to have your love, and you're lucky to have hers. Let nothing drive you two apart." With tears in her eyes, Elisabeth reached for her ex and embraced her in a hug. Suddenly the years of animosity faded as Suzanne laid down the burden she had been carrying and supported the blonde's feelings for Dara. The two women sat hugging for several moments before Suzanne pulled away and inquired, "Are you going to be okay?"

"I'll be fine. I just need a minute."

"All right. I'm going to go back inside unless you want me to stay."

"No. Go on."

Nodding her head Suzanne stood. "Maybe someday Dara, you, and I can all be friends. Until then though just know that I'm thinking about the two of you and hoping for the best." With that she walked away, leaving Elisabeth on the bench alone. The blonde continued to cry quietly at what had just transpired. She had never expected Suzanne to express feelings of remorse or love for her still. It left her completely aghast, but at the same time she was comforted by the fact that even Suzanne could see the love she shared with Dara. It meant that it seemed as strong to other people as she hoped it did between two of them.

Since Dara had seen Elisabeth and Suzanne disappear together, she wondered where they had gone and what they were doing, but she knew she had to trust her love for the blonde. Seeing Suzanne return alone though made the brunette uneasy, so she headed outside to see if she could find her lover. Spotting her on a bench, she cautiously made her way over. She could hear Elisabeth crying and felt bad that she had initiated their contact.

"Elisabeth, sweetie, are you all right?" she inquired gently, taking a seat next to the woman she loved.

Immediately wet blue eyes met hers. Unable to stop herself, the blonde threw her arms around Dara's neck and pulled her into a powerful kiss. The younger woman moaned lightly but tenderly pulled back to see what her lover could possibly be thinking. "I love you, Dara. I love you so much it hurts my heart."

"I love you, Elisabeth."

Going in for a second kiss, the older woman murmured, "I want to leave. I want to go home and make love with you the rest of the day."

Groaning deeply Dara felt the words settle between her thighs. "I want that too, baby, desperately, but we can't go home. We have to have dinner here with the school president, and then I promised to take you on a night tour of the city."

"But I want you."

"I want you too. I promise we'll have all the time in the world. We just can't. You know I'm right."

"I know, I know," she growled in frustration. "I'm just tired of waiting already."

"Time will fly before you know it. Now come on. I really should go back inside."

By the time Dara dropped Elisabeth off at home the following day, the blonde was full of emotions whirling within her. The whole experience at Hollins had left her with a feeling she had never had before in her life. She knew she wanted Dara, but the intensity of her emotions was more than she could even comprehend. It was all she could think about, being with the brunette.

As she went into her room to unpack her bags, she could hear loud music in Shelby's room next door. Wondering what her sister was up to, she walked out into the hall and knocked on the door. There was no answer, so she opened it. Immediately she regretted that choice as she saw her sister lying naked on her bed with Leah on top of her. The brunette was so involved she didn't seem to notice the intrusion at first, but Shelby's eyes met her sister's. Neither blonde said anything though as the younger one went right back to her pleasure. Quickly deciding it was best to just walk away, Elisabeth started to close the door when she noticed a camera sitting on a tripod across the room pointing in the direction of the bed and her sister's computer displaying everything that was taking place. Shocked at what was really transpiring, she made a hasty retreat downstairs to the kitchen.

Never could she have imagined that her sister would do such a thing. She knew Shelby was wild and unrestrained, but she never thought she would go so far as to record her own sexual encounters. Not knowing what else to do, she picked up the phone and dialed Dara.

"Miss me already?" the brunette joked.

"Dara, our sisters are upstairs right now screwing," she informed.

"So?"

"They're recording it as well."

"What? Are you kidding me?"

"No, I'm not kidding. I walked in on them. I have to stop them."

"Why? Elisabeth, you can't stop them. They're both adults. Just because we don't like it doesn't mean we have the right to interfere."

"Did you know about this?"

"I knew they were sleeping together. I didn't know Shelby had convinced Leah to do it on tape."

"You think this was Shelby's idea? Never. She wouldn't."

"Don't say never, Elisabeth. Your sister has it in her to do this. Just take my word for it."

"Why? Do you know something that I don't?" Dara hesitated in answer. "Well?" the older woman pressed.

"Let's just say I know more about her sexual escapades than you do and leave it at that. Both of them have the propensity for this behavior. I'm surprised that Leah has decided to participate, because I thought I knew where she stood, but I can't stop her any more than you can stop Shelby."

"But our reputations. Do you know what will happen if that tape gets out?"

"Nothing will happen. They'll see two hot chicks getting it on, but it won't reflect on us. People can discriminate between what we do and what our family does. Take Clinton and his brother for example. No one blames good old Bill for his brother's screw ups or vice versa. Just calm down. It's not that big of a deal."

"Not that big of a deal? You're not the one who had to walk in on it."

"Well, what do you want me to do? I'll talk to them. Is that good enough?"

Just then Elisabeth heard movement behind her and turned to see the topic of discussion standing in the doorway of the kitchen. Leah was dressed in a pair of gym shorts and a t-shirt while Shelby wore only a robe. "Hold on a second, Dara." Thrusting the phone in Leah's direction, she said, "Your sister wants to talk to you."

"Hello?" Leah questioned hesitantly.

"What are you doing, Leah? Is that shit on her porn site?"

"Yeah but it's no big deal, Dara."

"Are you crazy? Think about what you're doing. You're not a prostitute. Do you realize that could ruin me?"

"Dara, there is no way I'd let that happen."

"Oh? And how are you going to protect me? I run for office and that tape comes up. I'm against pornography politically, Leah. That's my stance regardless of whether or not I like it personally. Not to mention they will probably pass that tape off as being Elisabeth and me instead of Shelby and you. We look that much alike, and Shelby and Elisabeth are almost carbon copies. I don't need that. It's going to be difficult for me to tell the people that it is in fact you and then condemn something that you've done in such a public arena."

"I understand, Dara. You'll do what you have to, but this is my life, and if it's something Shelby wants, I'm willing to do it for her."

"Why? What kind of hold does she have on you?"

"One that I've never felt in my entire life."

"Don't tell me you're in love with her," the older brunette stated.

"I can't help it, Dara. I think I am."

"Leah, she's not capable of loving someone. You see how she treats me. Can you deal with that? Your girlfriend pawing all over me?"

"Don't think so highly of yourself. She may have had a crush on you, but I'm the one she goes to bed with, not you."

Seeing that she wasn't able to talk sense into her sibling, she demanded, "Put Shelby on the phone."

A moment later the younger blonde said, "Dara, hi. What's up?"

"How did you talk Leah into having sex with you for the site?"

"She wanted to."

"I don't believe that. What was the incentive?"

"I don't know, and I don't care, Dara. She wanted to do it, and who am I to turn her down? After

all she's by far the best lover I've ever had."

"What are you saying? You have feelings for my sister? That's why you did it?"

"No. Who said anything about that? It was fun."

"Well, for the sake of my sanity as well as your sister's, it needs to stop. Do you realize the two of you are mucking with our careers while you two are having fun? Shelby, I don't care that you and Leah are having a great time in and out of bed. I'm happy for you on that. However, please don't post anything with the two of you on your website. That's all I'm asking. Can you assure me of that much?"

"Dara, you're asking something impossible."

"Why?"

"You know why. I can't really discuss the monetary repercussions here."

"This is about money? You're exploiting my sister?"

"Dara, I'm taking care of her. Leah is in good hands."

"I know about your hands, Shelby. Please, if you two want the money that much, you could have just asked me for some. Leah doesn't lack funds when she wants them. Look. I can't make you stop, but I'm asking anyway as a friend and as someone who might be a future family member. How is that going to go over if that happens? If Elisabeth and I get married, you and Leah are going to be related by marriage. That's not going to be so hot to have footage of your torrid affair. Please, for me, just think about it. Think about what you are doing."

"Fine. Whatever."

"Now let me speak to Leah again." When her younger sister got on the phone, she said, "Leah, listen. You're an adult, so I can't make you do anything, but I want you to know that what you're doing has consequences. I don't know what they are yet, and neither do you, but you will have to pay a consequence for this. How much are you willing to sacrifice for what you're doing? Your degree? A future job? Our parents' high opinion of you? Just think about it. If our parents found out about this, they would be destroyed. Be with Shelby if you want. I'm not trying to stop you from that, but don't participate in something you know is a bad idea."

"But, Dara, you don't understand," she whined.

"I understand that if she cares about you she won't make you do it again if you say you don't want to. That's what I know. And whatever money you might be getting from this, it's not worth prostituting yourself, even in fun."

"Fine. I understand."

"Okay. Is Elisabeth still standing there?"

"Yeah."

"Then put her on the phone."

When the oldest woman got back on the phone, she asked, "Well, how did it go?"

"I don't know. I think I got through to Leah. I'm not sure about Shelby."

"Well, Leah just walked out of here with her head hung like a kid in trouble. Something you said must have stuck."

"We'll see. Have you calmed down?"

"Yeah, I'm better, but I'm still going to have a talk with Shelby once Leah leaves."

"Good luck with that. Well, I'm just about home now. I'll talk to you later. All right?"

"Okay. I love you."

"I love you too. Good night."

Elisabeth hung up the phone and then poured herself a glass of milk as she pondered what she was going to say to her sister. Before she could even come up with an appropriate way to open the conversation, she heard yelling coming from upstairs. Wondering what the problem was, she went into the living room. She heard both Leah and Shelby bounding down the stairs bickering about Dara. The young med student was enraged as she grabbed the door handle and flung open the door. Elisabeth watched as she turned to Shelby.

"Dara was right! You are incapable of loving someone! I did this for you, Shelby! I don't care about the money! I don't even need the money! I care about you, so I thought this might make you care for me too, but all you can seem to think about is your business!"

"That's not fair, Leah! I do care about you! I just don't see why you don't want to make money at what we already do!"

"I just don't want to, Shelby! I want to just be with you! If my parents ever found out that I made a sex video and put it on the net, they'd kill me! I know it's what you do for a living, but I am not a whore for sale! I do care about what people think about me, especially Dara!"

"So you're going to let your big sister ruin everything? If she cared about you, she'd let you do what you want!"

"What I want is to love you, Shelby, but you love your website more than me! That's become

clear! Until that changes you can consider this over!" she screamed, turning and storming out of the house. She slammed the door so hard a picture that had been hanging in the entryway fell off the wall.

Shelby turned and glared at her older sister. "Your fucking girlfriend just ruined everything!" she yelled.

"What the hell is going on, Shelby? What was Leah going on about? What website?"

"It's none of your fucking business!"

"Like hell it is! What have you done? You made a porn movie with Leah and put it on the internet?"

"So the fuck what? I couldn't get Dara, so I went after the next best thing!!"

"You bitch! You meddled with Leah's feelings? You pretended to be interested in her just to fuck her?"

"Well, I wanted to fuck Dara, but she was too interested in you! I figured Leah was the best substitute! She's not quite the kisser Dara is though!"

"Excuse me? Just how in the hell would you know that?" Elisabeth screamed as insecurities flooded through her. When they had first met, Dara had flirted with Shelby a great deal, but she thought it was only in play. She never conceived that there could be more to them.

"Oh come on, Lis! Do you actually think Dara is capable of just waiting until you're ready to stop being a frigid bitch? A bottle of tequila and she was more than ready to hit the sheets with me!"

"Are you saying you slept with my girlfriend?" the older woman accused.

"No! She had a change of heart! Apparently she does love you enough to at least try to be faithful! Not that I understand why after all you've put her through! She's a woman with needs, and she can get whoever she wants! I don't see what's so great about you that she passes up an available opportunity!"

"Oh, I don't know, Shelby! Maybe it's because you're a whore! Maybe it's because you sell your body on a website! Is that really true? Do you really do that?"

"Yes as a matter of fact! And that's not why Dara wouldn't sleep with me! She was all too intrigued with my website! She couldn't stop looking at it when I showed it to her! She just loved watching me perform!"

"She knows about the website?"

"Yeah! And she's been on the site even after I showed it to her!"

"How do you know?"

"I own it, Lis, and I have records of all my members! I gave her a free ID, and she's used it more than once! Face it! She's just like the rest! She might act gallant, but when she's at home, she's getting off by watching me!"

"You know where she goes on the site?"

"Yes! I can track every move she makes, and she's always watching my videos!"

Elisabeth didn't know what to say at that admission. She felt as her whole world was beginning to slip away. As much as she wanted to believe in Dara's love for her, she had her doubts in the far recesses of her mind. It was just in her nature after what had happened with Suzanne to hold skepticism. Feeling at a complete loss for words, she just looked at her sister. Shelby was obviously still seething, but she was just wounded by the information that had just been revealed. Not knowing what else to say, she merely walked away as she stared to cry. Going into the kitchen she slumped down at the table and wept. She had given her heart to Dara on faith, and she wasn't prepared for it to be shattered.

Elisabeth didn't know how long she sat in the kitchen crying, but the more she thought about what had just transpired, the more she realized she needed to talk to the woman she loved. She wanted answers from the brunette. Wanting to have the conversation in person though, she slowly got up from the table and went to get her car keys. She didn't even contemplate the hour as she headed for her girlfriend's place.

It was only when she knocked on the door and was greeted by the sight of Leah in pajamas yawning that she even looked at her watch. "I'm sorry I woke you," she apologized. "I need to talk to Dara now. It can't wait."

"She's upstairs with our parents," the younger woman stated. "I'll take you up."

Both women went through the basement apartment and then up a staircase that led them into the kitchen. Elisabeth felt nervous about the fact that she was about to meet Dara's parents at the same time she was about to have an altercation with her lover. It was not what she wanted, but she knew she wouldn't be able to sleep if she didn't confront her girlfriend.

Dara turned from her conversation with her parents as soon as she heard the door to her apartment open. Seeing Leah and Elisabeth, she smiled at them. "Hey, sweetheart. What an unexpected surprise," she greeted, getting up and coming to kiss the blonde. She felt the tense body of the older woman and sensed a problem. Nevertheless, she stated, "Let me introduce you to my parents." Moving the shorter woman over to the sofa where her parents were sitting, Dara smiled. "Mom, Dad, this is the lady I was just talking about. This is Elisabeth Gunter. Elisabeth, my parents, Eric and Emma Rosenthal."

Putting on a smile she really didn't feel, she said, "Hi. It's nice to meet you."

"You too, Elisabeth. Dara has told us so much about you. She's simply crazy about you," Dara's father said.

"I've never seen our daughter happier," her mother added as they all shook hands.

Elisabeth just nodded at the sentiment and turned to Dara. "I'm sorry to just barge in like this, Dara, but I really need to talk to you. It can't wait."

"Sure. Of course. Come on. Let's go into the study," she suggested, taking the blonde by the hand.

"It was nice meeting you," the older woman said to the brunette's parents before she was led away into another room.

As soon as the door was closed, Dara put her arms around Elisabeth and asked, "What's wrong?"

The touch of her lover burned her skin, making the blonde move away and across the room. She could see the hurt in her lover's eyes at the movement. Unable to stop herself from crying, she simply wept as she mumbled, "I feel like my life has just come to a screeching halt. I feel betrayed. I trusted you, and you've demolished me."

"What? What are you talking about? What did I do?" Dara questioned in panic. She couldn't think of any reason that her actions could make the older woman feel that way.

"You knew about Shelby's website, and you didn't tell me."

"She asked me not to. She said you wouldn't approve. I don't approve either, but it's legal, and I can't do anything to stop her."

"How can you say you don't approve when you've been on it several times watching her?"

"What are you talking about? I haven't been to her website. She showed it to me, but I never went there on my own."

"She says you did. She said she gave you a log in for it, and it's been used on several occasions and that you downloaded her stuff."

"Well, it's not true," Dara defended. "You know, I gave that log in to Leah. She may have been using it, but I didn't. I wouldn't do that to you. I love you, Elisabeth. I would never do something to hurt you like that."

"How can you say that? You made out with my sister!" she yelled as her emotions got the better of her.

"I did no such thing. Why would I do that?"

"That's what I want to know! Shelby said she tried to seduce you, and you were more than willing at first!"

Dara nodded her head. "All right. That is true. She did try. The emphasis is on the word try, Elisabeth, but I refused her. We kissed. I admit it. I'm not proud of it, but that's all I did, and it was before you and I ever even discussed having a relationship."

"When did this happen?"

"That night after we got back to your place after donating blood and having Mexican food. You had a meeting, so we were alone. We started drinking tequila shots and talking about life. She said she wanted to know what it was like to kiss a woman, so I showed her. It was innocent at first but quickly escalated. I was drunk, but I wasn't about to be stupid on top of it. I wanted you, not her, so I told her I couldn't sleep with her regardless of how tempting it was. That's when she told me about your feelings. Then we did something we shouldn't have done."

"What was that?"

"We went up to your bedroom. She had me lie on your bed and close my eyes," she stated softly.

"Then what?" Elisabeth prompted, not sure she really wanted to know but knowing she needed to find out.

"She read me an excerpt from your diary. I'm sorry, Elisabeth. It wasn't right to allow her to do that, but I couldn't help myself. I was dying to know what you thought about me."

"What did she read you?"

"It was a passage from a few days after the HRC banquet. You wrote about fantasizing about me, about us making love for the first time. You wrote that you had wished I was your first, your only lover, and that you hoped I would be your last," she whispered quietly, her own emotions swelling within her at the thought of such a notion. She felt the same way now about the blonde.

"Oh God," Elisabeth mumbled as she turned away in embarrassment.

"Elisabeth, I know it was wrong, and I can't tell you how sorry I am about invading your privacy. I didn't know that was what Shelby intended to do, but I wasn't thinking clearly that night because of the alcohol. I think she read that to me to make me horny and get into her bed, but I couldn't. The feelings that you wrote about were just so strong that I didn't want to hurt you. She left me alone in your room, and as wrong as it was, I continued to raid your domain. I looked at all your yearbooks and your photo albums. That's how I found out about your grandfather. I also found other things."

"Such as?" the older woman inquired. She wanted to know everything before she let her emotions rule what she was going to say.

"I found a letter from Suzanne that you had never opened. That's when I knew the extent of the hurt she had caused you, but there was one thing above all that caught my attention."

"What?"

"A picture of you and Suzanne. I was in the background. It made me realize the irony of the situation and that I was getting another opportunity with you. I didn't want to blow it. I left your room and went to the living room. I was too drunk to leave, so I watched TV. I fell asleep on the couch. I know I should have told you all of this a long time ago, but I was ashamed of the way I acted. It wasn't right, and I'm sorry."

A moment passed in silence. Dara just hung her head and waited whatever fate had in store for her. She hoped Elisabeth would be able to forgive her indiscretion. After a minute the older woman sighed. "So, you admit that you had feelings for my sister and acted on them?"

"The only feeling I may have had was drunken lust, but I still couldn't act on them, and I never would," Dara asserted.

"You admit that you grossly encroached upon my most sacred place in the world looking for evidence of my feelings?"

Dara nodded her head shamefully. "Yes, but I'm so sorry I did that. It was wrong, and I swear I will never do it again."

"And you admit that you knew about my sister's sordid activities but didn't tell me because of some misplaced trust she fixed upon you?"

"Yes but I wanted to be on good terms with her, so she would help me with you. That's all I ever wanted, Elisabeth, to be with you." With that Elisabeth came to the taller woman and wrapped her arms around her neck. "Does this mean I'm forgiven?" she questioned hesitantly.

"Dara, I am mad about what you did. Drunk or not there is no excuse for invading privacy, but I'll get over it. Right now I'm just relieved to know that things were not as bad between you and Shelby as she inferred. The way she made it sound the two of you did a lot more than share a kiss."

"Why would she do that to you?"

"To get back at you. She's angry, because you talked sense into Leah. Obviously Leah didn't want to participate in the sex website anymore after talking to you, and they argued bitterly. Shelby blames you for Leah walking out on her."

"Leah did the right thing even though I know she's hurting. She told me she thought she might be in love with your sister."

"And this whole time Shelby just wanted a replacement for you to indulge her own fantasies. God, what a bitch she can be."

"Yes, she can but don't be too hard on her. She's never felt love the way we have. She doesn't know that there is more to life than sex. Neither did Leah until now I think. They both just thought of this as a game at first. However, then it got emotional, and for the first time I think Leah knows what it's like to be hurt. Cut Shelby a little slack. They both got what they wanted. It's just that Leah's heart wanted to change the rules, and Shelby doesn't like to change the game for anyone."

"How can you be so nice towards her? After all she hurt your sister."

"I know, but I was once like Shelby. Love was a game, not to be taken seriously, but I eventually grew up. She will too. Just give it time. I feel bad that my sister was a casualty, and I'll be there for her, but I did try to warn her. She just had to learn this the hard way."

"Do you think there is a chance they'll reconcile?"

"No. Leah's straight, and I'm pretty sure Shelby is too. In time Leah will just chalk this up to a sexual experiment and go on. She's not in love with your sister. She just has feelings she's never had before that she's mistaken for love. In reality it's just lust gone out of control."

Before anything else could be said, there was a knock on the door. Dara called the person into the room. Her mother smiled at the two of them still in their embrace. "Sorry to bother you. Your father and I are going to retire for the evening."

"Okay."

Looking at the blonde, the older woman said, "I was telling Dara earlier that she should invite you over for dinner one night soon. The family is going to be in town at the end of the month, and I think it would such a treat to have you there, so everyone can meet the woman who makes my daughter's eyes so bright."

Dara flushed in embarrassment at her mother's comment, but Elisabeth smiled. "Thank you, Mrs. Rosenthal. That's sweet of you to ask. I'd love to come if I can fit it into my schedule."

"Please, call me Emma. It was such a pleasure to meet you. I look forward to seeing you again soon."

"Likewise, Emma. Thank you." The mother smiled at the two of them before saying good night and shutting the door. Casting a smile up at her lover, the blonde stated, "I make your eyes bright, do I?"

"I told them about you for the first time tonight. I told them I had fallen in love with you. Needless to say they are happy that I've found someone so wonderful."

"I am pretty wonderful," Elisabeth agreed jokingly.

Wondering if the blonde had told anyone in her family about them, she timidly inquired, "Does anyone other than Shelby know about us?"

"No. I haven't told anyone for the obvious professional reasons. However, I want to tell my mom. Chad is bound to mention it to her the next time they speak anyway, but I want her to hear it from me. She's coming up here at the end of the summer on business. I'd like for you to meet her if you want."

"Of course. I'd love to meet her."

"Good. I was hoping you would." Holding each other quietly for another moment, the older woman said, "It's late. I should probably go. I just don't want to see Shelby again right now."

"Then stay with me. Let me hold you tonight. I think it would help."

Elisabeth nodded in agreement. The thought of sleeping close to the woman who held her heart was better than any other she could have had at the moment. "Come on then. I'm tired. Take me to bed."

Leaving her parents' house, Dara led the way back to the basement apartment. It was obvious Leah was asleep for the night. Checking to see that the door was locked, the brunette escorted her girlfriend to her bedroom. Neither said much as they undressed. Dara laid out some clothes for the blonde and then proceeded into the bathroom. Moments later she was joined by the older woman. They brushed their teeth and washed their faces together in comfortable silence. The moment felt so right to Dara that it made her heart start pounding in her chest. She wanted this with the woman standing next to her at the sink. She wanted them to be this way every night, doing their routines in familial fashion. The domesticity of it made her realize her heart was resolved in making a life with the shorter woman. Looking at the blonde out of the corner of her eye, she wondered if Elisabeth would ever feel the same. Her instinct told her she would, but when was the question Dara wanted answered. She knew Elisabeth held aspirations of permanence in their relationship, but she wanted to know if it was too soon to be discussing something of that magnitude with the woman she loved. After all they had only known each other four months, but Dara was sure this was the woman she was meant to be with for the rest of her life.

Going into the bedroom, Dara made herself comfortable in bed and just waited for Elisabeth to join her. The blonde did so a few moments later. Getting under the covers, the older woman snuggled up into the brunette's shoulder and released a long sigh. Dara sighed as well in contentment. This was all she needed at the moment as she turned out the light. Kissing the fair head, Dara whispered, "I love you."

"I love you too, Dara." Nothing else was said then as sleep quickly claimed them both.

Continued...

Alex Tryst's Scrolls
The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Political Crossfire ~

by Alex Tryst
Copyright August 2004

Disclaimer: **See Part 1.**

Part 3

A month later Elisabeth found herself on the doorstep of the Rosenthal's house. It was a blistering summer evening, but she didn't mind the humid heat. Her mind was far too occupied by the fact that she was meeting the rest of Dara's family that night. She was excited yet nervous, because it signaled a definite serious turn in their relationship. Knocking on the door, she waited for someone to answer as she fiddled with the bottle of wine she had in her hand.

Within in moments the door opened and there stood the woman she adored. "Hi," she greeted shyly, knowing her nerves were getting to her.

"Hi," Dara answered with a smile, reaching for her girlfriend. She pulled her into the house by the waist and landed a soft kiss on her lips as she shut the door. "I've missed you. This week has been tough without seeing you," she mentioned as her gentle assault on her lover's mouth continued.

"I missed you too, but you know obligation beckons."

The taller woman nodded absently as she persisted in her indulgence of her girlfriend's lips. It was only a deep chuckle that broke them apart. Dara knew who it was before even turning around. "Get lost, Tom."

"Oh, come on now. Don't keep the guest of honor all to yourself," he insisted as the two women broke from their embrace. Smiling at the blonde, he stuck out his hand. "Hi. I'm Thomas, Dara's brother."

"Elisabeth. Nice to meet you."

"Well, you better come in before the rest of the group starts to rush the door," Dara mentioned, taking the blonde's hand. "Are you ready?" The older woman nodded. Heading into the kitchen,

they heard all commotion stop and attention turn to the two of them with the exception of Dara's nephew who was oblivious. "Everyone, I'd like for you to meet Elisabeth Gunter. Elisabeth, my family," she proclaimed generally. Taking her to each person, she made a more formal introduction.

When it was over, the blonde went to the younger woman's mother and extended her gift. "Well, thank you, Elisabeth. That's so sweet of you," she said, hugging the blonde.

Even though the blonde attorney wasn't expecting the contact, she participated in the hug as she realized where her lover got her consoling embrace. "Well, it was the least I could do for having me to dinner," she mentioned.

Breaking into the conversation, Tom inquired, "So, Elisabeth, Dara's been so secretive about you. What do you do?"

Knowing she was in a house full of Democrats, the woman chuckled to herself. She didn't want to argue with her hosts, but she knew she had to be honest about her career. "Currently I am working on the Minion-Bonaparte re-election campaign," she admitted.

Suddenly the room fell completely silent. She could feel all eyes on her, but no one said anything for a moment. Finally Dara's father smiled. "Now I understand why Dara said we weren't supposed to talk about politics," he jested.

"Yeah. Don't hold Elisabeth's career choices against her. She's still has many other admirable qualities," Dara joked, poking fun at her girlfriend while she could.

Elisabeth took it in stride, relieved that she was only going to be the source of jokes, not criticism.

"Well, she must if you're still in love with her," Emma stated. "That really does prove love can conquer all."

Nodding her head, the brunette attorney wrapped an arm around her girlfriend's shoulders. "If I can look past that so can all of you. Let's just drop it. Politics are off limits tonight."

"Agreed," Eric stated quickly with another grin. "There's plenty of time to convert her before you get married anyway."

Dara and Elisabeth both blushed as the rest of the family laughed. Even though she had confided in her parents her feelings about her relationship with the blonde, she wasn't ready to share it with the older woman yet. Hearing her father tease her about it left her mortified, but she played it off as well as she could.

Once dinner was served, everyone sat in the formal dining room. Dara pulled out her lover's chair before taking her own. The blonde smiled at her in return. Throughout most of the meal she was the center of the conversation. All of the brunette's family seemed anxious to know as much

about her as they could. Even though she wasn't used to being in the spotlight, Elisabeth still enjoyed herself. She learned quite a lot about her girlfriend, things that she knew Dara never would have shared otherwise, which pleased her greatly.

When the meal was over, Elisabeth's polite offer to help with the dishes was accepted, leaving Dara alone with her brother and father. "So, she's a Republican?" Eric questioned, sipping the last of his wine from his glass.

"Dad, please don't start. We're more closely aligned than it sounds. Working on the campaign was a good career move on her part. I don't begrudge her that. It's what she needed to do."

"But how can she manage it being a lesbian? Her boss hates her."

"He doesn't even know. Just trust me on this, Dad. I know what I'm doing."

"I'm sure you do, Dara. I just don't want you to get hurt, but I want you to be happy, and I can see that she makes you that."

Smiling the brunette nodded. "She does. If things go well, I know I'm going to ask her to marry me. There is just something about her that says she's the one."

"If that's what you want, we'll be happy for you," he said with a pat on her shoulder. "Now we should probably go rescue her from your mother. Knowing her she's putting her through an inquisition."

The three of them moved into the kitchen with the rest of the dishes from the table. Sure enough Dara's mother, oldest sister, and sister-in-law had the blonde answering questions unceasingly. Knowing she should come to her lover's aid, Dara stepped into the middle of the conversation and put her arms around her girlfriend's waist. "All right. You three have had enough time. Let Elisabeth breathe."

Her mother smiled at the couple. "Why don't the two of you go into the study and relax? I'll let you know when dessert is ready," she suggested.

Elisabeth started to protest, because she hadn't even bothered to help with the dishes while she was being quizzed, but Dara cut her off. "That's a great idea, Mom. We'll do that," she quickly answered, dragging the blonde from the room before anyone could change their minds.

As soon as they were alone, they smiled at each other. "Your family certainly can talk," the older woman teased.

"Now you know where I get it," the taller woman replied as she pulled her lover down onto the sofa.

"How do you think it's going?" Elisabeth inquired.

"I think they adore you despite the Republican aspect. I wish they could know the truth."

"Me too. Well, they can always think you converted me before we got married. That's good enough," the blonde said with a smile.

Flushing lightly the taller woman mumbled, "Yeah. About that, I'm sorry."

"It's all right. After all, it's not like the thought never crossed my mind," modestly Elisabeth responded, breaking their gaze.

"It has?"

The older woman nodded. Hoping that she wasn't alone in her feelings on the matter, she questioned timidly, "Have you ever thought about it?"

The brunette nodded her head. "Actually, I have, Elisabeth. You know, we have the same wants and dreams, and things are going so well. It just seems natural to think about the future. I know I want you to be a part of it."

Leaning into the younger woman's shoulder, Elisabeth sighed in contentment. "I feel the same way," she stated softly.

They simply sat in a quiet embrace until they were retrieved by Dara's mother for dessert. After that the family merely sat around talking. Elisabeth felt special to be included in the family conversation, because it made her feel as if she belonged. When it was time for Dara's nephew, Justin, to be put to bed, the six-year-old whined about having to leave the party.

Trying to pacify him though, Dara asked, "Do you want me to read you a book tonight?"

He shook his head defiantly. "I want Miss Elisabeth to read to me," he demanded, crossing his arms across his body.

"Well, maybe you should try asking her nicely." Thomas, his father, instructed.

Going to the blonde, Justin sat down next to her on the couch and gave his most charming grin. "Miss Elisabeth, will you read to me?" he asked with his best manners.

"Please," Tom directed

"Please," Justin copied.

"Sure, Justin. I'd love to read to you."

"Yeah," he screamed happily, jumping from the sofa.

"Say thank you, Justin," his mother, Clara, stated.

"Thank you, Miss Elisabeth," he complied, taking her by the hand to help her off the couch.

"I'll get him settled," Dara offered, standing and following her nephew and girlfriend up the stairs into her old room where he was staying. Going into the bedroom, Dara proceeded into that bathroom while Justin lingered with Elisabeth looking at books. "Get in here, sport. You have to take a quick bath," she said. Immediately both of them appeared. The brunette started the water, but when she noticed he wasn't undressing, she mentioned, "Don't be all night about it. Take off your clothes."

He shook his head. "No. I want my privacy first," he demanded.

Elisabeth chuckled in amusement and surprise at his declaration. However, she said, "I'll just wait in the other room."

When she was gone, Justin looked at his aunt as he pulled off his shirt and shorts. "She's pretty, Aunt Dara."

"Yes, she is, Justin."

"Mom said you two were going to get married. Would that make her my aunt too?"

Dara nodded. "It would. Would you like that?"

He nodded as he went to the bathroom. When he was finished, he got into the tub. Quickly Dara washed his hair and body before asking, "Do you want to play for a little while?"

"No. I want Miss Elisabeth to read to me."

"Okay. She can read you an extra story since your bath is so short tonight."

He smiled with excitement and quickly pulled the plug on the drain. As usual he watched all the water disappear before getting out while Dara went to fetch his pajamas. When she returned from the bedroom, he was drying himself off with one of the large towels. Together they hastily got him into his pajamas and brushed his teeth before heading back into the bedroom.

Elisabeth smiled from her position on the floor as he came bounding out and crashed next to her. "I was just looking at your book collection. Which one do you want me to read?"

"Aunt Dara said you could read two," he mentioned as he began to rifle through the books in search of the ones he wanted.

The blonde looked over toward her girlfriend. Dara was busy setting up some medical equipment she hadn't noticed earlier. However, she didn't have time to ask what it was as several books were thrust into her lap. She laughed lightly. "That's a few more than two," she said.

"They're short," he protested.

"Fine. Why don't we get in bed?" Elisabeth suggested. Justin did as he was told, climbing under the covers in the middle of the bed. She took a seat next to him. "Which one should we read first?"

Dara smiled at how easily her girlfriend took to her nephew. It made her own longing for children with the older woman much greater, because she could tell the great capacity Elisabeth had for love. She continued to watch as she prepared her nephew's feeding tube for the night. Then she went into the bathroom to get his medication.

Coming back she said, "Sorry to interrupt. Justin, your mom said you've learned to swallow your capsules now. Is that true?" He nodded, obviously proud of himself for that fact. "Awesome, buddy. Here. Then take these." She handed him two pills of enzymes with a glass of water. He did what he was told before putting his attention back on Elisabeth.

With that completed, Dara pulled up his pajama shirt to open the cap on his feeding tube. He didn't even seem to notice being too enthralled with his book, but the blonde's eyes couldn't help but stray to watch. She felt her heart beginning to break at the sight of Dara's nephew with a permanent tube protruding from his fair skin. Justin seemed oblivious to the process. However, she continued to read as she watched the taller woman out of the corner of her eye. Dara connected the tube together and then turned on the machine before dropping onto the bed next to Justin for the rest of the story. Elisabeth smiled as the six-year-old snuggled into his aunt.

After several books Dara rose from the bed. Taking her lead, Elisabeth did the same. The blonde smiled down at Justin and leaned to kiss him on the forehead. She was surprised but pleased when his tiny arms came around her neck. "Good night, Justin," she whispered.

"Good night, Miss Elisabeth."

She then moved toward the door while Dara went to hug him. "Sweet dreams, sport. I love you," she whispered, rubbing his chest lightly in affection.

"I love you too, Aunt Dara," he answered, giving her a hug. "Can I ask you something?" he inquired.

"What?"

"When are you two getting married?"

Dara blushed lightly, knowing that Elisabeth had heard the question. However, she didn't focus on her embarrassment. Instead she smiled at him and answered, "I don't know, Justin. Why?"

"I want to be there," he said.

"Don't worry. You'll be there. I wouldn't get married without you. You're my guy. In fact, you

can even walk down the aisle with me if you want."

"Can I really?"

"Of course. I promise you, Justin. When it happens, you'll be there. Now it's time you go to sleep." He nodded his head as she rearranged his covers and then stood. Turning to her girlfriend, they both quietly left the room. Once they were outside with the door closed, Dara noticed that Elisabeth wasn't all right. Concerned that her nephew had offended her unintentionally, she asked, "Are you okay? Sorry about what he said. He overheard his parents talking."

The blonde shook her head. "It's not that."

"Then what is it?"

The older woman closed her eyes in order to compose herself, but as she felt strong arms embracing her, tears began to track her face. "He's just a baby," she uttered.

"I know. I'm sorry. I should have warned you. It's just that we're so used to all of it that it doesn't cross our minds. It takes getting used to, honey. It's hard to see him like that in the beginning, but this is what we have to do to keep him alive and as healthy as we can."

"It's just heart-breaking," she whispered.

Dara nodded her head. Smiling at down at the woman in her arms, she said, "I love you, Elisabeth. You have such a big heart." Gently the brunette kissed her, expressing deeper feelings that words never could. "Come on. Let's go back downstairs and endure more of my family's torture."

Heading back to the living room to where the rest of the family was, both of them took their spots on the sofa again. However, this time Dara held Elisabeth's hand in her lap as they all just talked. The blonde allowed her to do so, enjoying the simple affectionate attention. That was one of the things she loved about Dara. She was so giving to everyone. She had a natural gift that made every person in a room feel special.

Finally after awhile Leah suggested a late night swim to the family. However, Tom said, "That's okay. You all go ahead. Someone needs to listen for Justin."

"We'll stay inside," Dara offered, knowing her brother well enough to know he did want to go out by the pool.

"Are you sure? You don't have to, Dara."

"It's fine. Elisabeth didn't even bring her suit. We'll listen for him. You go have fun. You don't get much a chance to do that. You might as well take advantage of the opportunity."

He nodded. "All right. We won't be long though."

With that all the Rosenthal children went to get their suits, leaving Dara with Elisabeth and her parents. "Are you sure you don't mind, Dara? We'd be more than happy to stay inside," her mother said.

"Really, it's fine. Why don't you two join them?" she suggested.

Mother and daughter looked at each other for a moment in silence before Emma nodded her head. "All right. We'll do that, but if you need anything, you know where we are."

With that Dara and Elisabeth were left alone on the couch. Shooting her girlfriend a grin, the younger woman joked, "Oh the sound of silence."

The blonde shook her head. "You didn't have to get rid of everyone. I was perfectly content talking to your family."

Leaning in toward her lover's neck, Dara replied in a whisper, "Well, I wasn't content. In fact, there are other things on my mind."

"I can only imagine what," giggled the blonde as she shrugged away from her lover's lips. "Your parents could walk in."

"They won't care," Dara insisted, leaning in again, but Elisabeth held her at bay.

"Well, I will. If you insist on this, let's at least go somewhere a little more private."

"Fine. Let's go in the study. No one will come looking for us."

"Can we still hear if Justin needs anything?"

The brunette nodded. "Not to worry. I wouldn't let anything happen to my Justin."

"I know," the shorter woman answered as they got off the couch. Going into the study, Dara closed the door almost all the way before coming to her lover in the middle of the room. They kissed slowly for a few minutes.

"I've been thinking about this all night. You look so incredibly beautiful, Elisabeth. It's taken all my willpower to keep my hands off you."

The blonde moaned lightly as the younger woman's hands roamed over her body. "You feel so good, Dara," she murmured in pleasure as the brunette took in the landscape of her neck with her gifted mouth.

"So do you."

After a few moments the blonde pulled back slightly and smiled. "I feel a little self-conscious

about this. The last thing I want is for them to be able to hear us."

Nodding her head, Dara pulled out of the blonde's arms. "I have just the thing." She went over to the stereo cabinet and turned on the equipment. Picking out one of the CDs that she had always liked for a romantic setting, she put it in and then turned up the volume. "Now. That's a sure sign for them to stay away." Pulling Elisabeth over to the sofa, Dara quickly went back to her girlfriend's neck. Soon both of them forgot about Dara's family as they lost themselves in the feeling of each other. The brunette was happily indulging in her lover's endowment when a loud beeping could be heard over the music. Dara groaned as she reluctantly sat up.

"What's that noise?" Elisabeth asked in breathless confusion.

"Justin," Dara sighed. "I'll be right back."

Rushing from the room, Dara took two steps at a time upstairs. Going into her old bedroom, she found that her nephew had only rolled over onto his feeding tube in his sleep, and there were no major problems. Repositioning his little body in the bed, she made sure there were no kinks in the tube and reset the machine. His groggy eyes opened and whispered her name.

"Hey, sport," she said softly, running a hand through his hair as she kneeled next to his bed.

"Where's Jerome?" he muttered, inquiring about his favorite stuffed animal.

Dara looked around the bed and then under the linens for the stuffed frog. Finding him under a pillow, she placed it in Justin's arms. "Here you go."

As she stood to go, he put his hand out to her. "Stay until I fall asleep again," he requested.

Dara thought about the woman downstairs and then her nephew. Knowing she could never deny him, she carefully lay down on the bed near him and lightly began to play with his hair as she waited for him to fall asleep. Within moments he was snoring softly again. However, Dara stayed there just looking at her nephew. He looked so angelic with his soft features.

Several minutes passed with Elisabeth just waiting on her lover's return. Wondering what might be taking so long, she figured Dara might need some assistance, so she quickly buttoned her top and made her way out of the study. She could still hear everyone out by the pool, so she made her way upstairs. The doorway to the brunette's old room was open, and as she came to it, her heart stopped and then began to beat in double time. There was Dara on the bed cradling Justin in her arms as the little boy slept. The blonde could see the wetness of her girlfriend's face even with the poor light of the hallway. Dara's eyes were closed, but the blonde could tell she was still awake by the way she was stroking Justin's hair.

Drawn into the room by the powerful scene, Elisabeth did the only thing she could think of in the moment. Without a word, she crawled onto the bed behind the brunette and wrapped her in her arms. She felt the taller woman relax into her embrace. Neither of them said anything as they laid in the darkness.

The next thing Dara knew she was being awakened by hushed voices coming from the hallway. Looking around in confusion, she realized she had drifted off as she had tried to put Justin back to sleep. Slowly sitting up, she noted that Elisabeth had somehow gotten into bed with them as well and was now asleep. Dara gently tried to rouse her girlfriend.

"Sweetie, we have to get up," the brunette whispered. "We fell asleep in Justin's bed."

Blue eyes opened sleepily. "What time is it?" she asked through a yawn.

"Late. After midnight."

"Oh, God. I have to get going," Elisabeth grumbled as they both stood.

"No. Why don't you just stay here since you're tired?"

"Can't. I have a team meeting with George and the other boys in the morning."

"Are you going to be all right to drive? Do you want me to take you home?"

"No. I'll just have to come get my car in the morning. I'll be fine. I promise," she assured as they made their way downstairs.

By the lack of lights on the main floor, they could tell everyone had retired for the evening. Dara and Elisabeth walked outside to the blonde's car quietly. Embracing each other they kissed gently. "Are you sure you're fine?" the taller woman asked again in concern.

"Yes, Dara. I'm fine. It's not that far. I'll call you when I get home."

"All right. Thanks for coming tonight. It means a lot to be able to have you here with my family."

Elisabeth nodded her head in understanding. "I had a great time. Can't wait to do it again."

In August Elisabeth and Shelby's mother came into town just as the older blonde had promised. It was now Dara's turn to meet the mother of the woman she loved, which left her even more nervous than when she had introduced the shorter woman to her own family. She wanted Elisabeth's mother to be impressed with her. On a Friday evening Elisabeth invited Dara to join her mother, sister, and her for dinner. Even though Shelby would be there and the two of them had been straining for civility towards each other, the younger woman knew this was her one chance at winning Elisabeth's mother over, so she accepted.

Going to the blondes' house after work, Dara sat in her car a moment preparing for their first meeting. She knew it was important for her to make a positive first impression. When she felt

calm, she took the flowers off the seat next to her and went up to the house. She gave a strong knock and then waited. Within a few moments Elisabeth answered the door. She smiled brightly at her lover.

"Hi. You got here sooner than I expected," the blonde mentioned, opening her arms to her girlfriend.

They embraced and kissed softly before Dara handed her the flowers. "I couldn't wait to see you," she admitted.

"Well, come on in. My mother's in the kitchen."

Taking Dara by the hand, Elisabeth led her to where her mother was. As soon as they cleared the doorway, she announced, "Mom, this is Dara Rosenthal. Dara, my mother, Patricia Gunter."

"Ms. Gunter, it's a pleasure to meet you," Dara said to the blonde woman in front of her as she extended her hand. Even though Elisabeth's mother was also fair-headed, they held little resemblance to each other until the older woman smiled.

"Dara, it is so good to finally meet you. Elisabeth's been going on and on about you that I feel like I already know you so well," she mentioned, taking the brunette's hand in both her own. The handshake was firm and friendly, encouraging the young attorney. "I'm so happy that you've found each other. I always hoped my little girl would find someone special."

"Well, she means a great deal to me, Ms. Gunter."

Smiling the eldest blonde said, "Please call me Pat."

Turning to Elisabeth Dara asked, "So, where's your sister?"

"She said she had to work late at the last minute at the hospital, so it's just going to be the three of us if you don't mind."

"Not at all. Would you like me to drive, or do you want to?"

"You can drive. I just need to put these in water before we go." Elisabeth quickly got out a vase and filled it with water for her flowers while the two other women just watched. When that was finished, the three of them headed to Dara's Jeep.

"So, where are we going, ladies?" Dara inquired when all of them were settled.

"We decided to do Mexican. Guapos in Tenley Town."

"Sound good."

Being that it was a summer Friday night, the wait at the restaurant was a long one, but the three

of them entertained each other at the outdoor bar, drinking margaritas as Elisabeth's mother shared stories of her daughters when they were young. However, after while the conversation turned towards careers.

"So, Dara, Elisabeth tells me you want to be a politician."

The brunette nodded her head. "That is my aspiration. I would like to be the first lesbian governor of Maryland. I think the state is ready for that or at least will be by the time I'm ready to take on the challenge."

"Then how do you feel about Elisabeth working for the President? Surely you don't agree with his politics."

"Well, my sister once asked me that. I just told her that if Arnold and Maria could do it so could we. I don't like the President, but it was a good move for Elisabeth's career. I understand why she chose to do it. I have a feeling that by the time I am elected governor of Maryland Elisabeth's political opinions will be more mainstream. After all, it'll be one thing to be the first lesbian governor, but it'll be more difficult to win if my wife is thoroughly against my politics," she teased.

The surprise on Pat's face was obvious at Dara's declaration. "Oh? I didn't realize you two were already planning that far ahead," she said with a smile at her daughter.

Elisabeth shook her head. "We're just talking about it, Mom. Nothing's been decided. It's just something we both know we'd like to do, and things are going so well. It just seems to be the next step, but we've only been dating a few months."

Pat looked at the both of them and then took a large sip of her beverage. She shook her head lightly as she smiled. "Whatever you say. Just know that I'm happy for you." A moment of silence followed before Elisabeth excused herself to the restroom, leaving Dara and Pat alone. The older woman looked at Dara and gave her a reassuring grin. "Tell me, Dara. It's been decided, hasn't it?"

"That we're going to get married?" she questioned in clarification. The blonde nodded. "I've decided," she declared. "I haven't asked her yet, because I feel like we should continue to get to know one another, but I've made up my mind about her, Pat. She's the one."

"How can you be so sure?"

Dara looked at her drink as she contemplated how to answer her lover's mother. "I just know in my heart. She's everything I've ever wanted in a woman. She's caring and thoughtful. She's intelligent and beautiful. Every time I look in those eyes, I'm just more swept away. I've hopelessly lost my heart, and I never want to retrieve it."

"Was there a moment that you knew for sure?"

"As a matter of fact, there was. Not too long ago Shelby and Elisabeth got in a huge fight, so much so that Elisabeth had to leave the house. She came to my place all upset, and we talked it out. She felt like she couldn't face Shelby that night, so she stayed with me," she said hesitantly. She noticed that Pat didn't even flinch at that admission, so she continued. "We were getting ready for bed, and we were both standing in my bathroom brushing our teeth. I looked over at her standing there in my pajamas that were way too big on her, and I realized that I want to stand next to her and brush my teeth everyday for the rest of my life. In fact, I'd rather watch her washing her face or brushing her teeth or even putting on makeup than do just about anything else. I just want to be with her. I want to hold her and love her in a way neither of us has ever known. My heart just tells me that she is my perfect companion. There's really no other way to describe it."

Pat nodded her head. "And you two are compatible in all areas?" tentatively she asked.

Not know exactly what the question was referring to, Dara inquired, "Meaning?"

"Look. I'd been extremely naive if I thought my thirty-two-year-old daughter was inexperienced. I just want to make sure you can make each other happy in all ways. It's not the only thing that matters, but it's important that each of you is satisfied in and out of the bedroom. I would hate to think this decision was based on the activities that go on behind the closed door. There's much more to a marriage than that."

"To assure you, Pat, I'll say that my decision is not based solely on that. In fact, I shouldn't probably tell you this, but I'm going to anyway. We've limited ourselves in that area, so we can have a chance to really get to know one another. If we're serious about it, that can wait."

"Then how do you know you're suitable for each other that way?"

"There's been plenty to go on," she answered.

Seeing the blonde headed back their direction, Pat smiled at Dara. "Well, you certainly do have my approval. I've never seen Elisabeth this happy in my life."

"Thank you. That means a lot to both of us," she stated as Elisabeth took her seat once again.

"What means a lot to both of us?" she inquired in interest.

"Oh, I was just tormenting Dara about her intentions regarding you to make sure they were admirable."

"Mom," she warned, her face flushing lightly.

"What? This might be my only chance to rake her over the coals before you two run off and do something crazy, like going to Massachusetts and getting hitched. I only want what's best for you, and I won't accept anything less," she stated.

"Mother, Dara is what's best for me. Now drop it."

Smiling at her daughter, she laughed lightly. "Well, I'm certainly glad we agree on that," she said, throwing a wink in Dara's direction.

The brunette laughed as she slid her arms around her lover. "She got you good on that one," she joked.

Elisabeth rolled her eyes at the both of them. "Well, I suppose I should be grateful that you two get along so well."

Through the rest of dinner, the conversation was light as they all chatted. They even made tentative arrangements for Pat to meet Dara's parents the following evening, leaving the brunette thrilled at how well the night was going. When she dropped the two blondes off later that night, she promised to call them in the morning about their families getting together.

The next day instead of doing dinner the three blonde Gunters came to the Rosenthal house for a barbecue lunch. Dara answered the door when they arrived but she was surprised to see Shelby. Nevertheless, she extended her a warm welcome and escorted them out to the pool. Dara's parents and Leah were already outside sitting poolside under the shade of an umbrella. Dara took the official duties of introductions, but the strain between Leah and Shelby was noticeable. Nevertheless, Elisabeth and Dara both tried to ignore their younger sisters and focus on getting their parents well-acquainted. However, sitting at the table with their parents, Elisabeth's attention kept being diverted to the way Dara looked in her bathing suit.

Even though she was wearing something a little more conservative than the last pool party, the sight of the brunette in her long board shorts and tank top made the blonde's libido spring to life. The other night when Dara had dropped her and her mother off at the house, the younger woman hadn't come inside, so they had not had a chance to spend any quality time alone together, which had left Elisabeth with a craving the night before. In fact, she had to relieve her own tension before she could find restful sleep. Now as she sat next to her lover those latent feelings from the night before resurfaced. She desperately needed a few minutes alone with the brunette to feel her strong arms around her body. Suddenly a perfect opportunity presented itself as Emma asked if anyone wanted something else to drink from the house.

Instantly Elisabeth was out of her chair suggesting, "You know what? Dara and I can get the drinks, Emma. Right, dear?" she inquired.

Unsure of what was going on in her lover's head, the taller woman just nodded and stood. "Sure. Of course. We'll be right back." Following the older woman up the stairs of the deck and into the house, she was about to ask what was going on when her lover jumped her as soon as they got through the door.

"God, I've missed you," she muttered, assaulting Dara's mouth brutally. "You have no idea how badly I wanted you to stay when we got home last night."

The taller woman groaned as her hands roamed under her girlfriend's top. She could feel the bare skin of her back. "I wanted to stay, but I thought it might be a little much for your mother the first time we met."

"She wouldn't have cared. She's a very modern woman," Elisabeth stated as her hands yanked up the brunette's tank top. "Oh my God. You're not even wearing a bra," she growled as her head swooped down and captured the younger woman's left breast in her mouth.

Dara gasped loudly and clutched the golden head. Her hands were equally busy trying to get into the blonde's clothes. She grumbled in frustration when she realized the blonde was wearing a conservative one-piece suit that was practically inaccessible. "This is so not fair," she whined, unable to find a good entrance to get to her lover's bare body.

The older woman chuckled at the brunette's predicament. "All's fair in love and war," she teased as her hands went to the tie on her girlfriend's swimming trunks.

"Whoa, baby. What are you doing?" the younger woman inquired, taking hold of her lover's hands, so she couldn't go any further. Triumphant she wrapped them around the blonde's back. Elisabeth struggled playfully trying to free herself, but it only served to throw herself off balance and into her girlfriend's frame. Now in control Dara maneuvered them, so the blonde was leaning against the island. Holding both wrists with one hand, she smiled devilishly at the blue-eyed angel. "Now what should I do with you?" she inquired needlessly as her right hand went to the buttons on her lover's blouse.

The older woman continued to strain against her bonds, but Dara was not letting go as she managed to work open the older woman's top. The younger woman could see just a hint of cleavage in her lover's suit. Licking her lips slowly, she grinned sexily. "Am I going to enjoy this," she muttered, leaning down and taking a mouthful of the blonde's breast with suit included into her mouth.

"Dara, please, baby. Let me go," Elisabeth pleaded.

"What was that you said a moment ago about all being fair in love?" she asked with a chuckle.

"Please let me go. I'll make you feel so good," she vowed, trying once again to free her hands. She could feel the taller woman grasping harder, so she couldn't get away. Elisabeth's breath began to grow uneven as she strove to get her hands liberated, but the way Dara was holding her down was making her incredibly turned on. Wanting the feeling to grow, she tried arduously, knowing the younger woman would not allow her to get free until she was ready. Eagerly the older woman thrust her body into her lover's, trying to bring them closer together as Dara pummeled her mouth.

Feeling herself lose control, Dara released Elisabeth's arms as she dove deeper into the blonde's mouth. Immediately one came around her neck and the other made its way down the back of her shorts and grabbed her bare backside. "God, Elisabeth," she moaned. "We have to stop. We have to stop."

"No," the blonde whimpered.

"Our parents. They're waiting on us."

"I know," the older woman whispered, combing her hand through dark hair as she tried to take a deep calming breath. "We're not going to make it until November."

Dara shook her head. "Maybe we should rethink that," she proposed.

"Maybe," Elisabeth conceded.

Just then they heard the door leading from the deck into the living room open, and they barely had time to get themselves presentable before Dara's mother came into the kitchen. She gave them a knowing smile as the two younger woman tried to act normally without success. "I just thought you two might need a little help," she mentioned. Pouring two glasses of lemonade, she turned to the blonde. "Elisabeth, be a dear and take that to your mother and sister."

"Sure, Emma," she replied before leaving the room, so mother and daughter were alone.

Emma didn't say anything for a moment, but she was humming an annoying pleasant tune, a sure sign Dara recalled from her past, that her mother was about to say something embarrassingly provocative. The older woman continued to fix drinks and place them on a tray while Dara simply waited. Finally the older woman turned to her daughter and smiled. "Dara."

"Yes, Mom?"

"You have lipstick on your neck," she stated, pointing to a section of her daughter's neck that Elisabeth had assaulted. Abashed that her mother noticed, the attorney quickly wiped it off with the back of her hand.

When the tray was full of beverages, Dara inquired, "Would you like for me to carry that for you?"

"Thank you, dear." Dara went to pick up the tray, but her mother stopped her once again. "One more thing, Dara."

"What's that?"

Her mother's eyes drifted over her body. Leaning in she patted on her daughter's stomach and whispered, "Tie your shorts, sweetie."

Groaning in discomfort Dara quickly turned from her mother and retied her shorts. "Sorry, Mom," she tried to apologize, thinking her mother might be upset.

However, Emma just continued to smile. "It's okay, honey. You're in love. That's what kids in

love do. Just do something for me."

"What's that?"

"Marry this one. She's perfect for you."

Smiling at her mother, Dara enfolded her in a hug. "I'm so glad you think so because so do I."

"Come on. Let's get back out to our guests."

Once back out by the pool, Eric and Dara started the grill for their meal. It didn't take long before they all were sitting down to a pleasant lunch. During the meal, Patricia looked over at Dara's mother and inquired, "So, Emma, what do you think about these two kids getting married?"

"Mom!" Elisabeth exclaimed with a flush. Dara laughed as she too turned red in embarrassment.

However, Emma just gave a charming grin. "Well, Pat, I'll be honest. Seeing them together makes me wonder just how long it will be before we have another grandchild running around. Something tells me it'll be less than a year after they get married that Elisabeth gets pregnant."

"I certainly hope so," Pat agreed. "Women today just keep hitting the snooze button on their biological clocks, and then before they know it, the window of opportunity is closed. We wouldn't want that to happen to you two."

"Mom, I'm only thirty-two," the blonde protested. "Besides, we've already decided that children will play a part of our family. However, we still have to get married first. Dara hasn't even asked me yet."

Seeing the playful grin her lover was sporting, the taller woman shook her head. "You're just lucky that I want to marry you, Elisabeth. Now I know where you get your persuasive attitude. Between our mothers and you, you'll have me walking down the aisle before the year is out," she teased.

"I hope so. I can't give you a chance to get away. I have to snag you while you're still blinded by the delusion of my perfection."

Shaking her head lightly, Dara turned to her father. "Dad, help me out here. These women are already trying to run my life."

With a smile of his own, he quipped, "Get used to it. It only gets worse. Personally I'd like nothing more than to see another grandchild. Maybe a little blonde girl with pigtails."

Seeing the dreaming demeanor of his face, Dara sighed. "I'm outnumbered. Leah, help?"

"Not a chance, sis. I'm just glad it's you and not me."

Putting her hands up in surrender, Dara said, "Fine. I give up. You all just plan my life for me. I suppose I should just be glad it includes the woman of my dreams."

Elisabeth shook her head as she laughed at her lover's pathetically sweet remark and patted the brunette on the leg in affection. "I love you, you big goof ball."

"I love you too, angel."

That evening when the Gunters finally left, Pat graciously thanked Dara's family for their hospitality before the three blondes went home. All the way there Elisabeth could tell something was on her mother's mind, but she didn't mention it at the moment. She waited until they had gotten home before sitting her mother down for a talk.

"So, what did you really think? I can tell you have a reservation."

"Not at all, Elisabeth. To the contrary, I think you've found someone amazing, and Dara has a great family. I'm truly happy for you."

"Then why the pensive face?"

Pat sighed as she looked at her daughter. Deciding to get right to the issue, she questioned, "Have you told your father about Dara?"

"No."

"Do you plan to tell him?"

"Of course. He's my father. I figured I'd be courteous enough to tell him I was getting married. I don't need his permission or expect his approval. This is my life, and I want to be with Dara."

Her mother nodded in understanding. "I'm glad you feel that way, sweetie. You know your father will not take to this news. The fact that Dara is a woman first of all and a Jew on top of that, he will say some horrific things. I just want to make sure you're prepared for what's to come with him. It won't be easy."

"I know, but he's not going to stop me from being with her, Mom. I love Dara, and she loves me."

Nodding Pat mentioned, "She certainly does. Listen, Elisabeth. I am so happy this has finally happened for you. I know it's what you've dreamed of your entire life. I'm going to be there every step of the way. I will help you with your father. Perhaps it might come a little better from me. Maybe I should be the one to break the news."

"You would do that?"

"I'd do anything to spare you the pain of his verbal abuse at your decision. I think this is the right

one for you, and I won't let him belittle you for doing what is best for your life. Why don't I make the call?"

"But you haven't spoken to him in two decades. Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

"Do you even remember enough German to do it?"

"I remember enough. When was the last time you talked to him?"

"Easter. We only talk on major holidays. Mom, it's really okay. I can handle this. You don't have to."

"I want to. Are you planning on introducing the two of them?"

"Only if she wants to meet him. Dara knows all about him and the rest of the family. She doesn't like it, but she lives with it the same way I do. She might not want to meet him."

"I suppose only time will tell."

"I know this though, Mom. Dara and I will be together, and Dad won't come between us. If I have to choose, Dara is going to win. I want her to be my life."

Pat smiled at her daughter and took her hand. "You'll never know how long I've dreamed of this moment for you. Your whole life I've wanted you to find the right person. I was scared that you wouldn't, but all those fears can now be put to rest. Dara really is perfect. I love the way she looks at you and treats you. You can just tell she absolutely adores you, Elisabeth. And she treats her mother well. That's the real test of someone's respectfulness of others. She treats her mother like a queen. I have no concern that she'll be the same way with you."

Elisabeth nodded her head. "She does treat Emma and her sisters well."

"There's just one thing I want to ask you. I asked her this yesterday, but I want to make sure the feeling is mutual. Does she fulfill your needs, all your needs?"

Looking at her mother, Elisabeth thought about what was really being asked of her for a moment. When it came to her, she flushed lightly. "Mom, you really asked her that?"

"Yes. It's important. I know it's not the easiest conversation to have with your mother, but I want to make sure that she is the right kind of lover for you. Does she satisfy your needs now and will she continue to do so in the future? I want your happiness in all areas. If you're going to be married, you have to face the reality of the sexual side of your marriage. Marriage is difficult enough without sexual problems. I should know. I've failed at it twice, but if you are not in the same place sexually, it can create major issues."

"Trust me. We are of the same mind when it comes to that. We feel the same way about it, and we've talked about it a lot. We're matched well in that area."

"That's what she said. I guess I just want to know how you really know that if you've never actually been together. I don't want you to find yourself in a position in which you thought one thing, but the reality is something else."

"She told you we hadn't slept together?" the blonde questioned in mortification.

Pat chuckled. "You say that like it's a bad thing. Would you have rather her say that you had?"

Shaking her head, Elisabeth answered, "You're right. This is a hard conversation to have with you. I don't know what's worse. Admitting that I'm not as experienced as you probably think I am or having you think I am experienced as you think I am."

"Why? You're thirty-two-years-old. I used to be that age. I know what a woman that age is like."

"Not this woman. Mom, exactly how many people do you think I've been with?"

Pat shrugged. "I know you haven't dated much. Half a dozen," she guessed.

Elisabeth shook her head. "Way wrong."

"More?"

"Fewer. Much fewer."

"Really? You can count them on one hand?" her mother asked in surprise.

"I can count them on one finger."

"Really?"

"Really. I haven't had that much experience, but I know from what I have had with Dara that she is right for me that way. We've been close enough many times that I can judge."

"All right. Just out of curiosity though, why the wait? What are you waiting for? A ring?"

"No," Elisabeth said with a laugh. "We're waiting for the election to be over. We are both so caught up in that and on opposite sides. We felt it best to wait until November to venture the rest of the way. I can't wait though. She drives me crazy, Mom, in a way no one else ever has."

"That's a good thing."

"That's a very good thing. I'm already planning the whole thing too. She won't know what hit her that night. It's going to be like nothing else either of us has ever experienced."

"Well, I hope you're right. I take it she has more experience than you?"

The blonde nodded. "Yes, she does, but that's okay. I'm just glad she knows what she's doing. That's what is most important to me," she joked.

Pulling her daughter into a hug, Pat stroked Elisabeth's fair hair. "The two of you are going to be so happy together. I just know it." After a moment of silence between them, Pat asked, "Tonight something struck me as odd, honey. What was going on between Shelby and Leah? They could barely look at each other."

"Oh that? The two of them were experimenting with each other a few months back, but it ended badly. Shelby is still mad at Leah and Dara I think."

"How did Dara play a part?"

"She didn't really. It was Leah's decision to end it, but Shelby blames Dara anyway."

"That's too bad. I thought I saw them sneaking longing glances at each other when they thought no one was watching. Do you think they can work it out?"

"I don't know. It's up to them. I don't think they've even seen each other in several months until today. I hope they can at least be on friendly terms again. I don't want that kind of trouble between Dara's family and Shelby."

"I'm sure they'll work it out in their own time, sweetie."

"I hope so. I just want them both to be happy."

"So do I, Elisabeth, so do I."

Dara sighed as she looked up at Elisabeth's house from the street. It was late on Sunday night in mid-September, and she had just received a call from Shelby a little earlier. The blonde had said something was wrong with Elisabeth and that she should come to the house as soon as she could. Since her lover had gone to North Carolina with the President and several members of his campaign staff for a working weekend getaway, the brunette wondered what could possibly be wrong other than the fact that her girlfriend had returned a day before she was scheduled. She knew whatever it was had to have been serious though, because her relationship with Shelby had been strained since Leah broke up with her, and they had hardly had a civilized conversation since. For Shelby to have called her, something had to be amiss. Taking a deep breath, Dara picked up the roses she had bought for her girlfriend from the passenger's seat and got out of her jeep. She made her way slowly up to the house and knocked. Shelby answered it after a moment.

"Dara, I'm glad you're here. Elisabeth's upstairs in her room, and she refuses to come out and talk

to me."

"She won't say what's wrong?"

"No. She's just been up there sobbing. I didn't know what else to do, so I called you."

"Thank you for calling me, Shelby. That was the right thing," the taller woman said before heading up the stairs to her lover's room. She knocked softly on the door before opening it.

"I told you to go away, Shelby," Elisabeth growled from somewhere under a mass over covers.

"Honey, Shelby called me. She's upset and didn't know what else to do," Dara said, announcing her presence. Suddenly a blonde head appeared from under the pillows. The younger woman could tell her girlfriend had been crying by her red eyes and swollen features. Moving to the bed, she took a tentative seat and inquired, "Do you want to talk about this?"

"No. I just want to be alone. You're the last person I want to see right now," the shorter woman answered, sticking her head under her pillow again.

Trying not to be hurt by the statement, Dara said, "I brought you some flowers. Why don't I go put them in a vase for you? I'll be right back." Vacating the room, she retreated to the kitchen. Putting the roses in a vase, she headed back upstairs, even more curious as to what was so awry that Elisabeth didn't want to see even her. Going back into the bedroom, she placed the vase on the bedside table. "Here you go. Your favorite."

Blue eyes looked at the flowers and then Dara. "Thank you. They're beautiful."

"You're welcome. Is there anything I can do to help you?" The blonde shook her head.

"Elisabeth, I'm the one you should be able to count on for anything. Whatever it is, I'll help you through it. That's what I'm here for, but you have to tell me first. You'll feel better if you do."

"It's just awful," the blonde sobbed.

"What is?"

"This weekend. Everything went horribly wrong."

"Is that why you're back early?"

"He sent me back."

"George did? Why?"

"Because I screwed up so badly. I could lose my job, Dara."

"What happened, sweetie? What could have gone so wrong?"

"Well, we were all down at the President's farm as you know. On the way down, he and I started talking about horses since that's a pastime of his as well. He invited me to go on a ride with him this morning."

"And?"

"I should have known something was up when I realized it was just the two of us plus one Secret Service agent. The three of us saddled up and took off for a sunrise ride. He and I rode far in front of his agent. We were just talking about the election, and he was telling me his concerns about the way the campaign was going." Elisabeth paused as she tried to formulate her next few sentences. She knew she had to tell Dara what had happened but that it would be incredibly difficult to admit to her lover. The emotions she was still feeling swarmed around her heart, making it difficult to focus on the facts.

Seeing her girlfriend struggling, the brunette sensed something hurtful was looming. Elisabeth had been forthright with her concerning her relationship with the President as much as she could due to the constraints that surrounded her position in the past. However, now looking at the blonde, Dara could see something was indeed amiss. Trying to lend her support though, she softly stated, "It's okay, Elisabeth. I'm here. Take your time."

"We came to this stream on his property, and he got off his horse, so I did the same. We were just standing there under this oak tree talking, and suddenly things started getting very personal."

"How?"

"He put his arms around me and started nuzzling my hair. I was so uncomfortable."

"I thought you had put an end to that," Dara mentioned.

The blonde shook her head. "There hadn't been any opportunity to talk about it, and he hadn't made any advances of that sort for some time, so I thought he had changed his mind."

"Sounds like that wasn't the case though."

"Not at all."

"So what did you do?"

Shaking her head, Elisabeth pulled the covers up over herself as she admitted, "I panicked."

"What does that mean?" the taller woman asked in confusion.

"I didn't know what to do, Dara. I thought I had it in me to confront him, but in those first few moments I was scared. I kept thinking about my job and the mission."

"So what happened?" the younger woman inquired, suddenly not liking the direction of the conversation.

Knowing she had to confess all that had taken place, Elisabeth's tears began anew. She had never wanted to betray the love she felt for Dara, but she felt as if she had done just that by her failure to act in time. "I can't," she cried.

Those words assured Dara that she wasn't going to like what was coming next. In fact, she had an inclination of Elisabeth's ensuing news, but she still didn't know how much damage had been inflicted to her girlfriend or to her own heart. Recognizing that she had to know everything, she prodded, "Tell me what happened, Elisabeth."

Elisabeth looked at her bedroom door. At that moment she couldn't look into the dark eyes she loved. She didn't want to see the sadness that would plague those eyes when she confessed what she had done. She didn't even want to admit it, but she knew she had to be honest with Dara. It was what the younger woman deserved. In almost a whisper, she began, "He kissed me. In fact, we kissed for quite a few minutes. The whole time I kept thinking about the reason I was there, but then he started unbuttoning my blouse and kissing down the side of my neck. When he touched me, I freaked, Dara. At that moment I realized nothing was worth giving my body to a man I hate. He doesn't deserve me. You're the only one who can touch me, and I quickly let him know he had crossed the line. That's when all hell broke loose."

The thought of someone else touching her beloved shattered her heart, but Dara knew Elisabeth had her reasons. Seeking to be supportive even in her own pain, she quietly asked, "What happened when you said no?"

"We started to argue. I told him that we couldn't have that kind of relationship that my heart belonged to someone else, and I couldn't be with him. He got angry and even more aggressive toward me."

"Did he force himself on you?"

"No. He just grabbed me by the arms and shook me. He knows about us, Dara. He said he's known all along, and he was mad that I lied to him. Then he said that if I didn't want to be outed that I would do what he wanted."

"Sounds like coercion to me."

"I said no, but he still tried, so I slapped him," she admitted.

Surprised at that comment, Dara looked at her lover seriously. "You what?"

"I slapped him."

"You slapped the President of the United States? You're damn lucky you weren't shot on the spot. Did Secret Service see you do that?"

The blonde nodded. "They saw the whole thing. I cut his lip with the ring I was wearing at the time. I told him his behavior was not becoming of the most powerful man in the world and that I would not do anything that would change the way you felt about me. I told him you were my whole world, and there was nothing that could change that. He told me to go home, that he'd deal with me later. I'm scared, Dara. I don't know what's going to happen now."

The brunette nodded in understanding. Her girlfriend has just stood up to the President and now faced an uncertain future. "Well, look at it this way. He can't fire you. If he does he's looking at a huge sexual harassment and discrimination lawsuit. He can't really out you, because if he does that he opens the door to your public response, which could be ugly. The election is only two months away, and this could explode in his face."

"Although this is the kind of thing that could land me dead in the Potomac," the blonde added.

Dara nodded. "I won't let that happen, though. Your choices here are limited. Perhaps resigning might be your best option."

"That's the last thing I want to do, Dara."

"Well, he's going to force you out. You've lost his trust, Elisabeth. The game is over. Getting out now hopefully will save you trouble down the road."

"But what would I do? I need a job. Where am I going to find one? And what would I tell people? I'm leaving the campaign before the election is over. That's going to look horrific on my resume, Dara."

"Not if you start working for the other side. Elisabeth, think about this logically. I know it's hard right now, because you're so upset with him but think about your options. Perhaps a deal can be negotiated in which you leave and his secrets get buried under a big pile of money. It would support you at least until you got another job."

"That's blackmail, but maybe I should think about it that way. Breaking this story would almost ensure his downfall, though. That's what I've wanted all along."

Dara shook her head. "I'm not going to let you do it, baby. I won't let you take on that responsibility. Don't put yourself in the firing line like that. It's not worth it. The election is not worth being labeled for the rest of your life."

"Not to mention that it won't look good for your career either," the blonde stated.

"That's not my concern as much as your happiness. You can't ever be truly happy again if you do this. People will always know you, and some people will always despise you for the rest of your life. I know you don't want that kind of attention."

"You're right. I don't, but I'd been willing to do it if it meant the end of him."

"He will meet his end in his own time. Don't sacrifice yourself."

Silence prevailed between them for several minutes. Finally though Elisabeth sighed. "Thank you for being here, Dara. I do feel better. I felt horrible about what happened, and I thought for sure you'd be upset too."

Dropping her head forward, the brunette sighed. "To be honest, Elisabeth, it does hurt. I'm not going to pretend it doesn't. However, I know your heart, and I believe that you love me as much as I do you. This was a job, and you did it to the best of your ability. Yes, it hurts that the man I hate so much has had access to you in ways that only I should, but I'm proud of you for standing up for yourself. I'm sure I'll get over this in time." Knowing that was as positive a response as she could expect from the taller woman, Elisabeth held out her hand to Dara. When the younger woman took it, the blonde pulled her over onto the bed, and they curled up in each other's embrace. After another lull in conversation, Dara said, "You know, I've wanted to mention this to you before, but I didn't want to do it until the election is over. However, since things have changed though, it's worth mentioning."

"What's that?"

"A job prospect for you."

"What kind of job prospect?"

"Do you remember my friend Allison Holladay? She was at the CF event we went to."

"Yeah, I think so. You went to Hollins together?"

"Yeah. She's the executive director of an international human rights non-profit. They're based out of D.C. Well, Allison is looking for another attorney for their counsel. It would be a significant raise over the DOJ. I've already mentioned you to her, and she's quite interested in meeting. You would be a great candidate with all your civil rights background."

"So would you."

"Well, I'm not necessarily looking for a position right now. I'm happy where I am at the moment. You, on the other hand, are a free agent, and anyone should feel honored to get you. It's a good fit, Elisabeth, and I think you'd be happy there."

"But the non-profit sector is notoriously bad when it comes to salary. How much of a raise could it really be?"

"Allison brings in six figures as the director. She told me privately that they are looking around the low 90s for an attorney. Of course there are other benefits on the table as well."

"Wow. How can they afford that?"

"Private donation. The Chairman of the Board funds most of it himself. He has money and no family. It's what he wants to do for his legacy."

"And you're sure you don't want that position?"

"Well, we talked about it, but she shared some information with me that makes me want to hold off personally."

"Which is?"

"They are going to move the home office to New York City and have D.C. as a satellite. Right now it's the other way around. The Chairman feels that would help their international exposure, because the organizations they work with most are based out of New York, but she disagrees. She thinks there is better lobbying opportunity here. Nevertheless, she wants to remain the director of the home office, so she's going to go. However, she wants to make sure the right person is in the director position in D.C. That's where I come in, because she and I would be working extremely close together."

"Would that make you my boss?"

"I suppose, but we wouldn't have to see each other all the time. We'd both be traveling and stuff."

"But what about your career aspirations of being in political office?"

"Well, the way I look at it, I can delay that for a few years. Being the executive director, I would be able to reach out to even more people. I'd make even more of an impact than I am as a counsel member at the HRC. I'd be running my own show. Besides if we're going to have a family, we need a good income stream. We can't live in my parents' basement or share a house with Shelby forever. I'd want a place of our own for our children. It's a good move all around, Elisabeth."

The older woman nodded. "It sounds that way. When are they looking to fill the position?"

"I told her you wouldn't be available until after the election. Your position is open until it's filled. However, they are taking their time and interviewing lots of candidates. However, she's made it clear that she'll wait to talk to you before making a decision. As for the director's position, they aren't moving the office until next fall."

"What's going to happen to the current New York office director?"

"He's resigning."

"I suppose I should at least entertain the idea."

"We both would like it if you did. I wouldn't ask this of you if I thought it was the wrong thing. I know you and Allison would work well together, and you have the skills she wants. When the

time comes, if I'm chosen to replace her, you and I will be able to handle working together just fine, I think."

"All right. I guess I'll talk to her about it, but I want to wait until things are resolved with George first. If he wants to keep me, I want to stay, Dara. It would look bad for both of us to part ways now."

"I want you to do whatever you think is best, honey. I'll stand by you."

"Thank you. I appreciate that more than you know."

Later that night once Elisabeth had fallen asleep, Dara quietly got out of bed and went into the bathroom. She took off her clothes and started the shower in order to try to relax her tense frame. The whole situation with Elisabeth and the President had taken its toll on her body. The stress made her muscles and head ache. Standing under the warm spray, the brunette just stood there for a long time thinking about her beloved in the arms of someone else. The image of it in her mind demolished her heart. Even as much as she knew of the responsibility Elisabeth carried on her shoulders, Dara couldn't get past the fact that her girlfriend had allowed someone else so intimately close to her. Dara tried to rationalize it to herself, but her heart refused to justify it. Unable to suppress her pain, she started to cry. The woman she loved, the one she wanted to spend the rest of her life with had betrayed her heart, and it didn't matter that Dara understood why. Her feelings couldn't differentiate Elisabeth's devotion to her mission and the violation of her undying love.

Suddenly her heart started to question whether or not the blonde was truly the one she was meant to be with, especially when they had agreed to put an end to the sexual game the older woman and the President had begun. Dara felt misled that such a relationship had not quickly been snuffed before things got out of hand. Knowing she was being irrational about her feelings, she tried to pull herself together, but it was impossible. The damage had been done, and she wasn't sure she would be able to move beyond it. Once her shower was complete, Dara went back into the bedroom. She was restless but didn't want to wake Elisabeth after all the effort it took to get her to relax, so she sat in a chair across the room and watched her lover sleeping until she eventually dozed off herself.

The following morning the older woman awoke alone in bed. Sitting up she looked around her room, but there was no sign of the brunette attorney except for a note saying she had to leave and would check on her later that day. Knowing she had a stressful day ahead of her as well, she reluctantly got out of bed. She knew she would have to face the President who would decide her fate. She only hoped she would be able to win his trust again and stay on the campaign until the end, but she wasn't quite sure if it was possible.

By the time the blonde arrived at her office, there was a message that her presence was requested by the President at noon without exception. Recognizing she had no choice, she made her way over to his office to meet her destiny. When she arrived, she was escorted into the Oval Office where he was sitting behind his desk. When he looked up at her and took off his reading glasses, Elisabeth almost felt sorry for him for a moment. He still had a swollen lip from where she had

hit him the day before, but she had been amused when she heard the news report of his riding accident to cover for the cracked lip she had given him in her anger.

"Elisabeth, I've asked you here to discuss your behavior yesterday."

"Yes, sir."

Standing from his chair, he rounded the desk and took a seat on the edge of it. Crossing his arms across his chest, he said, "You were right. I was out of line. I apologize for my behavior."

"Excuse me?" the blonde questioned in confusion.

"Elisabeth, I don't know what possessed me to act the way I did yesterday mornin'. I guess I just let my feelings get in the way of my responsibilities. Contrary to what you might think, I'm not that man. I might run the most powerful country in the world, but I had no right to do what I did."

"Mr. President, I'm not sure what to say."

"Say you'll accept my apology."

Elisabeth shrugged. "It depends."

"On what?"

"What's going to happen now? Am I fired?" He shook his head. "Are you going to out me for your campaign?" Once again he shook his head. "Then what?"

"I want you to resign, Elisabeth, of your own accord and with a generous severance package."

"And if I don't want to?"

"You don't really have a choice."

"Oh, I think I do, Mr. President. You sexually assaulted me, and you're discriminating against me right now, because I'm a lesbian."

"Elisabeth, I don't want to get involved in a lawsuit here, and I don't want my wife to know about this. I'm askin' you resign for both our benefit. I just can't keep you on. You serve no purpose to me now. Now I'm goin' to write a number down and hand it to you. This is my only offer."

Elisabeth watched him move to the other side of the desk and take out a pen. Quickly he wrote something on a plain piece of paper and folded it before extending it to her. "There better be quite a few zeros on this," she commented, holding the sheet in her hand. "I don't take to kindly to being bought, sir."

"Everyone has their price. I think this is yours."

Curious to the amount written, the blonde unfolded the paper and looked at it. "This is outright bribery."

"No. It's your severance package," he corrected. "I suggest you take it."

Sighing Elisabeth weighed her options. She knew she was being purchased at that moment. He wanted her silence, and he was willing to well pay for it. For a moment she thought about the consequences to accepting such an offer. It was true they could both pretend it was severance, but she knew differently. However, if she did take it, the charade would finally be over, and she could go on with her life. She could file her final report with Chad and then spend the time she wanted with Dara. The thought of the brunette made her smile. All she really wanted was to be with the taller woman, and that outweighed everything else. Nodding her head, she said, "Fine. I'll take your severance offer if you do something for me."

"What's that?"

"I want a glowing letter of reference. Then once I have that, I want us to pretend we don't even know each other. All relationships are severed."

"Agreed. You'll have your reference letter by the end of the week as well as the severance payment as promised pending a few legal documents."

"Very well. I'll remain in my office until everything is settled."

"No. You will pack up immediately. You'll be paid your salary through the end of the campaign plus what we discussed, but I want you gone today."

"Fine. I want to make one more thing clear, sir. This is never to be spoken of again. I don't want this to see light if Dara or I ever run for office. If it does, I will make you suffer."

"Is that a threat?"

"It's a fact, Mr. President."

"Fine. Dara's and your careers are safe. They fall under the agreement. Now there's somethin' I want to know, Elisabeth. Why did you lie to me about Dara?"

"Because I wanted privacy. Contrary to your political policy, who shares my bed has very little to do with the way I perform my job. All the gay Republicans have left you, sir, because of the initiative for the Constitutional ban. I stayed, because I needed the opportunity, but I didn't want to be used by you as a campaign ploy." He nodded. "Now answer something for me, sir. There are other ways to resolve my dismissal. Why choose this one?" she questioned, waving the paper with her severance offer on it.

"Because I like you, Elisabeth, always have. You've held a soft spot with me since we met. You remind me of my wife when we were younger. You have a brilliant future ahead of you, and I want to see you utilized for the good of the Republican Party. I can't see that come to pass if we don't end it this way."

Realizing that he had never figured out her true intentions, Elisabeth just nodded. "I suppose that's true."

The President moved around to the other side of his desk again and opened the top drawer. "Here. Take these with you. I don't need them any more," he stated, thrusting an envelope at her. "Now it's time for you to go. I want your resignation at the same time you sign the papers."

Knowing her time was over, the blonde nodded her head and without a word retreated from his office. She waited until she was on the street again before opening the envelope he had handed her. Seeing photographs of Dara and her, she gasped in surprise. She recognized where all of them were taken and wondered just how long he had really known about her involvement with Dara, because many of the pictures dated back to the early summer. Quickly stuffing them in her briefcase, Elisabeth sighed. She had been fired, and yet she still had gained quiet a bit financially in the process. The thought of being bought off put an ill feeling in her stomach, but she realized she had been spared much more painful things by taking the money. She could have met a grim fate, but instead she left him with the impression she was still on his side even if she no longer could work with him. The ultimate ruse had been successful even if it had come to a premature end. She only hoped that by taking a deal with him, she had not sabotaged any of Dara's or her future career prospects. That was her main concern. She was letting the President go after having tried so hard to catch him, and she would have no recourse should he ever come back with accusations against Dara or her. However, she knew she would have to believe in his word just as he apparently believed in hers, but if there was any solace in that, it was that he had never gone back on a promise that she had known.

Heading back to her office Elisabeth packed up her belongings. She could see other employees eyeing her curiously as she did so, but she didn't pay them any mind. Instead she just focused on her task, placing all her personal effects into a box that had been lying around the office. She hadn't put much in when she started, so she was ready in a short amount of time. With her belongings packed away, she left her office, closing the door behind her. As cheerfully as she could she said good bye to those co-workers that were around before stepping out on the street a free woman.

The first thing she decided to do was to tell Dara what had happened, so she hailed a cab to go to her girlfriend's office. However, when she arrived she was told that Dara had not come to work that day due to a family situation. Wondering what was going on, she called up to her lover's house. Leah answered the phone. "Leah, hey, it's Elisabeth. I was looking for Dara. She's not at work."

"No. She's up in Philadelphia actually. Justin's in the hospital."

"What? When did this happen?"

"He went in this morning."

"Was this planned?"

"We found out about it late last week. Dara went up to help out at the hospital for a few days, because Tom was going to be in New York on important business until Tuesday. It's her turn."

"When will she be back?"

"Probably not until Thursday or so. That's when I'm planning to go up."

"What hospital is he in?"

"Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. You want the number?"

"Can you tell me how to get there? I want to go up."

"Yeah. Sure."

"Great. I'm not in a place where I can take directions down now. Will you call and leave them on my voicemail at home?"

"Yeah. No problem. She'll be glad to see you, Elisabeth. Something was wrong with her when I saw her this morning, and I don't think it was Justin."

Dara spent the entire day with Justin and her sister-in-law at the hospital. "Are you sure you're all right, Dara? You don't seem like yourself," Clara asked.

The brunette shrugged. "I'm not quite myself, Clara, but I don't really want to talk about it now."

"Does it have to do with a certain blonde?" Dara nodded. "Problems?"

"Yeah. A big problem actually and I don't even know if I can get past it," she admitted.

"What? How can that be? You two looked so in love when we last saw you."

The brunette looked over at the bed to make sure her nephew was asleep. Safe in the knowledge that he was, she said, "I can't even tell you the details, because it's just so complicated. However, she did something that really hurt me. I know why she did it, and I can accept why she did it. If I were her, I probably would have done the same thing. My mind can come to grips with the incident, but my heart is a completely different story, Clara. She did the right thing for her career, but it still hurt. My head tells me it's nothing and my heart says otherwise."

Taking her by the hand, Clara gave it a supportive squeeze. "I'm sorry, Dara. What's going to happen now?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. I thought she was the one. I wanted to marry her, Clara. My head still does."

"But your heart?"

"It's not as sure."

"Well, there's always a possibility you'll get over this in time. She's a great woman, Dara."

"I know, but that doesn't make it any better right now."

After a few minutes of quiet between them, Clara looked at her watch. "Why don't you go back to the house now? It's after five already, and you're going to need to be fresh for in the morning."

"Are you sure? You're going to be here all night. I can stay a little longer."

"No. Go home. There's a good bottle of wine in the refrigerator. Open that and then sit out on the porch and enjoy the evening."

Dara nodded her head. "All right. If you need me though, just call. You know I'm here for you."

"I know, Dara."

Getting up from her chair, Dara went to the bed and kissed Justin on the forehead. She smiled at her sister-in-law and then left the room. Heading back to Tom and Clara's house, she went into the kitchen to find that bottle of wine. Opening it she took a glass from the cabinet and settled herself on the front porch. She wasn't ready to talk to Elisabeth just yet even though she was curious as to how her lover's day had gone. She felt as if she needed some time to gather her thoughts before making that call.

When Elisabeth arrived at the hospital, she took a deep breath when she got off the elevator at Justin's floor. She hadn't called ahead of time, so she wasn't sure how her presence would be received. However, she knew that Dara would need her whether she admitted it or not. With that in mind, she headed down the corridor to Justin's room. She could hear him talking to someone as she approached. Peeking her head through the crack in the door, she knocked.

"Miss Elisabeth!" he exclaimed when he turned toward her.

"Hi, Justin. How are you?" she questioned with a smile even though she could feel her heart tearing at the sight of him there. He was in pajamas with a large IV attached to his arm. However, he appeared to be in good spirits. "Hi, Clara."

"Hello, Elisabeth. This certainly is a pleasant surprise. Come on in."

Going into the room, the blonde extended a wrapped box to Justin. "Here. I brought you

something just in case you got bored."

Excitedly he ripped into the present. "Cool!" he exclaimed at the GameBoy. "Thanks, Miss Elisabeth! Show me how to play it."

Doing what was requested of her, the blonde took a tentative seat on the bed next to him and placed a game cartridge into the slot. He watched intently as she played the first round to show him how it worked before relinquishing the game to him. Once he was rapt by it, the attorney turned to Clara. "Sorry I didn't call first. Leah told me today that Justin was here, so I just came up. I hope that's okay."

"It's wonderful. He's always glad to see you. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule. I know it must have been difficult with the campaign and all."

Elisabeth nodded as she moved from the bed to a chair. "I'm not working on the campaign any more," she confessed.

"Really? Why not?"

Cracking a smile Elisabeth answered, "He's not the man he used to be. I'm starting to realize that Dara might be right. Politics is like driving a car. If you want to go forward, you put it in D, and if you want to go in reverse, you put it in R. We've been in reverse for four years too long."

Laughing lightly Clara said, "That sounds like a classic Dara quip."

"Speaking of her, where is she?"

"I sent her home to get some sleep. She looked exhausted. I can give you directions to the house if you want to go over."

"Maybe later. Right now I just want to visit with Justin if that's okay."

"It's fine by me. If we can tear him away from that game, maybe he'd like to give you a tour. That's his favorite activity to do with visitors," she mentioned.

The next several hours Elisabeth stayed at the hospital with Clara and Justin. The little boy was enthralled by her company and showed her all around his hospital floor, including the game room where he would sometimes play during the day. Elisabeth did her best never to let her smile falter, but it was difficult to see all the sick children and their families who resided on the floor. It made her heart ache for them and at the thought of Justin ever being so ill. That evening when it was time for his physical therapy, Clara and Elisabeth just chatted while it took place. As usual though he fell asleep, leaving the two women just talking.

"Will he be asleep for the rest of the night now?" the attorney questioned, consulting her watch.

"He should be. Why don't you go back to our house now? It's starting to get late, and I'm sure

you're tired."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to stay here until Dara relieves me in the morning. Someone has to stay here overnight. Tom and I usually alternate, but since he won't be back until tomorrow morning, I thought it best to take the night shift. Let me get you directions to the house now. I'm sure Dara is still awake."

The brunette was still sitting on the front porch that night just staring at the stars when a car pulled up in front of the house. Instantly Dara recognized it, but she was baffled at the sight of the gray Honda. Seeing the driver's door open, she gasped as her girlfriend emerged from the car. The blonde pulled a bag from the backseat and then started up the walk. Her eyes quickly found the brunette's.

"Elisabeth, what are you doing here?" she asked, standing and moving down the sidewalk. She took her lover's bag and shouldered it.

"Leah told me Justin was in the hospital. I wanted to come help," she answered. "Why didn't you tell me he was going in?"

"I wanted to, but you were so upset last night. I didn't want to make you worse. I was going to call you. Come in," she suggested as they went into the house. Leaving Elisabeth in the living room, Dara said, "Let me just drop your bag in our room. Be right back."

The older woman watched her girlfriend go. She could tell something was bothering the taller woman, but she couldn't quite figure out what it was, so she decided to wait and see if the brunette would reveal it given some time. Taking a seat on the sofa, Elisabeth just waited for her lover's return. A moment later Dara was taking a seat next to her.

"So, I take it you saw Justin," the younger woman stated.

The blonde nodded. "I went by the hospital. It was harder than I expected."

"I know. It's never easy when you start thinking about why he's there. And the other children are enough to rip out your heart. That's the floor for the terminally ill children. Most of them don't go home," the younger woman whispered. "It's hard to see him there, because you realize that he really is sick, but you have to remain strong."

"I felt the same way. I just wanted to cry the whole time I was there."

"The worst part about it is that it doesn't get easier," Dara murmured. "Each time he's there, it's like we lose a little bit of him, and we'll never get it back. He'll never get it back. He spends more time in the hospital in a year than most people spend in their life."

Sensing that her lover was struggling and knowing she was as well, Elisabeth slipped her arms

around Dara. Instantly the embrace was returned. "He's going to be with us a long time, Dara," she said.

"I know, and we're lucky for that. I just don't like seeing him suffer, and I don't like seeing those other children suffering."

The blonde nodded in agreement before they both fell silent. Minutes passed before she decided to share her own news with her lover. "I saw George today."

"What happened?"

"I resigned. We both thought it best, and he gave me a generous severance package. It's over, Dara. I'm a free woman."

"Finally he did something smart," the younger woman commented.

"Yeah. I can't believe it's over. This is the moment we've been waiting for, and it's finally here. I was so excited about it until I found out about Justin. That kind of knocked the wind out of my sail."

"It has a way of doing that," Dara agreed.

"Of course it didn't change the fact that the first person I wanted to be with was you. It's only in your arms that the world feels right," Elisabeth confessed.

Hearing those words, Dara contemplated their meaning. She too felt that way about the blonde. It was the shorter woman's embrace that made her feel safe and loved. She wished that Elisabeth had not hurt her with the sexual encounter with the President, but the mistake had been made. Dara tried to focus on the fact that her girlfriend had put an end to his advances and admitted her feelings for the taller woman. Even more, the blonde had just done something that no other women she had ever dated had. She came to Justin when he was in need. Elisabeth had immediately come to his side out of her love for the little boy, and that simple act made the brunette realize that nothing else mattered. The older woman had proven her worth through her actions, and it left Dara with the conclusion that Elisabeth Gunter truly was the woman she wanted to be with the rest of her life.

Cupping her lover's face, Dara tilted it up until their gazes met. Gazing deeply into blue eyes, she sighed. "Thank you for being here, Elisabeth. I love you."

"I love you too, Dara," the blonde whispered before their mouths met gently.

Moaning into the kiss, Dara let the feeling of love wash over her. Several moments passed with them trading tender kisses, but then the brunette pulled back slightly. Meeting blue eyes again, she whispered, "I need you, Elisabeth. I need to be close to you tonight. I need to touch you."

Elisabeth's heart sped up at the admission. The thing she wanted most was about to come true.

Dara was asking to make that final physical commitment, and she was more than willing to surrender to the pleasure she knew would soon follow. Giving a small grin, the shorter woman seductively murmured, "I'm yours, Dara." The simple submission to her desires by the older woman further fueled the dark-haired attorney's passion. However, Dara knew this moment shouldn't be rushed. She needed a tenderly methodical pace to be sated. Trying to show that, she leaned in to catch her lover's lips again. Elisabeth sighed into the exchange. It was so gentle, but she could feel the fervor just underneath the surface. Breaking away slightly she questioned softly, "Do you want to go to bed?"

"Desperately," Dara admitted. "But I don't want to rush this. Could we just stay here for a little while? Just let me touch you. I promise we'll make it to the bedroom soon enough."

"Fine. Whatever you need, baby," the older woman answered, giving herself to her lover's want.

Dara felt her desire grow at Elisabeth's willingness to accept her wishes. Gently maneuvering her girlfriend across her lap so they were face to face, the younger attorney leisurely began to kiss along her lover's neck as her hands found the buttons on the blonde's suit blazer. She worked them open slowly before pushing the black jacket from Elisabeth's shoulders, revealing a cream-colored camisole. Her hands roamed lightly over the silk garment, taking in the feel of her girlfriend's body trembling slightly under her hands. Dara smiled into the blonde's neck at the sure sign of Elisabeth's desire. She loved how much this woman craved her touch. It always spurred her own ardor even more. Dipping her head, the brunette licked a path down her lover's chest into her cleavage as her hands came to her breasts. Instantly Elisabeth clutched to the back of her head as she cried out lightly.

"Dara, that feels so good," the blonde moaned, raking her hands through dark hair. She had imagined this moment so many times before, but all her fantasizes failed in comparison to her lover's caress. Everything she ever wanted from the younger woman, she was finally going to get, and the thought of their bodies being one started a fire in her that was quickly flaming out of control at the gentleness her girlfriend was showing.

Going with her emotions, Dara leisurely pulled the camisole from her lover's skirt and over the blonde's head, leaving her in only a white lace and satin bra from the waist up. Immediately her head was pressed back into the older woman's chest. "Elisabeth," she murmured. "You are so beautiful."

Elisabeth could feel her heart respond to those words. She felt beautiful right then, more than she ever had in her life. "I love you, Dara," she said softly.

"I love you too, darling, more than I could ever say." The taller woman's hands ran over the contours of the blonde's back until they reached the zipper of her skirt. She began to undo it, but her girlfriend stopped her.

"Here. Let me help with that," she offered, slipping off Dara's lap. Elisabeth stood in front of her lover as she let her skirt fall to the floor. She could see the brunette gasp at what she had on under her conservative business attire. She smiled devilishly. "Do you like that?" she inquired

needlessly as she resumed her position straddled across Dara's lap.

The brunette could only nod as her hands went to her girlfriend's legs. Her hands traced over the garters that were holding up the blonde's thigh-high hosiery. "You look so sexy," she acknowledged. Her hands ran around the older woman's outer thighs and then up the back of them. She squeezed the shorter woman's bare backside gently as her fingers played with the thin material of her girlfriend's white thong. "I never expected this."

"Well, I like to dress like this sometimes. I was in a sensual mood this morning, because I was thinking about you. On the way up here today, I kept thinking about your hands on me, and I was getting so excited at the idea of you finally making me yours," she murmured sexily, nipping her lover's ear. "I can't wait any longer, Dara. Please. Make love to me. I want to feel you inside of me."

Dara groaned loudly at the admission. She had never heard anything more inviting in her life. She desperately wanted to give Elisabeth what she desired, because it was what she yearned for as well. Knowing she would do what the older woman asked, the brunette allowed the shorter woman to start undressing her. Her cotton dress shirt was unbuttoned with methodical care as Elisabeth kissed along her jaw. When it was open, she sat up enough to let the older woman take it off. Her black bra was next. Both of them groaned as Elisabeth dipped her head to Dara's left breast, taking the crest of it into her mouth as her hands continued to undress the taller woman. Her belt was out of its loops within moments, and then her pants opened. Feeling the blonde's manicured fingers slip between her legs, Dara shuddered. "Oh God. Elisabeth, please," she begged.

"Dara, take me to bed now," Elisabeth demanded softly.

Just as the brunette was about to do as what was asked of her, a surprised yelp broke them out of their reverie. Both of them jerked their heads towards the sound to see Dara's brother shielding his face. "My eyes. They're melting," he teased.

Instantly Dara took her shirt and managed to cover as much of Elisabeth's bare body from her brother's sight as possible before asking, "What are you doing here? You're not supposed to be home."

He waved off his sister's comment, stating, "I can't even talk to you right now. I've just been blinded by a sight I never wanted to see," he quipped. "Please get decent before you try to talk to me. How much therapy do you really want to pay for?" he joked, scampering from the room.

Dara laughed off her uneasiness before cupping the back of her girlfriend's head. Elisabeth had ducked into the crook of her neck when Tom had appeared, from embarrassment of being caught by family, the brunette guessed. "It's okay. He's gone."

"I can't believe this. Clara said we were going to be alone tonight."

"I know. He certainly knows how to ruin a mood, doesn't he?" The blonde nodded, not quite

meeting her lover's eyes. "I better go do some damage control. Why don't you get ready for bed? I'll show you to our room," she suggested. With a nod the older woman slid off her lover's lap and quickly put on Dara's shirt to cover herself. The taller woman retrieved the rest of their belongings from the floor and then led the way to the guestroom where they were staying. Grabbing a t-shirt for herself and then leaving the blonde there, Dara went to the master bedroom and knocked on the open door.

Tom looked up from where he stood at the dresser and gave a crooked grin. "What? You're finished so soon?" he teased.

"How do you expect me to carry on now that you're home?"

"Sorry to have broken the mood there. You two looked so cozy, not that I ever needed to see that."

"I could have lived without it as well. Hopefully you weren't too scarred by that," she jested.

"Fortunately for the both of us, I only got a glimpse of that fine looking woman of yours. However, what she was doing at that moment, I want to try to forget. No brother needs to see that much of his sister's sex life." Dara nodded in agreement. "Could I ask you something?" he questioned after a brief pause.

"What's that?"

He gave a mischievous smile. "How in the hell did you get her to dress like that for you? Talk about hot. Lingerie, stockings, heels and nothing else. Men would die for a woman dressed that way. I don't think I could get Clara to do that for all the money in the world."

Dara laughed lightly. "If I tell you a secret, you have to be able to keep it."

"You know I will."

"She dresses like that, because she wants me badly. It's an enticement to get me to sleep with her. It's just a seducement that will probably fade in its own time. I'm sure two years from now after we're married and have had kids, she won't do that. However, for now I'm enjoying the ride and putting her off as long as possible. That's my secret, Tom. You get the women to come to you. You make them so desperate for you that they'll do anything."

"You mean, you two haven't done the deed?"

Dara shook her head. "Trust me, Tom. Postponing things makes it so much better. It's hotter that way."

"Damn. The restraint it takes to resist a woman like that. Are you sure you aren't straight? I mean I wouldn't be able to do it," he teased.

"Did I look straight when you walked in on us?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Definitely not. You looked like you had given in to her desires," he said.

"And I had. Had you not come home, I'd be in bed with a beautiful woman right now. As it is, I'm stuck in here talking to you. Sometimes life just isn't fair," she pouted playfully. Changing the subject she inquired, "What are you doing home anyway? You weren't supposed to be back until tomorrow."

"I didn't want to stay away from Justin. I prefer it if I did nights at the hospital. I never can sleep when Clara is there overnight. Just something about it makes it hard. I'm actually going to go up there tonight. I just need to pack some new things."

Dara nodded. "Well, since I'm here you'll only have to have an eight-hour shift."

"Good, because I'm going to be tired tomorrow. I just know it. Why don't I take the night shift? Clara can have the morning, so she can be there for all the usual tests, and then you and Elisabeth can take the evening."

"That sounds fine to me."

"How long is Elisabeth going to be here?"

"I have no idea. We hadn't talked about that. Personally I'm just amazed she came at all."

"Me too. That says something about her, Dara."

"It certainly does. It just reconfirms that she is the one for me."

"Well, now that you know that, when do you think you're going to ask her the big question?"

"I'm not sure. Soon though. I guess that means I need to do a little ring shopping."

"Mom helped me when I did it for Clara. I'm sure she'll be more than happy to go with you."

"I'll ask her when I get back then."

Giving her another smile, he suggested, "Why don't you go back to that blonde of yours now? I'm sure she's counting the minutes you've been gone. You two have some fun. Just keep the noise down, so I can't hear you."

"Believe me, after what happened, I'm not going anywhere near Elisabeth while you're in vicinity of this house, but I am getting tired. I'll see you tomorrow."

He nodded. "Good night, Dara. Sleep well."

"You try to as well."

Heading back to the guestroom, the tall woman found her lover in bed already asleep. Dara figured the emotional day had taken its toll on Elisabeth and that she should let the older woman be. Gathering her pajamas, she went into the bathroom to change and get ready for bed. When she was finished, she came back to the bedroom and gently slipped under the covers as to not wake the fair-headed woman next to her. The brunette just looked at her girlfriend for a few minutes, admiring her beauty even in a state of sleep. With feelings from earlier not completely gone, the sight of her beloved began to stir her passion again. She couldn't help but imagine what might have happened had Tom not walked in on them. She envisioned the feeling of Elisabeth's bare frame pressed closely to her own. Just that one thought put her body in sexual frenzy. She needed alleviation in a way she hadn't known it in a long time. Pondering her options for a moment, she figured she could bring herself the relief she needed without waking her sleeping companion, so she softly turned over facing away from the blonde. Carefully Dara began to touch herself in an effort to appease her fervor as her mind conjured up visions of her and the blonde together. The younger woman was so involved in her own fantasy that she didn't realize the shorter woman was awake.

Blue eyes opened at the soft yet heavy breathing. Elisabeth was confused for a moment before realizing that her lover was actually touching herself in their bed. Turned on by the sound, the older woman just listened as Dara tried to hold back a whimper. The sound echoed through her own body. Even though she had already done the same thing before her girlfriend had joined her in bed, the sounds of Dara bringing herself pleasure settled in her heart, especially when she heard the brunette softly whisper her name. Unable to control herself from touching her lover, Elisabeth rolled onto her side toward the younger woman. Dara seemed oblivious to her. Scooting up to spoon behind her, the blonde placed her hand on top of the brunette's on the outside of her pajama shorts. Instantly the taller woman panted in surprise. However, any protest was silenced when the shorter attorney bit Dara's earlobe and she asked, "You need help with that?" She didn't wait for an answer, instead pressing harder, forcing her girlfriend's fingers deeper.

Dara moaned. It felt so good to have the blonde assisting in the process. Deciding to take the offer, the brunette maneuvered the older woman's hand, taking it from between her thighs and placing it on her breast. Instantly Elisabeth seemed to take the unspoken direction and began to fondle the taller woman with a firm but tender touch as her mouth continued to explore the side of the younger woman's neck.

"Tell me, Dara. What are you thinking about right now?" she inquired seductively.

"You," she confessed breathlessly.

"And what am I doing?"

The dark-haired woman groaned at the thoughts running rampant through her head. Conceding her fantasy to the older woman, she admitted, "You're inside me."

Elisabeth moaned at the confession. She hadn't expected it, but it made her heart palpitate harder. In response she groped her lover more firmly, eliciting a small cry from Dara. "I know you're going to feel so good," she murmured. "I can't wait to touch you, Dara. I can't wait to taste you."

The taller woman called out the blonde's name in growing need. It was only moments before Dara reached the summit under their combined efforts. She wanted to scream loudly, but knowing her brother would hear them, she turned her head and sealed Elisabeth's lips in an intense kiss. Her whole body shook from her peak before settling. Pulling away from the shorter woman's mouth, Dara panted for air. "Oh God," she muttered in a shaky voice.

"Are you all right?" Elisabeth asked sweetly, curving her arm around her lover's waist and placing her head on her shoulder.

"That was intense," the brunette admitted.

"Yeah. You seemed to need that," Elisabeth said, softly caressing her beloved's arm.

Turning to look at the blonde in the dark, Dara asked, "Is there something I can do for you in return?"

Elisabeth shook her head. "I already took care of myself while you were talking to Tom."

"Damn. I wanted a chance to please you."

"I am pleased just by being close to you. That's all I need right now."

"Are you sure?"

The blonde nodded. "Just hold me while we fall asleep," she requested.

Dara complied, wrapping her arms around the smaller woman and pulling her closer. They were silent for several minutes until they drifted to sleep. For the next several days Elisabeth stayed with Dara helping take care of Justin and enjoying the time with her girlfriend's family. Finally on Thursday though, it was time to go home. Since they had separate cars, Dara and Elisabeth caravanned together until the blonde turned off on her exit for home. Driving the extra few minutes to her own, the brunette went straight upstairs to her parents' house after dropping her bags in her room.

Her mother was in the kitchen preparing dinner. "Dara, hi. How are you? How's Justin?"

"He's all right. I'm great myself. You'll never believe who came to visit Justin and help out for a few days? Elisabeth."

"Really? I always knew there was something special about that girl. That's so sweet of her."

Dara nodded her head in agreement. "Yeah. She really is something. Listen, Mom. I want to ask

a favor of you."

"What's that?"

Smiling at her mother, the attorney said, "I want you to help me find a ring for Elisabeth."

"A ring? You mean an engagement ring?" she asked hopefully.

"Yes, an engagement ring. Tom said you helped him with Clara's. I need some help with Elisabeth's."

Throwing her arms around her child, Emma hugged her tightly. "Oh, of course I will. This is so exciting! Do you know when you're going to ask yet?"

"Not yet but I was hoping soon. Now that I know this is right, I want to do it as soon as possible."

"Well, just tell me when you can go, and I'll go with you. I already know lots of great places to try."

"I knew you would."

"Oh, my little girl is getting married! I'm so happy for you."

"She has to say yes first, Mom."

"She will. There's no doubt about that."

A few weeks later Dara and Elisabeth were having a quiet evening at Dara's place. They had just finished dinner and were doing dishes when the blonde said, "Dara, I've been meaning to ask you. Since I'm no longer working on the campaign, I was wondering if you wanted to go away for a few days around the election. I think it might be good for us after all the stress it's caused. We can just be alone and work on us. What do you think?"

"That sounds like a great idea. I'd love to go somewhere with you, but we'd have to leave on election day at earliest. I have volunteered to help put up signs the nights before. You can come with me though if you want."

"Maybe."

"So, where do you want to go?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"Well, I'll tell you what. I'll let you plan it. You pick a place and make the reservations. We'll go anywhere you want."

"All right. It's a deal."

Changing the subject the brunette mentioned, "I got an invitation in the mail to both of us from Allison's wife. She's throwing Allison a birthday party. It's over there on the table."

Elisabeth went to pick up the mail in question. Reading it she said, "It's a costume party on Halloween."

"Yeah. Allison was born on Halloween. It's her 29th, so Deborah wanted to do something special. Do you want to go?"

"That sounds like fun. Do you want to go?"

"Yeah. Deborah's parties are always a blast. She's a real party planner. She should have taken that up as her profession."

"What does she do instead?"

"She's a professional student. That woman has more letters after her name than anyone else I know."

"And Allison is okay with that?"

"She doesn't care. Deborah comes from money. Her father is a retired senator. Allison did something that no other woman has ever done at Hollins. She actually won over one of the old school girls. There was a real class divide at the school back then. There were those that had money and those that didn't, and there wasn't a lot of associating between them. Allison was one of those that didn't have money. Well, she had it but lost it when she came out to her family. They disowned her, because she chose the life she wanted to live instead of the one they wanted her to. She broke through the class divide though and charmed her way into Deborah's life. A girl like Deborah wasn't supposed to end up with the first drag king of Hollins."

"Drag king?"

"Yeah. She did that to make money for school. Sometimes you have to do what you have to do. There was a gay club in Roanoke where she performed."

"That's wild. Did you ever go see her?"

"Oh yeah. King Rex was a crowd pleaser."

"King Rex? What kind of a name is that?"

"Her stage name. Trust me, it suited her. She grew up in the South, has family in Texas and Louisiana. It was always one of her childhood fantasies to be the king of Mardi Gras, hence the name King Rex, because Rex was the king of the particular ball with which her family was associated way back in the day. At least that's the way she tells it. If you knew her back in college, it would make more sense. More than that though, Allison had this way about her, still does actually. Perhaps you've noticed it."

Elisabeth shrugged. "What kind of way?"

"Back in school Allison was the lesbian on campus. Women either wanted to be her or sleep with her, which is a little strange given that she wasn't the best-looking woman at school."

"She's attractive enough," the blonde conceded.

"Yeah but she's not perfect either in the looks department. The thing that makes her irresistible to women is her noble charm. She has those southern manners, and she has a way with words that can get any woman out of her clothes. You remember how she flirted with you that night at the CF function?"

"I guess she did a little. Deborah didn't seem to mind though."

"She never does. She's secure in the knowledge that Allison will never leave her. Allison loves to flirt, but her heart belongs to Deborah and always will. They were the couple everyone epitomized. You can just see it in the way they look at each other that the love they have is so incredibly strong. I've always wanted that."

Moving up and wrapping her arms around her lover, Elisabeth stated, "Well, now you have it."

"I certainly do. All right, I'll call Deborah and let her know we're coming."

"Fabulous. Now the hard part is finding an outfit."

Dara nodded in agreement. Redirecting their conversation once again, she casually inquired, "What are you doing tomorrow? I was wondering if you wanted to join me for lunch."

"Actually, I'm supposed to meet the infamous King Rex herself," she teased with a laugh.

"Really? I didn't know you two had set up an interview. That's great. I probably shouldn't have told you all that stuff then," she mentioned. "Wouldn't want to spoil Allison's professional image."

"Oh please. That's nothing. It actually makes me a little less nervous. I know that you two are such good friends. I wouldn't want to get in the way of that if this doesn't go well."

"Impossible. It's going to go great, but even if it didn't, it wouldn't change my relationship with her. I don't just throw decade-old friendships out the window over trivial stuff."

"Well, good. That's what I was concerned about most."

"How about we meet after that then? I'd love to hear all the details."

"Okay. That sounds good. I'll call you when I leave her office." Checking her watch the blonde said, "I hate to do this, but I should probably get going. I have some things to do to prep for tomorrow. I haven't really done my research yet or updated my resume, and I don't want to look like an idiot."

"All right. If you must," the taller woman mumbled. Walking her lover out to the car, Dara embraced her and placed a gentle kiss on her lips. "You'll be great tomorrow. Trust me."

Elisabeth just nodded. "Good night, Dara. Sweet dreams."

"You too. See you tomorrow."

The following day when Elisabeth arrived at Allison's office, she was greeted with a large smile and firm handshake from Dara's old friend. "Elisabeth, I'm so happy we were finally able to get together for this chat," the brunette stated, gesturing the way to her office.

"Me too, Allison. You have quite an exciting organization here."

"I'd like to think so," she answered as she closed the door to her office. "Please have a seat. Could I get you something to drink? Coffee, water, soda?"

"No thank you. I'm fine."

"How's Justin doing? Dara told me he had to go back into the hospital a few weeks ago."

"He's doing better. He was just released last week."

"Good. Glad to hear it. My nephew also has CF, so I understand what it's like. It's never easy to see them sick."

"No, it's not. Dara didn't tell me your nephew also had CF."

"Yeah. He was actually the first in the country to be diagnosed prenatally."

"I've never known anyone else to have it."

"Well, it's the German blood, especially the German Jewish blood. Deborah is German, so it runs all through her family line."

"Interesting. I'm German as well but never knew much about it until I met Dara."

"Most don't. It's the second most common genetic disease in our country, but it doesn't get much attention. Anyway, enough about that. Perhaps we should talk about why you're here. Basically I told Dara that I wanted her on staff, but she seemed to think you were a better match. She's managed to convince me of that fact. It would actually be good press to have a Republican on staff. Most people that work here are on the blue team," she said with a smile.

"That makes sense. Dems are more inclined to social causes."

"Exactly but you have quite the resume of civil rights experience. I think you're a good fit. This meeting is more of a formality, so it looks like I'm weighing all my options. Really I've already made up my mind. I want you on staff, Elisabeth. It's more a matter of whether you think you would be happy here, so ask me anything. I'll give you the best and worst of the organization to see if it's a place for you."

Taken back by Allison's proclamation, the blonde hesitated a moment. She had been prepared for an interview, but the brunette had made it clear she wasn't interested in that. Decided to forge ahead with her questions then, Elisabeth pulled them out and began her own interview of the director.

An hour later Allison smiled at Elisabeth. "Listen, Elisabeth. I know that you need some time to think about this. You won't be able to start until the election is over."

"Actually, I want to take off November and December, Allison."

"Oh, well, that's fine. I want to fill this position by the first of January. I have plenty of qualified people, but I'm giving you first choice. Do you think you'd be able to get me an answer by the election? That's four weeks from now."

The blonde nodded her head. "Yes, I will definitely have an answer for you by then. Thank you for this opportunity, Allison. I really need to talk to Dara before making a final decision."

"I understand. I wouldn't make a decision like this without consulting Deborah."

"Speaking of which, did she tell you that Dara and I will be at the party?"

"No. That's great. I'm so looking forward to it. She always throws me the best parties. She's the best."

Elisabeth nodded in agreement. "The only hard thing is figuring out what costume to wear."

"I'm sure Dara will help you. She always thinks of something brilliant."

"I'm counting on it. Well, I should go. I'm supposed to meet Dara when this is over. She wanted to try to do lunch."

Consulting her watch, the brunette said, "Well, you could still catch a late one. Tell her I said hi

when you see her?"

"Of course."

Standing from her chair, Allison escorted the blonde from her office and back to the reception area. Extending her hand professionally, she said, "I look forward to talking to you soon."

"Likewise. Bye, Allison."

As soon as the blonde attorney stepped out onto the street, she pulled out her cell phone to dial her lover. Dara answered cheerfully. "Dara Rosenthal."

"Hey. How about that lunch, sexy?" she inquired.

"You're finished with Allison already? That was fast."

"Yeah. It was faster than I thought it was going to be. I'd love to tell you all about it. Why don't I come pick you up?"

"Actually, I have another idea," the brunette stated, starting to dig into her briefcase. She pulled out the blonde's engagement ring that she had picked up that morning on her way to work. Opening the box, she gazed at the ring as she said, "Meet me on The Mall in an hour."

"Why The Mall?"

"Just placate me this once."

Instinctively Elisabeth knew her lover was up to something, but she answered, "Fine. Where on The Mall?"

"On the bench by the carousel where we first met."

"Dara, what are you up to?" she pointedly asked.

"Nothing. There's just an exhibit at the Smithsonian I wanted to show you while we were out for lunch," she lied, trying her lover's ring on her own large hand as she thought about what she was about to do. She knew she wanted to catch Elisabeth completely off guard with her proposal in order for it to be a surprise.

"All right. Fine. I'll meet you on the bench, but don't be late. It's chilly out today."

"I'll be there. See you then."

"Yeah. I love you, Dara."

"I love you too. Bye."

Hanging up her phone, the older woman wondered what was going on. Dara seemed so secretive, but she didn't know what the taller woman was up to at the moment. However, she decided she should just leave it alone for the time being. She had more important things to think about like Allison's unexpected job offer.

A little more than an hour later, Dara slowly made her way out of the Smithsonian metro station. Wind caught her dress coat, making her realize her girlfriend was right. It was a rather cold day. Quickly she walked toward the bench where she first met her beloved. She saw Elisabeth in the distance already there reading a book. Diverting her path, Dara went over to one of the street vendors and bought two cups of coffee before continuing on her way. Her mind drifted to the day that they met. Dara had spilled the blonde's coffee all over her work, and from that chance encounter she had found the love of her life. Getting to the bench, she took a seat before the older woman even noticed her, being so involved in her book.

When she looked up though, Dara smiled brightly. "Hi," she greeted, extending the coffee to her girlfriend.

"Hi. What's this for?"

"I still owed you that coffee that I had spilt the day we met," she explained.

Elisabeth laughed lightly at her lover's sentiment. "Thank you."

"So, tell me how things went with Allison."

"She offered me the job."

"Fabulous. What did you say?"

"That I wanted to think about it and talk to you first before making a decision. I told her I'd get back to her in a few weeks."

"Well, what was your first impression?"

"I liked it. I think I'd do well there," she answered, although hesitantly.

Sensing it right away, Dara questioned, "But?"

"I don't want to rush into a decision. There are other things I want to do."

"Such as?"

Elisabeth broke eye contact with her lover and gazed out over the grass. "I'm contemplating where my life should be going personally. There's a part of me that wants to take the position, because it would be great to do something of that magnitude. However, there's another part of me

that wants to get married and start a family. I'm not sure I can do both as well as I would want. Part of me wants to keep making that difference but the other just wants to be the mother of your children," she confessed, meeting the dark eyes she adored.

Dara felt the admission settle deep in her heart. They had talked about such matters before, but at the moment it seemed much more serious than in the past, making her realize this was the right moment to propose. However, before she was ready, she asked, "Which part has the stronger pull on you right now?"

Elisabeth shrugged. "I keep thinking about what my mom said when we were over at your parents' house. The clock is ticking, Dara. I'm thirty-two, almost thirty-three. If not now, when? This position Allison offered me takes real commitment. It will take lots of time and energy. And of course we want to have kids. I want to be with them, not just drop them at daycare everyday, but that would mean us living on one income. I don't want to burden you that way."

Scooting closer to her girlfriend, Dara slid an arm around her shoulders. "If that's what you want, we can make it work. I want to make you happy. If you want to stay at home with the children, I'll support you. I have the means to do that. I'll just take over Allison's old job when she leaves."

"But I know that's not what you necessarily want, Dara. You have a plan for your career, and I want you to stay on it, because that's what will make you happy. You want to run for state congress soon, and I think you should. My severance package is enough to keep us quite comfortable for several years. I'd rather use the money to support our family, so you can follow your dreams if that's what it comes to."

Caught by surprise at the comment, Dara inquired, "And just how much of a severance package did you get? Typically it's one week for every year of service. That's not much."

The blonde shrugged her shoulders. "I didn't want to really tell you the exact figure, because it's outlandish."

"What do you mean? Is it six figures?"

"Seven," the blonde admitted.

"He bought you?" Dara inquired in surprise.

Elisabeth nodded her head shamefully. "Yes," she confessed. "He bought me."

"Why did you let him?"

"Because I wanted my freedom, Dara. It was either this or end up in the Potomac with a bullet in the back of my head. Which would you have chosen?" Elisabeth snipped.

"You're right. Your choices were limited," the younger woman conceded.

"He and I made a deal. He'll never hurt you, Dara. He'll never speak ill of you or me publically. That's part of our agreement."

"Well, at least you covered the bases as well as you could."

"You know the irony of the whole situation is that before I left his office that day, I asked him why he chose to handle things this way. He said it was because he wanted to see me use my talents for the good of the Republican Party. He never realized why I was really there. He still thinks I'm in the red corner."

"Well, under the circumstances I think that is a good thing."

"It is, but it also means I have stay here for a while longer. I hate the party, Dara. I don't want to be a Republican anymore."

"It's only a name, Elisabeth."

"I know, but here I am, the future wife of the Governor of Maryland, and I've taken a bribe from the President of the United States."

"You made a successful severance negotiation. I know he would never contradict that. It's going to be okay, Elisabeth. I promise."

"But what if it's not? What if I've ruined your dreams? What if you never become governor because of me?"

"That's impossible. It will not happen, Elisabeth. I'm so sure of it, I'm willing to give you this to prove it," she mentioned, digging into her pocket. Pulling out the ring box, she opened it and turned it toward her lover.

Blue eyes widened at the sight of the diamond ring as her heart stopped a moment before starting again in double time. "Dara?" she questioned in delighted surprise.

Taking the blonde's left hand in her own, the taller woman looked at the woman she loved. "Elisabeth, Allison made you a job offer today, but I have my own job offer for you. It's a lifetime of service to me and my cause, but in exchange I'll do everything I can to make you happy. I'll give you as many children as you want and help you fill our house with laughter and love. I'll hold you at night and protect you from the world. I'll make love to you and worship your body, mind, and soul. I'll tell the world that you are the greatest gift God has ever given me. Elisabeth, I love you, respect you, and need you more than words could ever express. You're the one that I want standing next to me for the rest of my life, and I want to be the one standing next to you if you'll have me. Please make me the luckiest woman in the world by accepting my hand. I will do everything I can to make your dreams come true. Please, will you marry me, Elisabeth?"

With tears flowing freely down her face, Elisabeth smiled at her beloved. "Yes, I will marry you,

Dara. You know I will. It's what I've always wanted," she whispered, pulling the brunette into her arms for a strong embrace.

Dara responded in kind, wrapping her arms tightly around the blonde. Both of them were silent for a few moments, clinging to each other as they thought about the commitment they had just made. The younger woman could feel her lover's tears on her own neck as Elisabeth buried her head in the brunette's hair. Dara could feel her own eyes starting to water as joy filled her heart. She never imagined this moment could bring such a surge of emotion. Finally after several minutes, she pulled back enough to smile at the blonde and gently wipe Elisabeth's wet face. "May I put this on now?" she questioned, taking the ring from its box.

Elisabeth could only nod. She watched as her lover gently placed the ring on her finger before looking back into dark eyes. Cupping Dara's face with her left hand, she smiled. "I love you so much, Dara," she whispered.

"And I love you, Elisabeth," the younger woman answered as the blonde pulled her into a powerful yet loving kiss. For a long time the two of them stayed embraced exchanging tender intimacy as the world hurried on around them. However, Dara finally pulled back and mentioned, "It's getting cold. We should go."

Elisabeth nodded in agreement. As the two of them got off the bench, she inquired, "So, what is this exhibit you wanted to show me?"

The taller woman grinned and laughed. "Oh, nothing. That was just a ploy."

"You mean a lie is what it was," Elisabeth bantered with a laugh of her own.

"All right. It was a lie. Are you disappointed?"

"No. I knew it was, but you owe me lunch for making me sit out here in the cold," the older woman teased, looping her arms around her fiancée's waist.

"Fair enough. I'll take you anywhere you want to go."

Over lunch neither of them spoke much about wedding ideas. Instead they just enjoyed each other's company and talked more about Allison's offer. When the meal was over, they went outside and walked to the nearest subway station. "I wish you didn't have to go back to work," Elisabeth complained, pulling Dara in for a close embrace.

"That makes two of us. Right now there is nothing I want to do more than to be alone with you," she whispered in her lover's ear. "To make love to you," she growled seductively.

Elisabeth whimpered at the thought. However, knowing it was impossible at the moment, she decided to tease the brunette. Slipping her hands into Dara's coat, she brought their bodies even closer together. With one hand firmly planted on her lover's lower back, her right one trailed teasingly between the taller woman's thighs. To any outsider it would have looked like two

lovers just sharing a close embrace, not really knowing the naughtiness Elisabeth was initiating along the seam of Dara's wool pants with her hand. Pulling the younger woman's head down toward her own, she kissed the brunette lightly on the ear as she murmured, "I would love that too, Dara. It's too bad we can't do that. I guess I'll just have to go home and take care of myself. While you're at work, you can think about me alone in bed. My hands will be all over my naked body, wishing they were yours. I'll be calling out your name as my body arches up toward yours, seeking out the weight of you on top of me. My fingers will be thrusting in and out of my wet flesh, slowly teasing me the way I know you would do it. I'll imagine your tongue licking up my thigh and agonizingly leisurely entering me, tasting me from the inside, eating me like I was the best meal you ever had."

"Oh God," Dara trembled lightly as her legs began to shake. She knew Elisabeth could feel how turned on she was. She was so wet at the older woman's words that she knew she had ruined her slacks. However, she merely held the blonde tighter as Elisabeth continued her teasing with her hand. Suddenly Dara's body tensed slightly, and she nuzzled the blonde's neck tenderly in an effort to suppress the scream of her climax.

When the younger woman's body relaxed in her arms, Elisabeth chuckled under her breath. She looked up into dazed dark eyes and smiled. Patting Dara on the cheek lightly, she gave her a peck on the lips. "Have a good rest of the day, dear," she said before pulling away and hopping on the escalator that headed down to the tracks that would take her home. Dara just stood there watching her until she was out of sight as she tried to recover from the unexpected event that just taken place. Even though she knew Elisabeth was going to be wild when it came to sex, she never imagined her lover, her fiancée, her soon-to-be bride would make her orgasm in the middle of the subway station with the world going by around them. Looking around she noticed that no one seemed to either know or care about the dirty little thing that had just taken place between them. Taking a deep breath Dara made her way over to where the subway would take her back to work as she thought of the woman she loved.

Once back in her office, the brunette shut the door behind her and locked it before going to her desk. She wasn't about to let the blonde have the last word between them. In fact, she had her own plan to make her fiancée tremble. Consulting her watch she realized Elisabeth wasn't home quite yet, so she fidgeted in her chair and checked emails for several minutes. Conferring with the clock on her desk, she figured the older woman should just about be back at her house, so she dialed her lover's cell phone.

"Hello," Elisabeth purred into the receiver after a few rings.

"Where are you?" Dara inquired without a greeting.

"I'm just walking into the house."

"Is Shelby home?"

"It doesn't seem like it. Why?"

"I want you to do something for me," the brunette requested seductively.

Instantly Elisabeth caught on to the game her lover wanted to play and smiled into the phone. "What do you want me to do?" she whispered.

"First of all, put me on hands free if you haven't already and then go up to your bedroom."

Doing as asked of her, the blonde went up the stairs and into her room. "Now what?"

"Did you close the door?"

"Yeah."

"Open it. All the way, Elisabeth," Dara instructed.

"But Shelby could come home," protested the older woman even though she complied.

"I know," Dara growled sexily. "Now put your briefcase down and take off your coat. Don't hang it up. Just lay it over the chair. Then take off your heels but leave them by the side of the bed."

Following instructions the blonde removed her shoes before asking, "Now what?"

"Tell me what you're wearing underneath your skirt."

"Hose and a thong," she answered.

"What color?"

"Black," she murmured, closing her eyes to help the game. She imagined Dara there with her.

"Take those off." The brunette waited until it sounded as if that task was complete before continuing. "Now take off your sweater."

Elisabeth put the phone to the side long enough to pull her black sweater off her body and dropped it on the floor with her other clothes. Immediately she put the earpiece back to hear her beloved's voice. "That's done. Now what do you want?"

"What color bra are you wearing? What's it look like?" Dara questioned as she closed her eyes. In her mind she tried to create the image of Elisabeth there in her room.

"It's black lace."

"Get rid of it."

"Okay."

After a pause Dara resumed. "Now what are you wearing?"

"Just my skirt."

"Good. Lie on the bed on your back and close those pretty blue eyes."

"You don't want me to take off my skirt?" Elisabeth questioned in surprise.

"Did I say to take it off?" the brunette asked in a husky tone.

"No."

"Then don't. Leave it on. Are you on the bed?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now reach into the nightstand and get your favorite toy. Do you have it?"

"Yes," breathlessly the blonde replied as her mind already drifted to the pleasures forthcoming.

"Now flip up the front of your skirt, Elisabeth." The blonde followed the directions with a whimper. She really wanted her lover to actually be there at the moment. "Is it up?"

"Yes, Dara," she answered.

"Good girl. Now slowly take your toy and run it along your body. Take your time. Start where I would, kissing along your neck and ever so slowly making my way down. Let me just listen to you."

Elisabeth moaned as she turned on her vibrator to the lowest setting. Her mind was running rampant with thoughts of the woman she loved. She pictured Dara there, her frame hovering above her own while her mouth began a tortuous tease. The older woman took her time as charged, lingering along her neck before leisurely moving the toy down to her breasts. Her breath caught as she caressed first on the tip and then the other. "Dara," she called.

"Yes, baby. I'm right here. Does that feel good? Do I feel good to you?"

"Yes," the shorter woman answered.

"Where am I now? What are my hands doing? Where is my mouth?"

"Your hands are on my hips, and your mouth is kissing down between my breasts over my stomach."

"Then I kiss each hip gently before moving to your left thigh. I can already smell you, Elisabeth. God, you smell incredible. I can't wait to taste you. Do you want me to?"

Envisioning it in her mind, Elisabeth found her body tensing even tighter. "Oh God, please," she begged.

"Slowly I lick a path over the top of your left thigh before moving over to the right one. You are so hot and wet. I haven't even touched you yet, and I can feel it."

Elisabeth followed Dara's words, using her vibrator to simulate her lover's presence. Her legs quivered in anticipation. "Dara, please. Don't tease me. I need you."

The younger woman groaned wantonly as she began to touch herself with growing fervor on the outside of her clothes. "God, I want you, Elisabeth. Giving in to both our needs, I let my mouth trail up the inside of your thigh. I can already taste just a hint of you. It's heaven. Wanting more I open my mouth to take all of you in. You're so wet for me."

"Dara," Elisabeth whimpered, dragging her toy through her wetness. She wanted her lover inside desperately, but she waited until the brunette directed her further.

"Elisabeth, you taste so good. I can't stand it. I have to be inside of you right now. Wrapping one arm around your leg to keep you steady, I allow my other hand to wander up your body. You grab hold of it with your own as your other hand finds the back of my head. You're pushing me harder, deeper into you, and I'm helpless to resist. Slowly I enter you with my tongue."

"Baby, I'm so close," Elisabeth cried as she entered herself to mimic her lover's words.

"I can feel how close you are, sweetie. You feel so good. Knowing how badly you need to climax, I don't waste any time. I plunge into you as deeply as I can before withdrawing. My tongue alternates between thrusting into you and teasing your clit," she whispered, knowing that would be all it would take to push the blonde over the edge.

Elisabeth started to shudder as her body quickly rose to peak with the combination of Dara's words and her own hands. "Dara!" she screamed, trying to clutch the imaginary head between her legs. It took her several moments to recover. Finally when she was able to focus again, she mumbled, "Oh God."

"You all right?"

Elisabeth nodded her head. "Fine. Never better," she replied with a slight chuckle. "How are you?"

"Great."

"Were you touching yourself?" the blonde asked as she pulled the toy out and tossed it onto the bed. She smoothed her skirt back into place.

"Of course. How could I not?"

A moment of silence passed while they just listened to each other breathe. Finally Elisabeth said, "Thank you for the surprise. I love you."

"I love you, too, Elisabeth. Now I really should get back to work. Can we get together for dinner tonight?"

"Am I on the menu?" she teased.

"Actually, I was sort of hoping we could have dinner with my parents."

"Oh, way to ruin a mood there, honey," the older woman teased.

"Sorry about that."

"That sounds fine."

"Okay. Let me call to make sure they can do it. Shelby can come too. I'll probably invite Leah."

"Fine. I'll ask her when I see her." Another pause passed. Neither woman wanted to hang up, but they knew they had to. "I should let you go."

"Yeah. I'll call you later about a time. I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you too. I look forward to your call. Now get back to work."

"See you tonight. I love you."

"I love you. Good bye, Dara."

"Bye, honey."

That evening the blonde drove over the Dara's place to meet her fiancée and her parents for dinner. When she pulled into the driveway, she took a quick look at herself in the mirror. She knew this would be the night the two of them consummated their relationship. The way the day had gone so far, it had to be the moment for which they both craved. Checking herself over she decided she looked presentable, so she went to the front door and rang the bell. Only a moment passed before Dara opened it with a large smile.

"Hey, gorgeous," she said, wrapping her arms around the older woman's waist to pull her into an embrace.

Elisabeth smirked as she whispered seductively, "Hello, lover. How about a kiss?" Dara complied, kissing the blonde gently on the mouth, but the shorter woman just shook her head. "Like you missed me, Dara. Like you want to ditch your parents and make love to me."

Growling lowly the brunette ducked her head for a second time. Catching the older woman's lips slightly open, she probed passed them torridly. Instantly Elisabeth responded, matching the fervor as she ran her hands through dark hair. Several moments passed before the younger attorney finally pulled back. "We should stop before my mother catches us."

"Too late," her mother's voice called out lightly from behind her.

Elisabeth rolled her eyes playfully. "First Tom and now your mother. Who's next to catch us?" she teased as she pulled out of her lover's arms. Moving to Dara's mother she greeted her with a hug. "Hello, Emma."

"Hi, Elisabeth. I can't tell you how happy we are about you and Dara getting engaged. You really are the best thing to ever happen to Dara," she mentioned, squeezing the blonde tightly. When the embrace ended, she cast Elisabeth a grin as she said, "Besides it wouldn't be Dara if we didn't catch her in the act of naughty behavior. Your future wife is known for that."

"You don't say?" the blonde joked as she and her future mother-in-law walked arm in arm into the living room.

Eric stood as his wife and soon-to-be daughter-in-law entered and smiled at them pleasantly. "Well, if it isn't the lady of the hour. Elisabeth, I'm so thrilled someone has finally tamed Dara. I knew it would take someone special to do it," he said as they hugged.

"That's for sure. She's a handful," the blonde teased as her lover came up behind and slipped her arms around her waist.

"Well, in celebration of this wonderful news, we've taken the liberty of making reservations at one of our favorite places. Hope you don't mind," Eric said.

"Of course not, Dad."

"Fabulous. Then we should probably go."

Eric drove that evening, leaving Dara and Elisabeth time to playfully tease each other in the backseat. Even though she knew she should behave in front of her future in-laws, the blonde couldn't help but think of later that night when it was just she and Dara. She wanted to continue what had started hours ago, but she knew that would have to wait. She and her fiancée would have plenty of time to for that. In the meantime she would enjoy the chance to be with her future family.

Once at the restaurant, Eric ordered a bottle of champagne for them in celebration. When it came to the table, he raised his glass in toast. "To the future governor of Maryland and her lovely better half," he teased lightly.

However, Dara grinned. "I second that."

"Seriously, you two, we couldn't be happier that you have made this commitment to each other. I know for most of Dara's life she always wanted the kind of love that is usually only read about in books, but I truly think you've found it. What you have is a gift from God. It's a blessing, and it's not to be taken lightly. Marriage is work, but I know the two of you will have what it takes to make your love last. The look in your eyes, Elisabeth, tells me you adore my daughter more than anything else. Dara, you look at this incredible woman the way I see your mother looking at me and I hope she sees from me, complete devotion. This is a perfect match between you, and we are so happy that you have chosen Dara for a spouse, Elisabeth."

After everyone had taken a sip of champagne, Elisabeth smiled at Dara's parents. "Thank you both for welcoming me so warmly. One of things I love about Dara so much is her devotion to her family, and I clearly see where she gets it. I look forward to adding to that family someday very soon."

"So, have you discussed any plans at all?" Emma inquired.

"Not yet, Mom. However, I think we both would like to do this sooner rather than later. Once the election is over, we'll both have lots of time. I don't know what Elisabeth has in mind, but I thought spring might be nice."

Joining the topic the blonde stated, "We'll have to decide some of the details before picking a specific date. Spring sounds about right though. So much goes into it though that I'm not even sure where to begin."

"Well, just know we'll be here should you want or need any help. We want this to be a perfect day for you both," Emma said, patting Elisabeth on the hand.

Through the rest of the meal Eric kept refilling the younger women's champagne glasses, even ordering a second bottle. After her fourth glass, the blonde realized her in-laws had stopped drinking but Dara hadn't. Figuring it would be best to stop before she got sick, Elisabeth finished off her glass but declined when Eric tried to give her more. "Eric, please, I can't."

"But you must," he insisted, reaching for her glass anyway. He poured her a refill before doing the same for his daughter. Dara, who seemed none the wiser, thanked him and kept drinking. The brunette didn't seem to be fazed the volume of alcohol she was consuming, but the older attorney knew there was no way she would be able to keep up with her lover, so she switched to water through the rest of the meal.

When they left the restaurant that evening, Elisabeth watched her lover carefully as she stood from the table. She was amazed at how unaffected the taller woman seemed by the champagne. However, as they were walking through the parking lot toward the car, the blonde felt the younger attorney slip her arm around her shoulders and begin to lean into her slightly. "Are you okay?" she asked softly as they fell behind the brunette's parents by a few steps.

"I'm wonderful. How are you?" Dara inquired in a hushed tone.

Elisabeth could smell the alcohol coming off her lover. "Are you drunk?" she whispered.

Dara sneered as she shook her head. "Do I look drunk?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact," answered the older woman.

"Well, maybe drunk with the idea of what's going to happen when we get home," she sexually alluded.

Knowing to what she was referring but choosing not to let on, the shorter woman innocently questioned, "What's going to happen?"

"We're going to inaugurate my bed. At least I hope," Dara growled, leaning in to nip her fiancée's ear.

"You think you're going to get lucky, do you?" Elisabeth joked. It was too tempting to pretend otherwise even though she knew she wanted it as well.

"You can't resist me," Dara stated with confidence as she stopped walking and turned the blonde toward her. Without warning she swooped down and claimed her fiancée's lips in a smoldering lock.

Unprepared for the onslaught, Elisabeth had no time to react. Instinctually she pulled the woman she loved closer, indulging in the deep exchange, but her senses soon surfaced. "Your parents," she mumbled, trying to break free.

"Screw them. They know we're going to do it. They think we've been doing it all this time. They expect it," she said, already trying to go back for a second kiss, but Elisabeth held her at bay, glaring at her brazen behavior.

"Dara, it's one thing to act this way after we're married, but until then I don't like it when you do this stuff in front of your parents. It makes me uncomfortable. It makes me feel like a huge tramp, which we know I'm not," she admonished.

Immediately Dara pulled back out of the older woman's personal space. "Fine. I'm sorry. I won't do it again," she snapped.

"Don't do that to me, Dara. Don't make me feel guilty about this. You know I love it when you touch me, just not in front of our parents."

"They don't care, Elisabeth."

"But I do, Dara. I know it's hard. I want to touch you that way so badly right now, but please try to control yourself until we're alone at least. I promise it'll be worth the wait."

Nodding her head the younger woman replied, "Of course. I'll behave. I'm sorry for making you

uncomfortable. I would never want you to feel that way."

"Thank you. I can't wait to get home either, you know. After today I can't wait to see you in action. If you can do those amazing things with your words, I can't wait to see what you can do with your mouth. I bet you have me walking funny for days," she teased lightly, taking her lover's hand.

Once back at Dara's place, the foursome made their way inside. Emma offered the younger women a beverage and dessert, but they both declined. "I'm actually getting kind of tired. Must be all that champagne," Dara stated. "I think it's time to say good night."

Eric just nodded his head at his daughter. Turning to Elisabeth he mentioned, "At the risk of sounding like the father that I am, I hope you're not planning on driving home right now, Elisabeth."

"No, Eric. You don't need to worry. I'm not driving home now. I'm hardly fit to do that."

"Good. We wouldn't want anything to happen to you," Emma said with a soft smile.

Looking at her parents, Dara could tell what they thought. They assumed that the brunette was making an excuse to be alone with her lover, but they were right. All she wanted was to be with Elisabeth in the confines of her bedroom at the moment. Giving them a smile, she said, "Thank you for dinner."

"You're welcome. Congratulations again," Emma said as she moved to hug both women. "Go on now."

"Good night, Mom. Good night, Dad," Dara said, hugging both her parents. Elisabeth followed suit.

"Good night, you two. Sleep well," Eric called out as they retreated to the staircase leading to the basement.

When they were alone in Dara's den, Elisabeth chuckled. "Talk about an awkward good bye. I imagine they thought we were ditching them to have sex."

"Yeah but that is what we were doing," the brunette conceded. "They know me better than any parent could know a child. When I was a kid, I could never get away with stuff. My mother knew, just instinctively knew when I was up to no good."

"I imagine she did. You seemed to be quite the trouble-maker too, but enough about that. There are other things we should be talking about right now."

"Such as?" the younger woman inquired in interest as they moved toward her bedroom.

Elisabeth waited until the door was closed behind them to jump into her lover's arms.

Immediately assaulting her with kisses, she whispered sexily, "How you're going to make me scream in orgasmic ecstasy."

Dara moaned as her lover continued to barrage her with hungry kisses. In response her hands became active, already beginning to work open her lover's blouse. It was soon on the floor. The blonde's bra soon followed. Needing to even things a bit, the older woman pulled away from Dara's mouth just enough to pull the brunette's sweater from her body. Looking into dark eyes as she did so though, Elisabeth found herself lost once again and gave in to her need to kiss her fiancée. Soon there was just a flurry of movement as clothes were shed quickly, and then Elisabeth found herself on her back on the made bed. She moaned deeply at the weight of Dara's body on top of her own. Her hands ran over her lover's bare back taking in the feel of the muscles as their mouths continued with their torrid exploration. Needing to get even closer, the shorter woman wrapped her legs around her fiancée's naked hips.

Dara groaned in response. "You feel so good, baby," she whispered as she found the side of the blonde's neck with her lips. The younger woman was in heaven at the feeling of Elisabeth's frame pressed into hers. She had wanted this for so long. Letting her emotions guide her, her hands ran up her lover's sides to her breasts.

Elisabeth panted, arching her back toward the caress. "Dara," she called softly. "Please, I need you."

"I'm here, baby. I'll take care of you," the brunette vowed as her head started to descend down the older woman's frame. Getting to her fair breasts, Dara took long minutes teasing the right one with her hand as her mouth attacked Elisabeth's left. Hearing the shorter woman whining at the fact that one was getting more attention than the other, she focused on the right as her hands wandered lower down her lover's body. Her fingers took in the landscape of Elisabeth's hips as her lips left her favorite assets and traveled south. As many times as they had been intimately close, they had never ventured that far before, so as the taller woman's mouth trailed over the blonde's soft skin of her stomach, her mind began to spin with the thoughts of them finally consummating their relationship.

As the older woman lay on her back, the only thing she could concentrate on was the feeling of Dara's hands and mouth on her. She had dreamed of it so many times, but now it was actually happening, and it was better than anything her own mind could create in her most private thoughts. Lacing her hands through dark hair, she moaned as she felt the younger woman's tongue licking a path from her hip over the top of her right thigh. Not shy in asking for what she needed, she pulled the taller attorney by the back of the head toward her wetness as she begged, "Please, Dara."

The brunette groaned as she found her head between her fiancée's thighs. She could smell Elisabeth's arousal, and she knew it was mere moments before she would be able to taste her. Trying to postpone it for a moment longer though, she kissed the older woman's inner thighs teasingly. "Do you want me, Elisabeth? Are you ready for me?" she whispered sexily.

"Yes, baby. I need you, Dara," Elisabeth pleaded, jerking slightly at the feeling of the younger

woman's mouth along her thigh. She tried in vain to pull the brunette's head to where it was needed most, but Dara refused to budge. "Dara," she whimpered.

"Oh God," Dara suddenly mumbled, pulling back quickly.

Completely confused blue eyes opened and stared at the brunette. "Dara? Are you all right?" she inquired, trying to reach for her lover, but she was held back.

"I think I'm going to be sick," the taller woman announced, waving the blonde away from her.

"Do you think you're going to throw up?"

The brunette nodded her head before suddenly jumping from the bed and heading for the bathroom. She barely made it before she started to regurgitate all that she had eaten and drank from dinner into her sink. As she stood bent over her basin, she could feel consoling hands on her, one running long strokes over her back, the other gently rubbing her stomach. When it appeared she was finished, the younger woman simply put her forehead against the cold counter and mumbled, "I'm sorry, Elisabeth. I'm so sorry."

"It's okay, baby. That's not quite the reaction I was expecting," she teased.

Managing to meet blue eyes in the dark, Dara gave her a pained expression. "It wasn't you. I swear."

"I know. I was just joking. You had almost a whole bottle of champagne by yourself. I'm not surprised actually. I would have been amazed had you not gotten sick," she admitted as she stroked her lover's hair.

"Just give me a minute, and I promise that we can continue," the younger woman said, placing her head back down against the counter. Her head was starting to spin, but she was determined to fulfill Elisabeth's desires.

"No, I don't think so, Dara. You're not going to do anything like that. You need to just get in bed and go to sleep."

"But, Elisabeth, I want to. I've never had so many false starts at this. It's driving me crazy."

The blonde smiled at her fiancée. "I know. Me too but we have plenty of time, Dara. We have the rest of our lives. I think we're just trying too hard. Let's just not think about it for now. Let me get your pajamas and help you to bed."

Several minutes later the brunette and blonde were both clothed in some of Dara's pajamas. Elisabeth gently guided her beloved back to bed and pulled the covers over both of them. Silence prevailed for long minutes before the taller woman finally whispered, "I love you, Elisabeth Gunter."

"I know, and I love you, Dara Rosenthal. Sleep now." Almost immediately the brunette fell asleep, but the older woman was awake as she held her lover. She idly caressed Dara's dark hair as she thought about the fact she had committed her life to the woman in her arms. A wedding and marriage to someone perfect were her adolescent dreams, but she had never truly believed they could be reality. Even when she thought she might be with Suzanne forever, it just never seemed to be the perfect match she had always fantasized about as a little girl. However, now she had met the one person she knew she could remain lovingly faithful to for the rest of her days. Dara Rosenthal loved her in ways she never knew existed. The dark-haired woman challenged her intellectually and sparked burning passion she didn't know she could have for anyone. The younger attorney's zeal of politics and human rights matched her own, but the one thing that stood out to the blonde was the way Dara related to her family.

Elisabeth had always been close to her mother and sister, so she was thrilled the brunette was the same with her own family. The gentle way the younger woman handled her mother, sisters, and sister-in-law made it obvious the reverence Dara had for those four women. Equally powerful were the relationships she had with her father and brother and the respect she paid them. Above all though, there was Justin. Dara's eyes always were lit with loving warmth at the sight of her nephew. They were at ease together and genuinely enjoyed each other's company. It was apparent her bond with the six-year-old was stronger than anything she could possibly imagine. It was clear proof that Dara would be the best mother Elisabeth could possibly have for her children. Content in the choice she had made, Elisabeth sighed and snuggled up next to her beloved. Kissing her on the temple, she whispered, "Sweet dreams, wife of mine."

On Halloween night Dara pulled up to her fiancée's house just after eight. She and Elisabeth had debated for quite a few days on the most appropriate costumes given the party's vampire theme, but in the end Dara's idea of going as two of Germany's most notorious vampires, the Vampire of Dusseldorf and the Hanover Vampire, prevailed, because she felt it would be a fun nod to their lineage. Not only that, she knew Allison would choose to be the Prince of Darkness, eliminating her original idea of Dracula.

Going up to the door, she was pleased to find her lover ready. "You look fantastic," the brunette complimented.

"So do you. Good enough to eat," Elisabeth teased, affecting her words with her own German accent.

Dara laughed. "That is the point. Let's get going. It takes a while to get to Allison and Deborah's place."

"Where do they live anyway? You never did say."

"In Old Town Alexandria down on Union Street. You know those outrageously expensive townhouses down on the water, the French looking ones at the end of Union Street?"

"Yeah. I know those. They live there?" Dara nodded. "Those places go for over a million a piece easily."

"I know and believe me Deborah has it filled with only the best furniture. It just goes to show we're in the wrong jobs. When Allison got her JD, she had offers from all over the place, but she helped her friend found a non-profit, and they are paying her an obnoxious amount of money. Not only that she's a financial genius. Although I'm sure Deborah's trust fund helps a bit as well," the brunette joked as she escorted her lover to the car.

"Well, the George H. Minion trust fund that I have makes up for some of that. It's just too bad it came at the price it did. That was not the way things were supposed to go."

"I know, but it's over now, and there is nothing either of us can do about it. The election is in just a few days, and after he loses, it's ancient history."

"But we both know nothing ever really goes away in politics. It just makes me nervous that it can reappear at the most inopportune time like when you're running for governor."

"Again there is nothing we can do about it. We just have to keep it out of our minds. Now forget about him. Let's have some fun."

Upon arriving at their friends' house, the party had already begun with loud music and guests. Immediately joining in the two women went to find their hostesses. Upon seeing Deborah and Allison, they quickly went over to them, hugging both of them tightly as the two brunettes exchanged smiles. "Happy birthday, Allison. Last one before the big 3-0."

"Don't remind me, Dara. Just remember no matter how old we get, you'll always still be older," Allison joked before turning her attention to the blonde. "Elisabeth, how are you?"

"I'm great. How are you, birthday girl?"

"I can't complain. It's my birthday, and I'm surrounded by lots of hot women. This must be what heaven is like," she stated, sliding her arms around Elisabeth's waist.

"Easy there, Allison. I'm spoken for. You wouldn't want Dara to get upset now, would you?"

"Please. I can take Dara any day. Besides you aren't spoken for until I see a ring. It's either that or you start working for me. Until then you're free game," Allison replied.

"You're shameless. I don't know how Deborah puts up with you."

"She loves me," the brunette teased.

"She must, but I have to tell you I have that ring now, so you better keep your hands in check."

Pulling back in surprise, Allison grabbed her hand. "No way. Is this for real? You and Dara are

getting married?" Elisabeth nodded. "Oh my God. Congratulations. I can't believe it."

Seeing her long-time friend hugging her fiancée tightly, Dara leaned over and interjected, "Hands off. She's mine."

"So I just heard. I'm thrilled. We have to celebrate. I have to make an announcement." Seeing Allison rushing off to do just that, the couple received hugs and well-wishes from Deborah as well.

For the rest of the evening, the two of them kept getting barraged with congratulations and questions about their plans for the wedding. However, they fielded them as well as they could even though they had agreed not to discuss it with anyone else until things were finalized. Late that night as the two of them stood embraced dancing slowly to a love song among a sea of their other friends, Dara looked down at her fiancée and smiled.

"So, have you told the birthday girl your answer yet about her job offer?"

"No. I actually wanted to talk to you again about it first."

"What's there to talk about? If you want the job, you should take it, and if you don't, keep looking. I don't care. I just want you to be happy."

Moving her arms from her lover's waist and wrapping them around her neck, Elisabeth inquired, "What if I said I don't want to work at all, Dara? What if I said I wanted to have a baby?"

"Is that what you really want?"

The blonde nodded her head. "Yes. I've thought about it a lot over the last month, and I think it's time. I want to get married and have a baby with you. I don't want to wait any longer unless you aren't ready."

Dara took a moment to ponder that unasked question. She knew she wanted to have children with Elisabeth, but she wondered if she was ready to take on the responsibility of being a parent. "Do you think I'm ready?" she inquired.

"You'll be a wonderful mother, but if you don't want to do this yet, then we shouldn't. It needs to be something we both want."

"Oh, I want to have kids with you, Elisabeth. It's just the reality of it boggles my mind. I mean we're talking about creating a life together. It'll be ours, just ours. I mean, we can't just give it back if we get tired. It's a lifetime commitment."

"You're committed to me, Dara."

"I know, but you can take care of yourself as well. I don't worry about you getting fed or clothed. You're self-sufficient. We're talking about a baby."

Feeling her heart drop a little at the sound of her beloved's anxiety, Elisabeth decided to reassure her that they didn't have to get pregnant if she wasn't prepared. "Dara, I promise it will be all right. You have no idea how good you are with children. I've seen you with Justin, and he has special needs. Our child will be healthy. However, if you think you're not ready to take on the challenge yet, we won't do it. We can wait longer."

The younger woman shook her head lightly. "You know, I think this might be the only time I envy straight men. Their wives and girlfriends can just drop the bomb on them, and they have to be ready. There's no talking it over. It just is that way. I'm afraid that I could rationalize putting it off for quite a bit longer, Elisabeth, because I don't want to mess it up. Although I know I can do it. I know in my heart that I want to have a baby with you. I fantasize about it all the time. I think it's just one of those things that I have to jump into, but once I do I'm fine."

"So, what are you saying?"

"I'm saying we should have a baby. I promised you that we would have as many as you wanted. How could I ever expect to fulfill that promise if I don't start now?"

"Are you sure? We don't have to, Dara."

Giving her fiancée a smile, Dara nodded her head. "It's time, Elisabeth. We're going to get married, and then we should have a baby. It's what we both want. There is no reason to postpone our happiness."

"If you're sure?"

"I am, and as far as the job is concerned, if you don't want to work, you don't have to. I already told you I would take care of you."

"We'll take care of each other. All right. We'll get through this wedding and then start planning our family. One step at a time."

"I like the sound of that. I love you, Elisabeth. I'm going to do everything I can to make you happy."

"You already do," the older woman answered, placing her head against the taller woman's shoulder.

Just over a week later was election day. As Dara had promised, she had stayed out all night long assisting the Democratic Party in putting up signs for their candidate. Elisabeth, on the other hand, had finished the last-minute packing they had to do for their trip and got a good night's rest. After packing her car with all the things they would need, she left her house to go cast her vote before meeting her fiancée at her apartment.

By the time she arrived, Dara was ready to go and wore a tired but happy countenance. Greeting

her lover with a kiss, the shorter woman asked, "Are you ready?"

"Yeah. Bags are packed. Vote has been cast. Let the best man win," she answered with a grin.

"Good. Since you look like you could use a nap after being up all night, I'll drive. Just put your bag in the trunk, and we'll be ready."

As the two of them made their way out to the blonde's car, Dara asked, "So, are you going to tell me where we're going? You've been so secretive about this whole trip."

"No, I'm not telling you. All I will say is this. There is no TV, phone, or radio where we're going. We won't even know who won until we get back, that is unless you cheat and use your cell phone to find out," she joked.

"Sounds like we're going somewhere that we can't get reception."

"There's good enough reception, but I'm just not going to allow you to interrupt our vacation with politics. For three days it's just going to be you and me."

"Are you sure you can stand to be with me that long?" Dara joked as she made herself comfortable in the passenger's seat. For the next two and a half hours the couple just chatted as Elisabeth drove them to their destination. Dara stayed awake the entire time against her fiancée's urging, because she was too curious to see where they were going to sleep. However, when they arrived at a small cabin in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the taller woman smiled at her surroundings. "You brought me to the woods. How in the world did you find this place?"

"You'd be surprised what you can do with no job and lots of free time surfing the internet. Come on. Let's see if it's all it said it was on the website." Going inside the blonde was pleased to find everything as she had wanted.

Taking a look around, Dara found the entire layout extremely comfortable except for the lack of technology. Coming outside to the car where her lover was already beginning to unpack, she said, "You certainly know how to pick a place. A fireplace and a hot tub. Very nice."

"Glad you approve. Now if we could just get our stuff inside we can start doing nothing, which sounds so good at the moment."

Between the two of them, the car was unpacked in a few trips. Dara took the duty of putting away their clothes while Elisabeth did the food. When the brunette was finished, she found the older woman in the small kitchen making them lunch. Quietly they ate their simple meal before Dara stated, "I hate to say this, but I'm starting to get sleepy."

"I'm not surprised. You haven't slept in over thirty hours. Why don't you take a nap? We're not on a schedule here."

"You sure you don't mind?"

"Not at all. I'm just going to read my book by the fireplace."

"You don't want to join me?"

"I'm not tired, and you need to actually sleep. Go on. Take a nap. I'll be right here when you wake up."

"All right. Don't let me sleep too long though. After all this vacation is about spending time together."

"Not to worry. I'll come get you in a few hours. Just relax now, Dara. That's what vacation is for."

Nodding her head, the brunette leaned over and kissed her lover on the forehead. "All right. Thank you for lunch. I'll be much better after a nap." Going back into the bedroom, the younger attorney stripped off her heavy fall clothes and put on a t-shirt and a pair of boxer shorts. Sliding under the covers, she nodded off almost immediately.

For the next three hours Elisabeth sat in front of the fireplace reading leisurely. However, when she had come to the end of her book, she wondered if Dara was awake yet. Deciding to find out, she made sure the fire had dwindled enough before heading back towards the bedroom. She stood in the doorway a moment looking at her lover in bed. The taller woman was obviously still asleep, giving Elisabeth time to observe her undetected. The younger woman looked so much more like a child at rest. In fact, she could easily see the resemblance between Dara and her nephew. Even though their coloring was different, they had the same countenance lost in dreams. It made her think about their own children. Elisabeth wanted their kids to look as much like Dara as they did her and wondered about the best way to accomplish that as she came to the bed.

Slipping onto it, she just lay on her side facing her fiancée and studied her with adoration. Her mind began to spin fantasies of their future, their wedding day, their first child, living life as the governor's wife. She wanted it all, and yet she knew even if none of it ever came to pass, she would still love this woman for the rest of her life. It wasn't what Dara wanted to become but rather the woman she already was that made Elisabeth hopelessly lost in eternal devotion to the brunette, and that feeling was heightened by the fact that she knew without a doubt Dara felt the same.

Unable to resist the dark-haired beauty next to her, the older woman gently reached out and caressed her face. She traced lightly over her right brow and over her cheek before the younger woman began to stir. Eyes twitched for a moment before opening. Elisabeth smiled lovingly as she whispered, "Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

"It's okay. How long have I been asleep?" Dara yawned and stretched her back.

"About three hours. Did you have a good nap?"

The brunette nodded as her reached for her lover. Her right hand lazily ran through golden locks. "Very good. The best part was waking up though," she said softly.

Brown eyes and blue ones just gazed at each other in silence for a few moments before Elisabeth murmured, "You are so beautiful, Dara."

Caught off guard at the unexpected compliment, the younger woman blushed modestly. "I'm nothing compared to you, my dearest."

Elisabeth continued to look into her beloved's eyes as she thought about the moment in which she now found herself. This trip was to be the time she finally succumbed to her desires for the brunette. She had laid out an elaborate plan in her head to seduce the willing younger woman, but looking at her just then, none of that seemed important. She didn't care about the feeling of Dara inside of her as much as she did about worshiping the woman who held her heart. Smiling at the taller woman, she said, "I want to show you something."

"Okay," Dara answered.

Elisabeth could tell the brunette was oblivious to what she was about to do, but she enjoyed it that way. "Will you close your eyes for me?" she asked sweetly.

Dara did as was requested of her. For a brief moment, the blonde looked at the taller woman lying there with her eyes closed, waiting for the unknown. Knowing what she wanted though, Elisabeth leaned over and softly began to paint her lover's face with airy kisses. Instinctively Dara's arms found their way around her, but she stayed on course until she came to her beloved's lips. She kissed them tenderly at first but with growing fervor. However, just when she started to feel the younger woman responding, she moved her mouth away down to Dara's neck. The lightness of the bombardment continued as her hands maneuvered the dark-haired woman onto her back. Straddling her lover's waist, Elisabeth leaned over the strong body beneath hers to Dara's mouth again. She could tell Dara was struggling to keep her eyes closed as her hands moved to the hem of the taller woman's t-shirt. Willingly Dara sat up just enough that Elisabeth could pull it off her body.

Once she was exposed, the shorter woman continued her exploration with her hands and mouth over the brunette's frame. She took her time idolizing her lover's breasts. She hadn't had the opportunity to spend much time with them in the past, but now she gave them her complete attention as she listened to the erratic breathing from her Dara.

For all of her surprise at the unexpected attention, the brunette allowed her lover to continue. Elisabeth's hands felt wonderful on her body, and even though her usual fantasies were of taking the blonde, this was a pleasant change. Giving herself over to the probing, the younger woman decided she would let Elisabeth go as far as she wanted if it pleased her. Wanting to reassure the blonde of her efforts, Dara cradled the older woman's head closer to her chest as she whispered, "That feels so good, Elisabeth."

Hearing the words above her head, the older woman gained confidence in her endeavor. Pushing

the limits further, her hands wandered to the brunette's shorts. Without a word Dara simply lifted her hips in invitation of which Elisabeth gladly accepted. Rolling off her lover, the blonde worked Dara's shorts off her body, leaving the brunette completely naked. Elisabeth looked up to her lover's face and saw eyes open.

"I have to see you, baby. Please let me see you," requested Dara, not taking the initiative to remove the blonde's clothes. She wanted to see what the shorter woman would do if left to her own devices. Without a word Elisabeth just smiled and then began to unbutton her blouse as if in show for her lover. Dara lay there engrossed in the sight of Elisabeth slowly pulling off her blouse and then bra. Next the older woman's hands went to the zipper of her own jeans. The only sound in the room was the sound of that zipper teasingly being lowered. Then Elisabeth gently pushed them off her body until she was also naked.

For a moment they lay there gazing at each other as if it was the first time in fascination. Unable to restrain herself any longer, Dara reached for the woman she loved, slipping her arms around Elisabeth's bare waist and pulling her on top of her own frame. However, she didn't try anything else, instinctually knowing the older woman wanted to lead. Seeing the submission in the dark-haired woman, Elisabeth quickly resumed her course. Her mouth recommenced where she had left off, kissing over her lover's abdomen and then down her right leg. She made it all the way to Dara's foot before switching to the left and leisurely making her way north once again. Back at her lover's wetness, Elisabeth paused for a moment, taking in the scent of her soon-to-be wife. The aroma was intoxicating as it filled her lungs. She knew she couldn't wait any more to know this woman. Risking one last look into her lover's eyes, she saw Dara gazing back with loving openness and no expectation. She was just as Elisabeth imagined her to be, perfectly content in their closeness that she would never take, only give whatever she could to heighten the blonde's enjoyment.

Closing her blue eyes, the shorter woman allowed her emotions to guide her to her destination as she tasted the woman she adored for the first time. Instantly Dara cried out lightly as her hands found perch in fair hair. However, she didn't force Elisabeth, instead letting her take her time. With her own moan of satisfaction, the older woman settled in further. Her tongue snaked out to take in the contours of her fiancée's heat.

Dara's body was on fire as she felt Elisabeth slowly tasting her. She had imagined it before on a few occasions but nothing like it truly was. The sight of the blonde head between her thighs and the sound of Elisabeth's eager arousal caused her own to surge. As much as she wanted to touch her beloved, she knew she would please the older woman the most by allowing her to explore to her contentment, so she simply closed her eyes and allowed the feelings to overcome her. It wasn't long until she could feel herself on the edge of climax.

In her want she gave her only directions. "Elisabeth, please. I need you," she begged. Immediately she was rewarded as the blonde slipped into her awhile her mouth still continued to drink all her body had to offer. Dara gave herself over to the pleasure as it crashed over her in a giant wave. She felt as if she was drowning in the ecstasy of it as her body shuddered, but as she started to settle again, she realized her lover had no intension of stopping. Even though Elisabeth withdrew her mouth, her fingers stayed in place as she kissed up Dara's body to her mouth. Dara

groaned as her fiancée kissed her lips in fervor.

"God, you feel so good, Dara," Elisabeth confessed. "I've wanted this moment almost since the first time we met."

"Me too," the brunette managed to reply.

"I love you so much, Dara."

"I love you too, Elisabeth," she gasped as the blonde started to bring her to peak a second time. Once it subsided though, she smiled at the older woman and reached down to her wrist to stop her. "As good as you feel, you're going to incapacitate me before I can reciprocate," she mentioned.

"I don't care. I just can't get enough of you," the blonde desperately responded, collapsing against her lover's body as they kissed again.

Dara laughed lightly when she pulled away. "I'm glad for that, but you're driving me insane. To be able to smell you and not taste you is more than I can bear. Please let me touch you, Elisabeth. I need to taste you," Dara begged, rolling them over so Elisabeth was on her back.

As soon as the taller woman said those words, the blonde felt her pulse start pounding even harder. This was the moment she had waited for her entire life, to receive love from the woman she was destined to marry. Knowing she would give Dara anything, everything she ever desired, she withdrew from her fiancée's body and wrapped her arms around the taller attorney's back. "Take me, Dara. I want to feel you inside of me," she confessed as they met gazes once more.

Smiling at the admission, Dara leaned down to meet Elisabeth's mouth in a gentle probing kiss. "I love you so much. No one has ever made me this happy, Elisabeth, and I'm going to spend the rest of my life trying to make you just as happy," she promised as her hand trailed over the blonde's hip between her legs. Her hand was greeted by a flood of hot throbbing anticipation. Elisabeth gasped as Dara merely cupped her wetness firmly a moment. Methodically the brunette's mouth took a similar path Elisabeth's had minutes ago but stopped when it reached the older woman's thighs. Dara moaned wantonly. "You smell so good, baby. Please may I taste you?" she inquired, still letting the blonde have the lead for a moment.

Elisabeth couldn't even speak. Just the sight of Dara lying between her thighs, her head so incredibly close to her greatest desire, made the blonde mute with passion. With a nod she managed to squeak, "Please."

With permission granted Dara closed her own eyes as she lowered her mouth to savor her lover. She moaned at the first taste as she quickly found herself becoming lost in the feeling of Elisabeth. She was so soft and wet. Every curve was deeply explored before her tongue found its way home.

Elisabeth cried out loudly as she felt the brunette's tongue enter her. Clutching tightly to Dara's

head, she felt her legs tremble as her fiancée started to thrust in gentle pace. "Dara, oh God," she called as her thighs clenched against the brunette's shoulders. Her pinnacle came so quickly she hardly had time to relish it, but the aftershocks left her quaking for several moments. Feeling her lover's body spasming, Dara stopped for a minute, resting her head on the blonde's thigh. When she appeared to have recovered though, she was back again but this time, she started her teasing with the tips of her fingers.

Lifting her body Dara rolled them, so they were on their sides slightly regarding each other's faces endearingly. The taller woman's fingers didn't cease as she just gazed into blue eyes. Elisabeth strained to keep the connection even though her eyes threatened to flutter closed at the caress on her body. Reverently leaning in to kiss the smaller woman's cheek, Dara whispered, "You are so beautiful like this, Elisabeth. I am truly the luckiest woman in the world to have you."

Elisabeth couldn't even respond with words. Instead she cried out lightly, her eyes reflexively shutting, and her arms clutching Dara to her as she felt her fiancée enter her tight wetness. The older woman felt like crying. It felt so flawlessly perfect to have her lover finally know her completely. She felt as if it was truly her first time. Feeling Dara's lips on her own, she kissed her powerfully, lovingly showing what she could not quite manage to say in the moment.

Turning them once again so the smaller woman was on her back, Dara slid her body completely between Elisabeth's legs. Immediately the older woman wrapped hers around the brunette's waist to hold on tighter as the younger woman started a slow deep thrust with her entire weight. Each plunge led to a gasp from the blonde as Dara went deeper with every plunge.

"Dara," Elisabeth whispered with rising need. She was close again already.

Knowing her lover was close to the edge, the younger woman bit her earlobe gently as she whispered, "That's it, darling. Just let it go. I love you, Elisabeth, and I always will."

That was all it took as her climax took her, shook her completely. Elisabeth clasped tightly to the body above her own, pressing them together as tightly as they could go. "I love you, Dara," she murmured over and over for a few moments.

"I love you too, my wife," she said.

Blue eyes popped open at the statement and met smiling dark eyes. She allowed that smile to warm her entire being. The life she had always wanted had finally come true. "I like the sound of that," she confessed.

"So do I, Elisabeth, so do I."

Quietness followed for long minutes before the older woman asked jokingly, "Is this the sex I have to look forward to for the rest of my life?"

"I certainly hope so. I'll always give you anything you want, Elisabeth. All you have to do is

ask."

Smiling up at her fiancée, she cupped her face affectionately. "Good because right now I want more," she growled with renewed ardor.

"And you can have it. I'm yours forever," Dara assured, leaning to kiss Elisabeth as they started to once again make the most of the first day of the rest of their lives.

Author's Note:

Listed below are the organizations in this story. To highlight just a few, my school Hollins University, which has been a driving force in women's higher education for more than 150 years. The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, which strives to find a cure for the second largest genetic disease in the United States. To whom I volunteer my time, so my nephews may someday live the life they deserve free from this life-shortening disease. The Human Rights Campaign, the most prominent gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender social/political organization in the United States, promoting advancement for our community. Lastly but certainly not least the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee. The United States will be holding one of its most important and historical elections in November for the office of the presidency. To all my U.S. readers, no matter what side you are on, know your candidates and get out and vote!

Schools:

Hollins University www.hollins.edu
(My alma mater, our motto "Women who are going places start at Hollins")

Washington and Lee University www2.wlu.edu

Yale Law School www.law.yale.edu

Non-profit and Social/Political Organizations

American Jewish Committee www.ajc.org

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation www.cff.org

Democratic National Committee www.democrats.org

Human Rights Campaign www.hrc.org

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People www.naacp.org

National Rifle Association www.nra.org

Republican National Committee www.gop.com

Government Agencies:

FBI www.fbi.gov

Museums:

National Museum of Natural History www.mnh.si.edu

Smithsonian Institution www.si.edu

Alex Tryst's Scrolls
The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive
