

*A Reason  
to Remember*

LEIGH DUNCAN

A REASON TO REMEMBER  
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ISBN: 978-1-944258-01-6

Published in the United States of America.

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## *Can a fresh start save their love?*

They've divvied up the assets, settled the custody arrangements and packed their bags. Signing her name to the divorce agreement is the final hurdle standing between Margo Langdon and freedom from a marriage gone stale. But Margo's divorce is put on hold when a freak accident erases her ambitious husband's memory of the past ten years.

When David awakens in the hospital with all the enthusiasm and devotion of his younger self, has life handed Margo a second chance with the man she still adores? In a race against the clock, the young couple re-live the events that first drew them together.

But once David's injuries heal and he remembers all the reasons he and Margo drifted apart, will their re-kindled love survive?



*For  
Kristen Painter, Lara Santiago  
and Roxanne St. Claire*

*You inspire me to do more than I think possible.  
Thank you.*





# *A Reason to Remember*

*M*argo Langdon tugged aside the heavy silken window covering and studied the vacant driveway. Six o'clock had come and gone, and there was still no sign of David. She cast a wary eye toward threatening clouds that, without warning, had boiled up from the south. Not that she needed the weatherman to predict a late-afternoon storm. They were near-daily occurrences during the long Central Florida summers. But this afternoon the clouds bathed the quiet neighborhood in an eerie glow. Freshly mowed Saint Augustine grass rippled in a stiff breeze. Palm fronds tumbled end over end before landing in heaps beneath the hibiscus hedge. In step with the gusting wind, moss shimmied from the branches of the hundred-year-old oak that towered over the

house. A heavy limb sawed noisily against the eaves.

Margo crossed her fingers and prayed the storm would pass them by.

*Too late for that now. It's practically upon us.*

Frowning, she dropped the curtain into place, smoothed the creases in the fabric with her fingers and sighed. David was nearly an hour late. Big surprise. These days, there was always another deal to close, another client to call, one more opportunity to follow up before he left the office. Nothing had shaken his concentration on making a name for himself among the management consultants at Waterson and Bash. Not the toll it took on friendships. Not the births of their two children. Certainly not the precipitous decline of their marriage.

Beyond the window, the sky darkened. Clouds closed in.

Turning away from the scene, Margo wondered how a love affair that had started out with such promise had reached such a dismal ending. As a sophomore at the University of Florida, she'd instantly fallen in lust with the tall, broad-shouldered economics major. Much to her surprise, he'd felt the same spark, one that, over time, had deepened into something neither of them had expected. In the aftermath of long afternoons of glorious lovemaking, they'd mapped out plans for the future. Once she had a few years' worth of experience with an established company under her

belt, she'd branch out, open her own accounting firm. Meantime, David would climb the corporate ladder in mergers and acquisitions.

For a while, everything had gone just the way they'd hoped. Five years ago—on the heels of David's first big promotion—they'd tied the knot. The boys had come along soon after. With her plans to return to work on hold till they were older, she'd thrown herself into raising their children and watched while David practically scampered up the rungs at the office, becoming the youngest junior partner in the history of Waterson and Bash. But his success had come at a price. For all their dreams, what was left of their marriage boiled down to the papers stacked in his-and-her rows on the dining room table.

Assets in one pile.

Debts in another.

Yellow legal pads, separation agreements and terms of the divorce.

Tears pooled in the corners of her eyes. Angry at herself, she swiped at them and wiped her hands on her sweat pants. She'd known for a while now that things weren't right between them. The demands of parenthood and his job had pushed them apart, until they'd gone from finishing each other's sentences to barely speaking, from lovers who couldn't keep their hands off each other to little more than roommates who just happened to be raising a couple of kids. Not that they fought or argued or strayed. That wasn't their style. Or at

least she hadn't thought so. A wry laugh bubbled in her chest. Her refusal to face facts explained why the end had struck so suddenly and with such ferocity that it had shocked them both.

How had she not seen the train wreck coming?

For months, David had sung the praises of his new personal assistant. Charlie, it seemed, didn't just walk on water; he'd invented the stuff. It was "Charlie this" and "Charlie that," until her husband couldn't talk about his day without bringing his assistant into every conversation. He'd even insisted on throwing a party to introduce Charlie to his clients.

Though the boys kept her so busy that, heaven only knew, adding one more thing to her schedule was a little cray-cray, hadn't she done her part? Pulling out all the stops, she'd lined up the caterers, agonized over the menu, selected the wines and the tablecloths. In short, she'd single-handedly juggled the thousand and one details that went into an elaborate bash. Which had all fallen apart, right here at this very dining room table, a scant six weeks ago.

She kicked at the table leg, wincing when her toe made contact.

"Dammit."

One minute, her husband had been playing the role of gracious host. Standing at his side, she hadn't suspected a thing...until the ground shifted beneath her feet when she finally met David's oft-discussed assistant. Because Charlie was actually

Charlotte, a stunning twenty-four-year-old with a master's in accounting from Columbia and enough curves to raise a NASCAR driver's blood pressure.

Though Margo hadn't so much as batted an eye, her stomach had lurched the way it had when she was a kid and stared into one of those fun-house mirrors. Only this time, instead of an image that yawned hugely in one direction or the other, the mirror had stripped away time. Her head pounding, she'd seen herself...minus five years and two kids' worth of stretch marks. Before her life had descended into a never-ending race to outrun their preschoolers, ambition had propelled her onward and upward. Now that same glow burned in Charlie's eyes.

From the gleam in David's, he saw the same thing.

Seeing that look told her all she needed to know. The damage was done, her marriage over in all the ways that really counted. David had made his choice. Though she believed him when he said he hadn't broken their marriage vows, she couldn't ignore the dangerous path he'd chosen. Or that, sooner or later, the assistant would end up in his bed.

So sure, she'd felt positively pea green when Sam Waterson referred to Charlie as David's "office wife." And while she'd gasped right along with their guests when Davey Junior escaped the babysitter's clutches, raced down the stairs...and promptly upchucked SpaghettiOs all over a pair of Louboutins that probably cost Charlie more than

Margo spent on groceries each month, her horror had quickly morphed into anger. Shoes or no shoes, the woman had no business screaming obscenities at her son. David's restraining hand on her arm had been the only thing that kept her from tossing a drink in Charlie's face. As it was, the incensed personal assistant had dashed out the door. After which, the social event of the season had dissolved in a hailstorm of blame and hasty good-byes.

The moment the front door slammed behind their last departing guest, David had made a beeline for the bar. While he downed glass after glass of expensive champagne, they'd argued. Over the cost of caterers and floral arrangements. And Charlie, of course. When her husband of five years firmly—and unforgivably—took his assistant's side, the argument spiraled into a funnel cloud that ripped through their marriage, exposing every flaw and tearing it right down to the bare foundation. By the time starched waitresses and tuxedoed waiters cleared the buffet and pulled out of the drive, she and David had been on the phone with separate attorneys.

Both lawyers had recommended a cooling-off period. A trial separation, they'd called it. But if there was one thing she and David agreed on, it was that words hurled in anger could never be recalled. The love they'd sworn would last a lifetime had evaporated like a puddle after a rainstorm. They'd been in free fall ever since, their descent buffeted by discussions of asset protection, visitation rights and child support.

She caught a flash of black as David's car whipped into the driveway. Finally. The garage door rumbled upward, and she straightened. Moments later, the security system chirped. Her chest seized, making it difficult to draw even a shallow breath, much less the lungful she'd need to get through the next few minutes. Forcing herself to remain calm, she snugged her ponytail and marched to her favorite Queen Anne chair, where she sat, legs crossed, arms folded.

But instead of heading to the living room where they'd agreed to meet, David's footsteps took him toward the back of the house. Minutes ticked by while she waited, second thoughts tumbling through her head.

Was it too late to call off the dogs? Retreat into their separate corners? Fire the divorce attorneys? Hire a marriage counselor?

No, she decided. She could raise their children with an absentee husband. Their marriage could survive his long hours at the office and even longer business trips. She could tolerate the lonely nights and the weeks that passed without so much as a pat on the back.

But Charlie had changed everything.

"David?" she called at last.

When there was no answer, she headed across the house to a room where one side of the bed had remained untouched for a month. "Where are you? I thought we were going to talk."

Though the door to his closet stood ajar, David

had been and gone, leaving a wrinkled suit and a discarded dress shirt in his wake. Turning, she nearly tripped over the leather shoes he'd left in the middle of the floor.

Her patience fading, she retraced her steps through the house. Movement beyond the front window drew her attention to the lawn where her husband, dressed in a T-shirt and jeans, hauled a gleaming silver ladder across the yard. A series of metallic blows sounded as he wedged the top end against one of the oak's thick limbs. A purposeful stride took him out of sight for a long minute. Her breath stalled when he reappeared, carrying a wicked-looking chain saw. Seconds later, the roar that ripped through the neighborhood competed with the thunder of the approaching storm.

She glanced from the spinning blade to the tree limb that brushed against the house. Fear seized her chest. She raced for the door.

"Get down! Get down this instant," she yelled, not caring that she sounded much the same as she had earlier today when she'd caught Davey and Jeremy playing follow-the-leader across the backside of the family room couch.

David either chose to ignore her or simply couldn't hear over the incessant whine. With a loud crack, leaves and branches blurred past the spot where she stood. The bushy end of the limb struck the ground with such force she felt the impact through her shoes. Yelping, she darted under the porch's protective overhang and stared at the



partially cut limb hanging off the rest of the tree. A quiet so profound it almost hurt her ears filled the air as the chain saw fell silent.

“What on earth are you doing?” Lightning tore across the sky. She shielded her eyes.

“What does it look like?” David asked without bothering to glance her way. “I’m cutting back the tree before this storm sends it through the roof.”

*The roof. Not our roof.*

At yet another sign of how far apart they’d drifted, she hesitated. “Can’t it wait? The boys are at my folks’. We were supposed to talk. Sign the papers.”

“When I’m done here.” Reaching for the red handle on the chain saw, he finally glanced down. “You know, I wouldn’t be doing this if you’d just done what I asked and called the tree trimmers. One phone call. That’s all it would have taken.”

Okay, so he had a point. She should have made the call, but the dropping barometric pressure had sent the boys bouncing off the walls—literally and figuratively. She’d barely had a chance to go to the bathroom, much less locate the number for their tree service and spend half an hour lining up an appointment.

“It slipped my mind. I’ll do it tomorrow.” Though how she’d find the time then, she didn’t know. Each day, she did the same things over and over again in the vague hope that this time she’d get a better outcome.

Wasn’t that the definition of insanity?

She nibbled her lower lip.

“Watch. Out of the way.” David wrestled the chain saw into the fresh cut. Rain splattered the sidewalk while he braced himself on the ladder. Lightning cut another bright swath across the darkened sky. Thunder gave the ground another shake.

Margo’s stomach turned over. “Let it go, David,” she pleaded. “I’ll have it taken care of tomorrow.”

“Too little. Too late. Go inside if you don’t want to watch.”

He tugged the handle, and the saw roared to life. Almost instantly, the branch tipped lower. But instead of falling free, the cut section pulled the rest of the limb down with it. Another crack tore a hole in the air. A white gash streaked up the branch. It passed the point where David had anchored the ladder. For one long second, everything shook. Then, as if in slow motion, a huge section of the limb broke off, sending the ladder—and her husband—plummeting to the ground. Wet leaves and twigs showered down on top.

Margo screamed.

While the echo bounced off the house, she plunged forward, but too many branches, too much tree blocked her path. Fighting an instinct to charge ahead, she dashed back inside where she scooped her cell phone off the dining room table. Punching 9-1-1, she sprinted through the kitchen, rushed out the garage door and burst into a war zone. Jagged wooden splinters, some large enough to impale a

man or a small car, protruded through the dense foliage. Ignoring the branches that tore at her clothes and scratched her arms, she forced her way into the center.

Hours seemed to pass before she uncovered David. Silent, unmoving, one arm bent at an odd angle, he lay in a tangle of small branches, red coursing from a long gash on his forehead. Her heart stuttered at the blood that ran in rivulets down his cheeks. She sank to her knees at his side.

“David,” she called, then couldn’t manage another word.

His answering groan sent hope arcing through her. *He’s alive.*

She clutched his fingers. “I’m here,” she whispered. “Lie still. An ambulance is on the way.”

“This is all your fault,” he moaned.

*Not exactly.*

Clamping her mouth shut, she refused to argue. Later, maybe, she could point out that she wasn’t the one who’d climbed up on a ladder in the middle of a thunderstorm. She might even admit her part in the accident, shoulder some of the blame. But not now. Now she could only pray as her soon-to-be-ex-husband’s eyes rolled back and his head lolled to one side while sirens screamed in the distance.



Double-wide doors swished open at the paramedic’s

touch. Smelling faintly of antiseptic, a blast of cold air slapped Margo in the face. The gurney rattled, its wheels wobbling. Men and women wearing blue shirts and black pants pushed it quickly down a wide corridor.

One of the men called out information. “BP one twenty over eighty. Pulse fifty-six.”

Medical personnel crowded in. Jostled to one side, Margo hustled, intent on not losing sight of David. The group rounded a corner where a woman in scrubs blocked her path.

“Ma’am, are you family? Family only beyond this point.”

“What?” Margo wrenched her gaze away from the still figure on the cot. She glanced at the woman’s name tag. *Debbie*. What had she asked? “Yes. I’m Margo Langdon. That’s my husband, David Langdon.”

At least he was for another month. Once they signed the paperwork that still waited for signatures on their dining room table, the countdown would begin. In as little as four or five weeks, they’d both be free. But David would always be the father of her children and, for now, she was his wife. Buying herself time to think about what she should say next, she exhaled slowly. “I want to be with him.”

“Give us a chance to get him into an exam room. Meantime, if you could answer some questions, it would help us provide your husband with the best treatment. Full name and date of birth?”

“David James Langdon. March 21, 1986.”

*An Aries like me.* Maybe that was part of their problem.

“Any allergies? Drugs? Latex? Foods?” asked Debbie.

“No. The boys are both allergic to peanuts, which is weird since David isn’t, and neither am—” She was babbling and stopped. “No allergies,” she repeated.

“Any history of heart attack or stroke? Is he diabetic?”

“No, no and no.”

While Debbie fired off more questions, the paramedics wheeled David into one of the cubicles that radiated from a centralized hub like the spokes of a wheel. Margo flinched at a clatter of metal. Her gaze shot to an overhead track. Curtain holders chattered loudly as someone gave the heavy drape another tug. All the while, people continued to stream into the exam area.

“Does he have a living will? Is he an organ donor?”

Her attention snapped to the nurse.

Though her mouth went instantly dry, she managed, “He’s going to be all right, isn’t he? He’s not going to...to die?” The thought of explaining to her young sons that their father wasn’t ever coming home took her breath away. Tears welled in her eyes.

Debbie’s hand poised over her iPad. “I didn’t mean to upset you. We ask everyone the same questions. Does he? Have a living will?”

“No.” To the best of her knowledge, David didn’t have any kind of will, living or otherwise.

*Should he? Should she?* She shoved the guilt aside. *What thirty-year-old thinks death can ever happen to them?*

By the time Debbie finished playing twenty questions and ushered Margo into the curtained exam area, one of the staff had removed David’s clothes. Dressed in a nondescript hospital gown, he lay under a thin blanket, his eyes closed, an oxygen mask over his nose and mouth. She couldn’t look away from him and focused on the bare toes that protruded from beneath the covers. Wires snaked under and over the blanket to various spots on his body. An IV bag hung from a tall pole at his bedside. Adhesive anchored one end of a tube to the back of his hand. Her eyes swam at the red blossoms on the white gauze wrapped around his head. Sinking into a chair in the corner, she studied the monitors and told herself to be thankful for every reassuring blip and bleat.

“So, what do we have?” Her white coat spotless, a woman not much older than Margo drew the immediate attention of the half dozen people in the room.

“Thirty-year-old male. Fall injury. Unconscious but breathing on his own for approximately thirty minutes. Blood pressure and pulse normal.” Debbie glanced up from the notebook she’d anchored to a rolling stand.

Poking, prodding, the doctor leaned over

David's prone figure. She pulled a small flashlight from a pocket. One at a time, she raised his eyelids.

"We have PERLA," she announced, "but let's call Neurology for a consult. Get an X-ray of that arm." She pointed. "Let's stitch up that head lac. In the meantime, we'll need a STAT CBC, EKG and head CT."

While Margo's stomach tightened with each incomprehensible series of letters, the nurses and technicians dispersed like soldiers who'd received their marching orders.

At last, the doctor turned to her. "Mrs. Langdon, I'm Dr. Sarah Miles, the emergency resident on call this evening. Can you tell me what happened?"

Her heart hammering, Margo licked her lips. "He was on a ladder, cutting down a branch on the oak tree in our front yard. The limb snapped and the ladder slipped. He, uh..." Her words faded. "Next thing I knew, he was on the ground," she said in a rush.

The doctor leaned closer. "Did he fall very far, Mrs. Langdon?"

"Five, six feet maybe?" Picturing the scene, she closed her eyes. She could practically hear herself yelling at David to get down.

*I should have been nicer.*

*I shouldn't have taken no for an answer.*

She pried her eyes open. "It's a twelve-foot ladder. He was about halfway up."

"Good. That's good. Tell me, did anything heavy fall on him? Was he pinned?"

“No.” She shook her head. “Lots of little branches and leaves, but I was able to clear it all away by myself. The big limb, it fell first. That’s what knocked the ladder out from under him.” The memory sent a shudder rippling across her shoulders.

“Okay then.” The doctor paused for a breath. “Here’s what we’re going to do. I’ve ordered a battery of tests and blood work. It’s obvious your husband struck his head when he landed. That explains the scalp lac— Sorry.” A thin smile flickered across the doctor’s lips. “The cut on his forehead. Don’t worry about the blood. Head wounds always bleed. It’s a little concerning that he’s still unconscious, but we have PERLA—that means his pupils are equal and reactive—which is a good sign. In all likelihood he has a concussion, but we won’t know how serious it is until he has a head CT, which I’m sending him down to have right now. Oh, and it looks like his left arm is broken. He probably tried to break his fall with it.”

Margo held her breath. “He’s going to be okay, though.”

“We’re going to do our very best for him, Mrs. Langdon. I’ll be able to tell you more after I see all his results.”

The response wasn’t nearly as reassuring as she would have liked. Before she could ask more, two orderlies swept into the room. Their movements quick and efficient, they released the brakes on David’s gurney and wheeled him, IV and all, into the hall.



“They’re taking him to Radiation for the X-rays and CT now. While they’re gone, there’s some paperwork you’ll need to fill out. Insurance and admission forms, that sort of thing. Debbie will show you where to go.” Checking the pager clipped to her waistband, the doctor motioned to the nurse and slipped out of the room with a crisp, “I’ll be in bay twelve.”

As Debbie continued logging information, fluorescent lights amplified the harsh angles and shadows in the treatment area. The reassuring beeps of the monitors had fallen silent. The bank of dials on the wall had zeroed out. Margo stared at three red drops on the pale green floor tiles and swallowed. Without David in it, the space had lost its limited appeal. Her body aching, she struggled to her feet.

“I should go with him,” she said to no one in particular.

“Can’t. No family or visitors allowed in Radiology.” With all the warmth and patience of someone who’d grown tired of repeating the same phrases over and over, Debbie continued typing. “He won’t be long. While he’s gone, let’s get you to Registration.” Her fingers flew over the screen until, with a flourish, she finished. “There!”

With no other option but to do as she was told, Margo followed orange footsteps painted on the floor to one of several tiny workstations near the ER’s main entrance. There, a sympathetic clerk

required more information about her husband than the bank had needed when they financed their house. An eternity passed before she signed papers she didn't have the strength to read.

"Someone will call for you soon," the clerk promised. "Till then, please take a seat in the waiting room."

An urge to protest surged into Margo's throat. She tempered it, telling herself it wouldn't do any good to argue. She didn't know her way around the hospital or how soon the orderlies would return with David. Forcing her shoulders to relax, she tracked a different set of footprints—yellow, this time—through yet another set of double doors.

"How's he doing?" Greg Thomas, a neighbor and one of her husband's golf buddies, sprang from a hard plastic chair the moment she walked into the room. Beside him, a tiny woman in a gray cardigan gave a wan smile. "How are you holding up?" asked his wife.

"I don't know much. They think he has a concuss—" She stumbled over the word. Suddenly cold, she rubbed her upper arms. "They think he has a concussion and a broken arm. They're running tests. They had me filling out paperwork." She sagged, the strength seeping out of her.

"Here, sit." Greg's firm hand on her shoulder ushered Margo into the chair beside his wife. "What can I get you? Coffee? Soda?"

"Something hot, thanks. Coffee with cream, if they have it."

The minute Greg set off for the cafeteria, Shirley leaned in. "Are you all right?"

"I don't know." She shook her head and drew in a thready breath. "He could have died. He still might." Oh, sure, when she'd finally put two and two together, she'd seen red. But she'd never actually wish David harm. Not for more than a second or two, anyway.

"Let's not borrow trouble. David's strong. He'll come through this." Shirley fingered a cross that hung from a chain around her neck.

"From your lips to God's ears." Margo sighed.

"Where are the boys? Do you want me to pick them up? They can stay with us tonight."

"Thanks, but my mom and dad have them at the ranch." Her folks ran Happy Trails, a dude ranch on the outskirts of town. "They had already planned on a sleepover. In case things went badly as we hashed out all the details."

Had it only been a couple of hours ago that she and David had planned to sign the divorce petition? Now here she was, praying his injuries were minor. Unbelievable.

"Oh, crap," she whispered. "I need to make some calls. My folks. David's mom, too. This will be so hard on her." Leaning against the hard seat, Margo dug through her purse for her phone. When she found it, she sat, unable to bring herself to make the call. Her mother-in-law had barely pulled her life back together after David's father was killed by a drunken driver. If something happened to her

oldest son, it would probably destroy the retired schoolteacher.

Shirley's hand cupped her fingers.

"Why don't you wait on that for a while? Just till you find out how the tests went. Then maybe you'll have some positive news to share."

"Yeah, you're right." Relieved, Margo slid the phone into the outside pocket of her purse where it'd be handy.

"I hate to ask, but how'd things go with the...?"

"The divorce?" Shirley was one of few friends who knew the whole story. "We never got that far. The minute he came home from work—late, as usual—he headed out to take care of the tree."

Shirley's brown eyes blinked rapidly. "I can't believe he went up on that ladder. What was he thinking?"

*He was thinking I should have called the tree trimmers.* But since that was more than she wanted to admit—even to a close friend—Margo simply shook her head.

"What a mess," she whispered.

"Here now, don't worry. Greg rounded up a few guys in the neighborhood—Susie's husband and Belinda's. They'll get everything in your yard cleaned up and taken care of. They're just waiting for the storm to blow itself out."

Margo eyed the rain pelting the sidewalks on the other side of the plate glass window. Florida storms rarely lingered, but this one was a doozy. Hours had passed since the first scattered drops

sizzled on hot pavement. Yet an occasional bright flash still lit the sky. On its heels, thunder rumbled.

“I don’t want anyone else to get hurt,” she protested.

Greg reappeared, carrying a tray loaded with coffee and creamers. He placed a steaming cup into her hands. “Trust me, we’re not going to do anything stupid. I called the guy who takes care of my trees. You use Lindeman’s too, don’t you?” At Margo’s nod, he continued. “They’ll be out first thing in the morning. Tonight, all we’re gonna do is pick up the small stuff.”

Wrapping her in a warm hug, Shirley whispered, “Let them help. You know men. They need to do something. It’ll make them feel useful.”

Stifling a laugh, Margo said she appreciated Greg’s efforts. For a while after that, conversation flowed around her while she did her best to pay attention. But it was hard to listen to Greg and Shirley discuss the newest restaurant in town while David lay in another part of the hospital. At last, the door to the treatment area swung wide.

“Mrs. Langdon?” called a young girl in a pink uniform.

“I’m here.” Margo jerked upright. Not sure her legs would support her, she struggled to her feet.

“Wait a sec, honey. Take my sweater.” Shirley stripped the long gray cardigan from her own arms.

“Thank you,” Margo answered and meant it as she slipped the sweater over her shoulders. “I’ll call as soon as I have news.”

She barely registered Shirley's, "No rush," any more than she paid attention to the ambulance that skidded to a stop with a watery spray beyond the ER doors. Her flip-flops slapping against the tiles, she reached the cubicle where she'd last seen David. It was empty, the curtain pushed against the wall, the floor freshly scrubbed. Puzzled, she turned to ask the aide, but the candy striper had disappeared. At the end of the hall, a sudden commotion erupted. Nurses and doctors converged on a spot where paramedics worked feverishly over an incoming patient. Margo flattened herself against the wall to let the group move past.

"Mrs. Langdon?" Dr. Miles separated herself from the throng. "You must be looking for your husband. Didn't anyone tell you?"

Margo slid one hand over the hollow spot that formed in her stomach. "Tell me what?"

The doctor tugged an iPad from her pocket. She cleared her throat. "Yes, well. We've sutured that cut on Mr. Langdon's forehead. The CT shows a slight concussion. Neurology is sending someone in to see him. He had a straightforward break of the left ulna. We've applied a temporary cast. The orthopedist will be in first thing in the morning to take a look at it. We'd like to keep an eye on him for the next day or two, so they're moving him to room 254. You can meet him there." She scrolled through her notes before adding, "Oh. And he came to while he was in Radiology. He should be awake by the time you—"

“Dr. Miles, we need you.” The clipped voice overrode whatever else the doctor intended to say.

Turning, the young woman added a brisk, “His neurologist will have to clear him, but everything should be okay.”

*If only that were true.*

Margo stared after the departing doctor. Now that David was awake, things would go back to their oh-so-not-okay normal.

Her shoulders tightening with every step, she headed to the elevator. As she pushed the button for the second floor, she caught sight of her reflection in the shiny doors. Blood smeared the sweats and T-shirt she’d tugged on this morning when she thought she’d spend the day chasing after a pair of toddlers. Most of her hair had escaped its ponytail. Her cheeks bore the telltale tracks of tears. The branches had scratched her hands, torn her nails. She looked like she’d been in battle and braced herself. The worst, she was afraid, was yet to come.

On reluctant feet, she found her way to the right room. Pausing just outside the door, she listened to the murmur of voices drifting from David’s bedside.

“You gave that hard head of yours quite a knock, but you should be fine if you take care of yourself.”

Margo peeked around the doorframe. A tall figure in a white coat blocked her view of the bed.

“You might have a headache, blurred vision, nausea, dizziness,” the speaker continued. “Unless

the symptoms get worse, that's all normal. You'll want to rest and relax for a couple of days. What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a student."

Though the voice certainly sounded like her husband's, Margo glanced at the room number. Yep. 254. But why would David lie? Though he'd talked about going back to school for years, that's all it had been—just talk. He didn't have time for classes and studies any more than he had the time to play catch with Davey Junior or sing lullabies to Jeremy. Maybe he thought the divorce would provide the freedom to do as he pleased. The coffee sloshed in her unsettled stomach.

"Take it easy," the doctor ordered. "No sports activities until you've gone at least a week without a headache."

"What?" David asked. "No soccer on the quad this weekend?"

*Soccer?* The most strenuous exercise David got was riding around in a golf cart once or twice a month. In fact, she'd bet he hadn't kicked a soccer ball since college.

"Yeah, that's exactly what I mean," the doctor said, apparently unaware that her husband was pulling one over on him. "Nothing like that for at least a month."

"You got it," came David's response.

"Excuse me, Doctor?" Margo asked a few seconds later as the man in the white coat headed past her. "I'm Mrs. Langdon. I take it he'll live?"



*At least until I pound some sense into him.*

“We’re going to keep him overnight to be sure, but his CT showed only a mild concussion. He doesn’t remember the accident, which is not at all unusual. A lot of patients experience slight memory loss and can’t recall the events immediately before and after a blow to the head. He may recover those memories over time. He should be able to return to normal activities in a week or so. Well, except for the broken arm. His ortho will talk to you about that.”

“Thank you.” Margo leaned against the wall, surprised when a sudden wash of relief left her shaky.

The doctor slipped a business card from his coat. “Call my office to make a follow-up appointment in seven days.”

Leather soles slapping against the highly polished tile, the doctor—George Baines, Neurology, according to his card—headed down the hall to the nurses’ station. Watching him go, Margo wiped a single tear from one eye while she pocketed the slip of paper. The knots in her stomach loosened with the reassurance that David would recover. The tightness in her chest eased.

As she entered the room, her husband’s head rose. A shy smile slid across his lips. A potent mix of emotion stirred in a pair of dark eyes that hadn’t shown more than disdain for her presence in far too long.

“You came?” he said, sounding surprised.

“Of course. You were hurt. I had to make sure you were okay.”

Margo took a breath. Despite the purple goose egg above a gauze headband that hid fifteen stitches, despite the fact that he was lying flat on his back in a hospital bed with one arm covered in thick plaster, he was alive. She didn't have to explain life and death to their children. She gave a prayer of thankfulness and listened.

“Yeah. Hurt.” David's long fingers traced the ridges of the bandage. “I'm still not quite sure what happened.”

Margo kept it simple. “You were on a ladder, trimming a tree branch. It slipped and you fell.”

“So...” He paused as if he'd received information he didn't quite understand. “We were doing yard work,” he repeated. His face brightened, and he chuckled nervously. “Guess that didn't work out so well.”

“It could have been worse. By the time your arm heals, you'll be good as new.”

“A kiss might help me get better faster, don't you think?” He frowned at the IV board anchoring his broken arm to the bed. “Sorry. I can't get up right now. C'mere.” He motioned her closer.

*Not exactly the reception I expected, but hey, let's go with it.*

On tentative feet, she edged forward. When David slipped his free hand around her waist, she swallowed a gasp. But when he pulled her to him, she bent, letting her lips meet his soft, yet

demanding, ones. Probing, his tongue ran the seam of her lips, teasing them apart. Memories of his touch mingled with the present, overwhelming her senses. She inhaled, drinking in his familiar spicy scent while their tongues danced to a tune she'd almost forgotten. As his hand sought the nape of her neck and drew her closer to him, long-buried desire sparked in her midsection.

Sound drifted in from the hall. Metal clanged against metal. The wheels on a passing cart squeaked. Breaking the kiss, she pulled away.

*What are we doing?*

Mere hours ago, David had insisted on finalizing the terms of their divorce. His interest in her had waned to the point where sex was a distant memory. Yet here they were, practically panting—okay, she was panting a little—and ready to tear their clothes off. Where was the angry man who questioned every dime she spent? The one who no longer spooned her in bed but slept with his back to her? Had the blow to his head somehow restored his love for her?

*Impossible.*

She straightened the blanket under his chin. “Feel better now?”

“I’m not sure. I might need another dose.”

The hopeful lift in David’s voice teased a smile from her. “Maybe later. We wouldn’t want to get carried away and have the nurses give us what for.”

At David’s sad nod, she gave his hand a squeeze. Sinking onto a vinyl-covered recliner, she said,

“You gave me quite a scare.” Divorce court might be the next stop on their train ride, but she didn’t wish him harm.

“I still don’t understand what happened. Were we at my folks’?”

“You don’t remember?” Margo fought to keep her smile steady. It had been three years since David’s father had died. Soon after, his mom had sold their house in Viera and moved to the same North Carolina town where her sister lived. She took a breath. “No,” she corrected. “We were home.”

“Home?” David’s eyes widened. A note of disbelief crept into his voice. “Where?”

“At our house. In Suntree. You came home from work. We were going to, um—” Deciding to skip that part for now, she blurted, “We had papers to go over. But you dashed outside instead. There was a limb brushing against the front of the house.”

Confusion moved across David’s face like fast-moving clouds. Pressing his fingers to his eyes, he closed them. “I don’t remember,” he whispered.

“What’s the last—” Fear shook her voice. Deliberately, she firmed it. “The doctor said we could expect some blank spots in your memory. What’s the last thing you do remember?”

David’s brows knotted the way they always did when he concentrated. As they slowly untangled, the shy smile crawled across his lips. “Finals are over, aren’t they? I was sweating bullets over that last statistics class, but I know I aced the exam. I’m

interning at Waterson and Bash this summer,” he said with more confidence. “I start next week.”

Margo clenched her hands into tight fists. Don’t panic, she told herself. Just because David had started at W&B the summer before graduation, that didn’t mean he’d forgotten everything that had happened in the past ten years. She should probably let him talk. Then, like pushing the fast-forward button on the DVR, he’d catch up to where they were now.

“I’m not sure what day it is, but I have a hot date for this weekend.” David’s lips pulled down at the corners. “You’ll wear something hot, won’t you? Not”—he glanced pointedly at her sweats and faded T-shirt—“that?”

Suddenly self-conscious, she tugged Shirley’s sweater tighter. Granted, the dried splotch of jelly from Jeremy’s lunch was a bit outré, but as everyday wear went, this was it. Applying makeup, fixing her hair and wearing the latest fashions didn’t make sense when she spent her days chasing after two toddlers.

Think, she ordered. *This isn’t about me. It’s all about helping W&B’s junior partner in Mergers and Acquisitions get his memory back.*

“If I promise to wear something sexy, where will you take me?” She tossed out a saucy grin and hoped the edges didn’t wobble.

The creases around David’s lips deepened into a full smile. “Dinner and a movie. *Cinderella Man* ’cause it’s my turn to pick.”

“You always did like Russell Crowe,” she said, ignoring the panic that beat its wings in her chest and demanded to get out. The story of a washed-up boxer who fought his way to the top was one of the actor’s older flicks. “I like him too,” she admitted, twisting her fingers. “Do you remember our plans for the summer?”

“Work, mostly. I need to make a good impression on Mr. Waterson so he’ll offer me a full-time job once I graduate.” David’s brow wrinkled. Absently, he tugged at the bandage wrapped around his forehead. “We have that trip to Blue Springs at the end of the summer. That’ll be fun.”

Suddenly transported back in time, she pictured the state park where visitors hiked nature trails and floated inner tubes on the crystal clear water. She and David had pitched a tent at one of the campsites and spent a glorious weekend making love at night under the stars. But that had been ten years ago.

She shook her head. The doctor had said David might have “slight memory loss,” but he needed to redefine that word *slight*. Because, from what she was seeing, they weren’t using the same dictionary. Her shoulders tense, she searched for the right questions.

“David, who’s the president of the United States?”

His eyebrows rose. “Well, that came out of nowhere, didn’t it?”

“Just answer. Please,” she added.

He shrugged. "Bush. George Bush. Why do you want to know?"

*Because Barack Obama is halfway through his second term in the White House.*

Thinking that might be information he wasn't ready to hear, she faked a smile. "And do you know what year it is?"

"2005. Margo, what's going on? You weren't hurt when I fell, were you? You're starting to worry me."

"I'm fine. Honest." *Other than the fact that there's a big gaping hole in your memory, everything's peachy keen.* "But there's something I forgot to ask the doctor. Let me see if I can catch him. Promise not to get up if I leave you alone for a minute?"

David tapped the plaster cast on his arm. "No races for me. Doctor's orders. Can you bring me a candy bar when you come back?"

"Um, sure," she agreed while she carved another notch in her something's-seriously-wrong belt. David had given up sweets of all kinds five years earlier when he discovered that, thanks to a mostly sedentary lifestyle, he'd packed ten pounds onto his lean frame.

Keeping her motions as casual as possible, she made it to the door before she broke into a panic-induced sprint. At the nurses' station, she glanced at vacant chairs in front of monitors.

"A little help here?" she called.

Her heart did a somersault when Dr. Baines leaned out of a cubicle.

“You just caught me. I was charting your husband’s progress.” He swiveled in his chair. “What can I do for you, Mrs. Langdon?”

Breathless, she gasped, “I think there’s a problem. He doesn’t remember.”

“I believe I said his memory of the accident might remain spotty for a while.” Dr. Baines pushed a pair of reading glasses higher on his nose.

“But he doesn’t remember anything,” she protested. “Not our home, our marriage, his job.” *Good Lord, does he even remember the children?*

Baines stroked his chin. “That’s troubling. Let’s take another look at him, shall we?”

White coat flapping, the tall man strode to David’s bedside where he repeated all the questions Margo had asked, plus a few she hadn’t. Each answer confirmed her suspicion that David’s accident had somehow rolled back the clock ten years. Her gaze drifted from the doctor to the man who sat in the hospital bed with such love shining in his eyes that it made her heart ache.

*Now what do we do?*



Bleat! Bleat! Bleat!

With a groan, Margo pried one eye open. She aimed for the clock on the nightstand where a red five and two zeros flashed. Yawning, she slapped the Off button. For a long moment, she snuggled beneath the downy comforter and listened to a



quiet broken only by the hiss of cold air pouring through an overhead vent. She hugged the blanket closer and caught a faint whiff of a musky, spicy scent. Curious, she sniffed again.

*David?*

Suddenly wide awake, she studied the pillow still clutched to her chest. David's pillow. She buried her nose in the soft cotton ticking. Considering the circumstances, she supposed it was only natural to cling to a reminder of him. He'd broken an arm and banged his head, but the outcome could have been so much worse. He could have been impaled by one of the jagged splinters. Might have broken his neck in the fall. At the thought of how close her children—and she—had come to losing him completely, she swung her legs over the side of the bed.

A quick call to the nurses' station told her nothing had changed—her husband remained trapped in a time warp. Wondering how soon his memories would return, *if* they returned, she finger-combed her hair. After a second CAT scan confirmed his initial diagnosis, Dr. Baines had insisted David would be back to his old self within the week. But, the doctor had gone on to say, it was critical the patient remain calm.

“It's important to reintroduce your husband to the present in slow, careful steps,” he'd said, thoughtfully tapping one finger on his chin. “Bring in a few photographs. Remind him of things that happened during the missing time period. But don't

overdo it. Too much too soon will overwhelm him and jeopardize his recovery.”

To that end, Baines had ordered the TV removed from David’s room and told the nurses to hide the morning newspaper. At his suggestion, she’d asked her folks to keep the boys, and her parents—God bless them—had sworn they were having the time of their lives with their only grandchildren.

“Davey and Jeremy are doing just fine,” they’d declared. “Focus on David. The sooner he recovers, the sooner you can move on with your lives.”

Determined to do her part, she’d spent half the night sorting through old photographs, searching through box after box until she found pictures of David and her on a long-ago camping trip to Blue Springs. Choosing one or two shots from the milestones of their lives since then, she’d pulled from their engagement and wedding albums, selected favorite photos of the boys. At last, so tired she could hardly put one foot in front of the other, she’d trudged upstairs where, intending to get to the hospital before rounds, she’d set an early alarm.

Was she doing too much? Not enough?

A faint glow already tinged the eastern horizon, and she still wasn’t sure. Searching for answers, she padded to her closet. There she thumbed her way past the casual wear best suited for long days of Mommy and Me classes, jelly sandwiches and at least two glasses of spilled milk. She fingered a worn T-shirt. Ten years ago, she wouldn’t have

been caught dead in baggy sweats. Back then, Daisy Dukes and a skimpy tank top were as low as she'd go. Most often, she'd worn barely there sundresses that showed off her curves and slipped her feet into strappy sandals.

Doctor's orders, she reminded herself as she reached for a pair of skinny jeans and a cold-shoulder paisley top. A cross-country runner all through college, she'd taken the sport up again after Jeremy was born. While Davey attended preschool and the baby napped in the jogging stroller, she usually managed twenty laps around the track at the nearby middle school. She shimmied into the form-fitting clothes while she thanked her lucky stars for firm muscles and a flat tummy.

Hair was next, but instead of anchoring it up in a wide clip, she left the long strands loose in an homage to the days when looking her best had been priority numero uno. As a final touch, she applied a bit of blush and powder, mascara and lipstick.

Looking in the mirror, she ran her fingers lightly over her lips where the taste of David's kiss yesterday lingered in her memory. When had he last kissed her like that? She paused, saddened when no flashing neon arrow illuminated that particular moment in history. She shook her head, once more getting used to the weight of the silky strands on her back. Too much time had passed since she and David had held each other close. Despite all their troubles, she longed for the solid weight of his hand around her waist as he guided

her to a chair. Hated that she no longer felt the casual brush of his hip as they jockeyed for milk, cereal, toast in the mornings. Missed making love.

Yeah. She missed that...a lot.

Was it possible to turn back the clock? Her heart thudded. Her breath caught. She twisted the bands on her ring finger. While she'd looked into David's dark eyes at the hospital last night, her heart had ached for the love they'd once shared. Was it possible to see that same emotion in his eyes again? A tiny ray of hope warmed her chest as she flipped through the photographs stacked beside her purse. If there was a chance—even a slim one—of rekindling the love they'd once known, didn't she owe it to them to try before his memories of the bad times overwhelmed them?

She thought she did and, over her first cup of coffee, she worked out a plan. Dr. Baines swore David would regain his memory within a week. She'd give herself—give them—that much time to make a fresh start. It wouldn't be easy. For seven days, she'd have to let go of her anger and frustration. Forgive her husband for not putting their marriage or their family at the top of his priority list. Forget about all the days and nights, the weeks on end, she'd spent alone with their children while he traveled for his job, or stayed late at the office to work one more deal.

But she could do it. If it meant saving her marriage, keeping their family intact, she could do it.

And if it worked, what then?

Well, they'd both have to change. No doubt about that. David swore he'd never been unfaithful. She'd believed him when he said he hadn't slept with his personal assistant...yet. But there was more to a good marriage than fidelity. Would he be willing to cut back at the office? Become more than an absentee father to their sons? Be the man she'd fallen in love with?

Grabbing a pashmina to ward off the chill in a building where nerves and air-conditioning conspired against guests, she wondered if maybe she wasn't the one who'd lost her mind. Still, she shoved her doubts aside and dashed out the door, determined. Somewhere buried under the workaholic with the short temper was the man she'd fallen in love with and, over the next few days, she'd do her best to find him.

Thanks to yesterday's storm, a froggy chorus greeted her on her way to the car. Mist rose from every pond and puddle. As she pulled out of the driveway, the first rays of a new day sparkled off droplets that shrouded the trees while patches of denser fog draped downed limbs in an ethereal beauty. She spotted trucks bearing the Lindeman Tree Service logo at the entrance to the neighborhood, and a tension she hadn't known she carried eased from her shoulders. True to his word, Greg had called in the professionals. By the time she came home tonight, the yard would be restored, the bill under the front mat the only sign left of the damage.

Ten minutes later, she smiled as the bell over the Roasted Bean's door tinkled cheerily.

The petite blonde behind the counter grinned a standard greeting. "Haven't seen you in a while, Margo. Welcome back."

"It's good to be here, Donna," she answered and meant it. Looking around, she took in the wrought-iron tables and cozy book nook that hadn't changed in the years since her last visit. Back in their salad days, the Bean had been one of David's favorite haunts. On college weekends and even into the early years of their marriage, they'd made a point of visiting the little café tucked into the center of their small town's shopping district. Carrying their purchases outside, they'd linger over the dark, robust brew. Talking, planning, stealing an occasional kiss, they'd watch while shoppers ambled the tree-lined streets.

"How are things with the family? A son, isn't it? He's got to be close to four, isn't he?"

Margo's answering smile registered surprise that Donna would remember after all this time. "Right on the money. Davey has a little brother now. Jeremy. They keep me on my toes." For a while after Davey's birth, she and David had continued their frequent visits to the Bean, though they'd no longer lingered at the tables but steered the stroller to the park where they'd taken turns pushing a swing in the cool shade. Once Jeremy came along, there'd been no more lazy afternoon treks downtown. In fact, there'd been no more lazy

afternoons, period. At least not with David. He'd so immersed himself in striving to get ahead he barely had time to breathe.

"And your husband? David, isn't it?"

Margo's smile wilted. "He's in the hospital. Took a fall and broke his arm," she said, stifling an urge to tell someone, anyone, every detail.

"I'm sorry to hear that." Donna scrubbed one hand on her apron.

"He should be released in a day or so. That's why I stopped in today. I want to take him some of that coffee he likes so much."

The barista's expression brightened. "If I remember right, you were both fans of our house blend. Anything else?" she asked, turning to the mammoth copper machine at the end of the counter.

"The same for me." While the proprietor filled her order, Margo peered into the display case. Baked daily in a brick oven, Donna's pastries were honest-to-goodness, melt-in-the-mouth treats. "And two of those," she added, selecting a couple of David's favorites.

"Don't stay away so long next time," Donna said as she handed Margo her change and a sturdy tray. "Give David my best. I hope he gets better real soon."

Soon, but not too soon, Margo thought. She and David had loved each other once. Seeing him lying on the ground yesterday, blood pouring from a gash in his forehead, she'd been certain she'd lost him.

But when she thought of the future, she wanted him in it.

What if she was too late? What if his memories had already come back?

Praying they hadn't, she drank in one last breath of coffee-scented air on her way out the door. Minutes later, carrying a sack of sweet rolls that would add an extra five miles to her next run, she squared her shoulders and slipped into David's room. She clutched the tray of coffee tighter, hoping against hope that his memories hadn't returned.

"Oh, hey!" he called, turning away from the window. Despite the awkward-looking cast on his arm, he struggled to sit up. "You're here."

The smile that had tugged on her heartstrings the moment they'd first met crept across his face. Margo paused to catch her breath. Resisting the urge to rush in and throw her arms around him, she managed a soft, "Hey, yourself!"

"Yow-za! Someone sure cleans up nice." David's eyes scorched a path from the hair she'd worn long and loose to the sexy sandals she'd unearthed from the back of her closet. "I like that top. Is it new?"

"I haven't worn it before." Though it wasn't exactly new. She'd purchased the blouse for a Memorial Day cookout, but she'd put it away, tags and all, when David called from the office to say she and the boys should go on without him. Now here it was, nearly Labor Day, and the shirt hadn't been off the hanger. Until today.



“How’s the patient this morning?” She settled the tray on the stand by David’s bed.

“I have the mother of a headache, but the nurse said I can have Tylenol after breakfast.”

“Good thing I stopped for coffee, then.” She handed him a cup.

He lifted the lid and inhaled the rich aroma. “The Roasted Bean?”

Nodding, she pointed to the bag. “Donna’s sweet rolls too.”

“You’re an angel. C’mere and let me thank you properly” Hampered by the IV that pinned one arm to the bed, he reached out, his free hand circling her waist, tugging her ever closer.

She leaned down and brushed her lips gently across his forehead, taking care not to get too close to the wide bandage. When David pressed her for more, she drew back, shaken by an unexpected feeling that enjoying his touch, his embrace, was practically cheating as long as he had no idea what had transpired between them. Reaching for her purchases, she pretended a sudden interest in breakfast.

“Don’t you want a roll?” Paper crackled as she gave the bag a quick shake. “I brought your favorite. Cinnamon.”

David’s raised eyebrows gave her pause. The gooey sweets had been his pick ten years ago. Was she wrong in assuming he’d want them today? But no, she decided, as his wide-eyed expression filled with wonder.

“You’re so good to me,” he swore. “I don’t deserve you.”

*If that’s true, why aren’t you ever around?*

Forget the past, she told herself, trapping the question behind a smile. She had to focus on the here and now, not on how badly their marriage had faltered. With a nod to the recriminations that wouldn’t do either of them any good, she busied herself with their breakfast.

“Has Dr. Baines been in yet?” she asked when sweet rolls glistened on paper plates. She hoped to get the neurologist’s approval before she put her plan in motion.

“No.” The moment David bit into his cinnamon bun, he flopped back onto the bed, his eyes closed. “Oh, man. These are so good.” He chewed thoughtfully before he added, “The nurse said he doesn’t usually come around until after his office hours. Sometime around six or so.”

She couldn’t wait that long. Not with David’s memories apt to start flooding back at any time. If there was any hope of rekindling their love, she had to do it before he remembered how badly things had turned out for them. Her hunger for sweets fading, she shoved her roll aside after the second bite. For strength, she took a good long pull from her coffee cup. The doctor said to take it slow. Well, slow it was.

“So, yesterday you were having trouble remembering some things,” she said, dipping one toe into David’s murky past.

“It’s the weirdest thing. It’s like I’m Rip Van Winkle or something. I looked in the mirror and I thought, who is that dude with the gray hair?” David gingerly rubbed his temples where a few silver strands gleamed against his dark hair. “Then I went, hey, that’s me.”

“It’s got to be confusing.” Her eyes lowered, she rubbed one finger along the seam of her coffee cup.

“Dr. Baines says I’ll remember. I just have to wait it out. I figure as long as you’re here, nothing else really matters, does it?”

Timing, she thought, choking on a sip. It was all in the timing. She wished David’s had been better. Once she managed to swallow without spewing hot coffee all over herself, she blotted her lips. “Um, it’s been ten years. A lot has changed.”

“Ten years.” David gave a low whistle. “And we’re still together.”

“Yes.” *For now.*

She spun the rings on the finger of her left hand, exposing the princess-cut diamond David had pulled out of his pocket when he went down on bended knee. “The thing is, we got married.”

“No, we didn’t!” Disbelief warred with joy for possession of his face. A hard knot in the pit of her stomach unfurled when happiness won the battle. “You’re not kidding?”

“Nope.” Despite her efforts to swallow her laughter, she giggled. “I brought our wedding photograph. You want to see it?”

“Yeah, sure.” As if the news brought him a new measure of self-respect, he scooted higher in the bed. He watched eagerly while she pulled the gilt frame from her bag. She didn’t think it was possible for his grin to stretch any wider, but his mouth gaped open as he stared down at the candid shot taken outside the reception hall.

Against a backdrop of mullioned windows, David had leaned down, his head touching hers. Eyes closed, she’d savored his presence, knowing a year’s worth of preparations had gone into that particular moment—a time when, the ceremony and vows complete, their bright future lay ahead. If they’d known the photographer lurked on the sidelines, they probably would have waved him off. But when all was said and done, they’d chosen the snapshot over the hundreds of posed images as their official portrait.

Dampness pooled in David’s eyes as he glanced up from the picture. “You’re so beautiful.”

“You weren’t so shabby yourself.” Leaning forward, she traced a finger over the navy suit he’d chosen over a tux. The suit hadn’t been his first. It wouldn’t be his last. But it would always be her favorite.

When he let the picture rest on the bed beside him and ordered her to “tell me everything,” she sank onto the mattress at his feet.

“It was magical,” she began, and launched into the story of a day that had sped past in a blur. Choosing the moments she considered most

important, she drew word pictures of his adorable nieces scattering rose petals. Her heart melted a little when she described the glow that had suffused David's face when she walked down the aisle. She recalled butterflies beating their wings against her ribs as they recited the vows they'd written.

No wedding went off without hitches, and theirs had had its share. She laughed, replaying the moment when his thin band had absolutely refused to slide past his knuckle. In the end, she'd slipped the wedding ring over his pinky. One red-eyed, woozy groomsman required careful editing. No one wanted to revisit the memory of cookies tossed into shrubbery outside the church. As for the absolute hissy fit his Aunt Louise had raised over the seating arrangements, she omitted that part altogether. Instead, she focused on how handsome David had looked when they lit the unity candle. How they'd left the chapel arm in arm to thunderous applause. The way they'd danced to "Bless the Broken Road," barely touched the sumptuous meal, carefully smeared the cake, tossed the bouquet and the garter belt and drifted in each other's arms long after the music stopped.

"The limo driver acted like he'd never heard such a thing when we told him to stop at the closest fast-food place on the way to the hotel. But, honestly, we were having too much fun to think about eating at the reception."

She could still see them ravenously digging into greasy hamburgers and hot, salty french fries.

David, in his boxers on the bed, shirtsleeves rolled to his elbows, his tie discarded on the bureau. He'd stopped, his burger halfway to his mouth. An entirely different kind of hunger had flared in her midsection as he eyed her sitting there in little more than a bustier and panties, one sequined heel dangling from her toes. Until that moment, she'd wondered if they should have waited. But the sex on their wedding night had never been better, and when she came the first time, she'd sworn the heavens parted.

A little bit of what she'd felt must have shown on her face because David studied her, his expression pensive. "From that glow in your eyes, I'm guessing the night was a success?"

Her mouth dipped to one side. "The best," she said, pressing one hand over her breast.

"Not fair that you can remember and I can't." He hiked a brow suggestively. "Care to refresh my memory?"

Her cheeks warmed at the slow ache that started in her midsection and spread throughout her core. She had to admit it, she liked the idea. It had been months, literally, since David had shown the least bit of interest. One glance at the industrial-green walls and functional furnishings, though, was all it took to dampen her enthusiasm. Much as she'd like nothing better than to climb into bed beside him, there was a very good possibility they'd be interrupted without warning.

"No exerting yourself, remember?" She added a

saucy grin to cushion the rejection. “We’d better check with your doctor first.”

Not to be denied, David teased, “How ’bout a preview of things to come, then?”

Tapping one finger against her chin, she pretended to mull over his proposition for a long minute before she faked a resigned sigh. “One kiss can’t hurt. As long as you promise that’s as far as it goes.”

His fingers traced circles on her bare shoulder as she leaned in. In a move that never grew old, no matter how many times they repeated it, she brushed her lips against his. Although she’d meant the kiss to be a brief one, David clearly had other ideas. His free hand cupped the back of her head, drawing her so near she drank in the smell of freshly laundered sheets mixed with a scent that was uniquely his. Her toes practically curled as he rained tiny kisses along her lips. The tip of his tongue probed, seeking entrance, acceptance, more. Want pooled below her waist as he traced his fingers down her neck. Her breasts grew heavy beneath his touch. Her pulse hammered.

At a sharp rap on the door, they sprang apart like guilty teenagers discovered making out on the couch by her parents.

“To be continued?” David murmured, his voice filled with hope.

The door sprang open with a hiss and a swish before she had a chance to answer. An aide in green scrubs wheeled machinery into the room. The girl’s

eyes rounded, her gaze shifting between Margo and the patient.

“I can come back later,” she offered.

“No, it’s all right.” Margo waved the red-faced girl into the room. Tugging her shirt into place, she planted a final kiss atop David’s head on her way to her chair. As it turned out, the technician was only the first in a parade of health care workers who marched through the room taking vitals, removing IVs and dispensing pills, food and drink. Wondering if she and David would ever pick up where they left off, she sipped coffee and stuck to neutral topics for hours on end while the workers went about their business. Just when she thought they’d seen the last of them, the door swung open to admit a mere wisp of a girl.

“Hi! I’m Anna,” announced a perky physical therapist. “Time to get you on your feet, Mr. Langdon. Your doctor wants you to take a little walk today.”

“I’m ready,” David said, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. “Does this mean I can go home?”

“Not today,” came the answer while she secured a wide belt around his waist. “And tomorrow’s not looking good. Ortho will clear you once you’re up and moving around, but Neuro has to approve your discharge. They like to keep head injuries around for a couple of days. Take your time now.”

Holding one end of the strap, the therapist retreated a step while Margo, noting the disparity in



their sizes, scooted to the edge of the visitor's chair.

"I'm good," David insisted, sitting face-to-face with the therapist. "I don't need help."

But Anna was not to be deterred. Holding tight to her end of the strap, she cautioned, "You might be woozy because of the concussion. The cast will throw you off your balance. Let's take it nice and slow. Any dizziness? Headaches? Nausea?" she asked once David stood at the side of the bed.

"Not a bit," he answered, though his face definitely went a shade lighter.

Used to being in charge, he announced his opinion of the therapist's restrictions with an exaggerated eye roll. Slow and easy had never been his strong suit, and Margo did her best not to laugh at his impatience as the pair headed into the hall. Sure enough, in ten minutes, they were back, David tugging the slight girl along in his wake.

"Feel like doing some more?" she asked when he lingered at the door.

"Definitely. The more I walk, the sooner I can get out of here. Right?" He turned to Anna.

"That's up to Neuro," she repeated. "But congratulations. You're steady enough on your feet that you don't need this." She loosed the thick strap she'd belted around David's middle.

At his I-told-you-so glance, Margo joined him for a walk through the wide corridors that circled the nurses' station. Watching the other patients slowly, sometimes painfully, move up and down the hall, it was only natural for David to want to prove

he was stronger, fitter. His competitive nature had been one of the first things she'd noticed about him. That was, she corrected, once she saw past the wavy dark hair, piercing brown eyes, muscular frame and tight ass. Now, though, he tired quickly and, by the end of their second circuit, he propped one shoulder against the wall.

"You all right?" She slipped closer, one arm around his waist. Not that she'd be able to do more than break his fall if he went down. At six-two, he outweighed her by more than fifty pounds.

David shook his head. Through clenched teeth, he managed, "See how I did that? I found the perfect way to get you to hold me."

She didn't buy his act for a second. His cheeks were too pale, his breathing too labored. "Why don't you stand here and hold up this wall for a sec while I get a wheelchair?" she suggested. "There were two in that alcove we passed."

"Just give me a minute," he ordered, his voice taking on a low, guttural edge. "I need to make it under my own steam."

"If I had a gash in my forehead, a broken arm and a concussion, I'd be railing at the world and downing pain pills. But not you," she tsked, even as she admired his determination. In typically stoic fashion, he'd see the task through to completion with barely a whimper.

But even David had his limits. Stumbling, he quickly righted himself at the threshold to his room.

“Let’s get you in bed,” she said at once. Overruling his objections now that they were alone, she maneuvered him to the mattress.

“The world is spinning,” he admitted at last.

“Want me to ring for the nurse?” She reached for the call button.

“No, no. I’ll be all right.” He settled against his pillows. “Just talk to me, okay? Tell me some more about the wedding. Better yet, where’d we go for our honeymoon? Paris? Switzerland? Tahiti?” A faint light glimmered in his eyes. “Please tell me it was Tahiti and you spent the entire time in a string bikini.”

“Nothing nearly that exotic,” she said, hating to disappoint him. David’s yearning reminded her of the years she’d spent on her parents’ ranch where she and her brothers had spent far too much time repairing fences the randy bulls had torn through in their urge to get to the heifers. “We spent a weekend in Daytona.”

“Ouch.” Turning up his nose at the popular vacation spot, he gripped his forehead. “Daytona? Really? So much for making love on our own private beach.”

Choosing to remain loyal to a long-ago David and the decision they’d reached together, she said, “We decided to be practical. Instead of spending it on an exotic getaway, we put the money aside for a down payment on a house.”

“But it was our honeymoon,” he objected.

“You’ve always been practical,” she said,

pointing out something else he obviously didn't remember. She checked the time on the Rolex he'd given her last March in lieu of the thirtieth-birthday trip to Cancun she'd dreamed of. "It's a good trait to have."

"Yeah, but, jeez. Seems to me there ought to be a little romance too."

Perhaps if they'd taken more time for that—and for each other—they wouldn't be talking to lawyers and discussing child support right now. She drew in a deep breath. Littered with opportunities for better choices, the past stretched behind them.

There was the California business trip David had taken soon after their wedding.

"Two weeks. Think of it. Two weeks in LA, just the two of us. I'll come with you," she'd offered.

Claiming work would keep him too busy for sightseeing, he'd turned her down. When a stomach virus waylaid her a week later, she'd grudgingly seen the wisdom in his decision. But when the so-called virus lingered, she grew suspicious. She'd always wished he'd been there to get the news right along with her when the plus sign appeared on the stick. Instead, she'd kept her secret, safeguarding it while one delay after another kept David in California. By the time he returned home brandishing several bottles of Napa Valley wine, she was nearly three months along. Now she eyed her husband, the father of her children. The man who no longer remembered he was a dad.

Maybe it was time to cross that hurdle.

“David, there’s more I need to tell you.” At his earnest expression, she scraped her upper lip through her front teeth. “We had so many dreams. You were going to rise to the top of Waterson and Bash. Which you’ve done, by the way,” she said to his apparent relief. “But my part didn’t exactly go according to plan. The thing is, we got pregnant with David Junior on our honeymoon. And then, two years later, we had Jeremy,” she finished in a rush.

David rubbed his eyes. “We have kids?”

“Two. Boys. Davey and Jeremy. They’re four and two.”

His jaw all but dropped. While she held her breath, almost afraid she’d said too much too soon, an expression of absolute joy filled his face. He swung a look toward the door.

“Where are they? Can I see them?”

“They’re at the ranch with my parents. I thought it’d be better for them to stay there till your memory comes back. They’re too little,” she pointed out when bone-crushing disappointment rounded David’s shoulders. “They won’t understand if you don’t know who they are.” She was having a hard enough time with it herself.

“You’re right. You’re right,” he agreed, but he sagged against the pillows, his eyes closed. Seconds later, he leaned forward, new hope blooming in his features. “Did you bring pictures?”

“Of course.” She dug in her purse. “This is David Junior. Davey,” she said, handing him the

first photo in the stack. "It was taken shortly after he turned four. Santa brought him the car for Christmas." She smiled down at the dark-haired boy who stood beside a pedal-powered Batmobile.

"He's big for his age. Does he look like me? I think he does." A note of pride crept into David's voice.

"He's going to be tall, like his dad." She'd always been drawn to David's height. At six-two, he was a perfect match for a girl who loved heels but at five-eight didn't feel comfortable towering over the boys. With David, it had been different from the start. Even in her tallest stilettos, her head rested perfectly in the soft space under his collarbone.

"Do you have more pictures of him?" Eagerly, he held out his hand.

"A few." She laughed and gave him a half dozen.

"I can't decide who he takes after the most. He has your eyes, your coloring. But that's my hair." David tapped one of the pictures. "I had a cowlick just like that one when I was his age."

"He's busy all the time. Takes after his dad that way too."

David blinked and stared out the window at a low ridge of clouds along the western edge of the sky. "You say we have two boys. And the other one?"

"Jeremy. He turned two last month. He's quick on his feet, always trying to keep up with his big brother." She scattered a handful of pictures across the sheeted valley between David's legs. In each one

of them, a towheaded toddler with a toothy grin smiled up at them.

“I wish...”

“What?” she asked.

“I wish I remembered.” David cleared his throat and stared harder at the pictures. “Is he always happy?”

“Most of the time. He was an easy baby, an easy toddler. But, oh my goodness, can that boy run. Some days I can hardly keep up with him.” She lifted a photo David had discarded after a quick glance. “Both boys had so much fun on Jeremy’s birthday. We started off like we always do with my famous chocolate-chip pancakes for breakfast.”

“Oh, man.” David licked his lips. “I do love your pancakes.”

She grinned. Back when they hadn’t had two nickels to rub together, she’d learned to make pancakes from scratch out of necessity. Over the years, they’d become a household tradition. Continuing, she slipped another picture into David’s hand.

“What’s this?” he asked, staring down. “His birthday party?”

She gave the photo a quick glance. “Yep. I took ten of the little munchkins to the petting zoo. After that, we came back to the house for a swim in the pool and cake. Superheroes are his thing right now, so we had a Superman cake. With vanilla filling.”

“Ten? That was brave. Sounds like you’re a Supermom.”

“Not quite,” she said, tossing out a self-deprecating smile. “I had lots of help. Bryan and Kristy—their son is the same age as Jeremy. Matt and Cyndi—they have twin daughters. Greg and Shirley from down the street.” As an aside, she added, “You play golf with Greg from time to time.”

David studied the happy faces and shrugged. “I don’t see myself, but I guess someone had to hold the camera.”

His assumption stirred a familiar heartache. “Um, no. That was Joe Carson. His boy, Terry, is Davey’s best friend.”

She moved to gather the pictures, but David wasn’t ready to let them go.

Questions formed in his dark eyes. “Where was I?”

A deep pit opened in her stomach. She’d hoped to avoid this part. But David stared at her, his unwavering gaze demanding an answer.

Her voice even, she did her best to explain. “You had an important client in town that day and couldn’t get away.”

Guilt tugged at the corners of David’s lips. His mouth worked while he stared out the window again. “What’s done is done.” He finally exhaled. “Tell me the rest. What’d we do for dinner? I bet we had a blast.”

“The kids can choose anything they want to eat on their birthdays. When they’re older and demand steak and lobster, we’ll probably regret that tradition. But for now, it works out. Jeremy



wanted chicken nuggets and fries—big surprise.”

“Ugh.” A frown drew his eyebrows together. “Tell me the adults ate something else.” When she studied her fingers without answering, he prompted, “Margo? What happened?”

Sympathy spread through her chest at his glum look. “You had to take the client out to dinner. By the time you got home, the boys were both sound asleep.”

For a long moment, they listened to the slow ticking of the clock. At last David asked, “Am I a good father? Be honest.”

The lump in her throat refused to budge. She spoke around it. “You’re an excellent provider.”

This time she overruled his objections and stacked the pictures into a neat pile. The truth was he so rarely spent time at home with the boys that nearly every picture showed their youngest in her arms or propped on one of her slim hips.

David’s brow furrowed as though he was trying to figure something out. A long moment passed before, smoothing the sheet over his legs, he asked, “What’s a normal day like for me, Margo? How do I spend my time?”

Feeling as guilty as a felon in an interrogation room, she shifted her weight on the hard cushion.

“You’re very good at your job, David,” she started, trying to strike a balance between frustration and pride. “Waterson and Bash made you an offer after graduation. You’ve been with them almost ten years now. You’ve already made

junior partner, and you're on the fast track to a full partnership." Next came the hard part. She hesitated only a moment before plunging ahead. "Not long after Jeremy was born, you spearheaded the merger of two of the nation's largest communications companies. It was a huge feather in your cap, but it's meant more client meetings and dinners. Lots of travel. When you're not on the road, you're usually out of the house by seven. You rarely make it home before nine."

"And weekends?"

Sensing his dissatisfaction, she let air seep through her lips. "Mostly you hole up in your office at home and try to catch up with paperwork." Without meeting his gaze, she laid another card on the table. "You have a new assistant, Charlie. She strikes me as a real"—*home wrecker*—"go-getter. Hopefully she'll shoulder some of your workload."

She kept her doubts to herself. The pressure never slacked off for a man in David's position. From the look on his face, he reached the same conclusion.

"What about you? I remember you talked about getting your CPA, starting your own firm."

"Yeah, well." She shook her head. "We were young and naïve back then. Neither one of us had a clue what having children was all about."

When he refused to let it go at that, she continued. "Neither of us wanted strangers to raise our children. Besides, child care alone would have taken more than my salary. Our folks help out when

they can,” she said, sidestepping any talk of the illnesses and accidents that had taken their toll on the past ten years. “One day, when the kids are both in school, I’ll take a couple of refresher courses and get back on track.”

For now that was the plan, though she’d watched enough families with older kids to know that the demands didn’t stop. Once the boys entered elementary school, committee meetings and after-school activities would lay a fresh siege on her time.

“So, what? You stay home and raise the boys?”

Studying him, she could almost see his wheels turning. “They keep me pretty busy,” she hedged. In truth, her life was an endless round of waking, bathing and feeding their children before she schlepped them to the pool, Mommy and Me classes, music lessons. If everything went according to schedule—which happened about half the time—she squeezed sixty minutes out of the day for herself. She used the hour to run, her feet pounding the asphalt track until her knotted shoulders loosened, her breathing came in great big gulps and sweat slicked every square inch of her skin. Dinner, baths and bedtime stories followed, but it didn’t stop there. For the next two hours, she answered pleas for water, dashed up the stairs when one or both called, “Mom, I have to go to the bathroom,” and vanquished imaginary monsters until, finally, the boys settled down for the night. As likely as not, she climbed into bed soon after, but she refused to

shut her eyes before she prayed for a day when the boys tried out their permanent markers on paper instead of the couch, when the toilet didn't overflow, when she didn't have to run to the store for cereal or milk or when a thousand other little things didn't throw her off schedule and make her look—and feel—far less competent than an honors grad from the University of Florida ever should.

Bracing herself, she waited for the biting criticism David usually offered whenever she complained about her day.

Rather than chastising her, he only straightened. His expression pensive, he ventured, "Raising our boys, being their mom—I can't think of anything more important. But while you do that, I work to pay the bills. The house, the cars, the kids' college tuition, that's all on me," he mused. Glancing up, he added, "I guess that's why I work so hard."

When he put it that way, she supposed he was right. Her chin wobbled as she considered the burden that rested on shoulders that had always seemed so capable. David rarely complained about the long hours or the weeks he spent on the road. She'd assumed it was what he wanted, what he enjoyed. But seeing their lives through his fresh pair of eyes, she thought maybe she'd misjudged him all along. Maybe he was simply doing the best he knew how to do.

He turned to face her, his expression still serious. "Are we happy?"

Unable to answer, she stared through the rain-

splattered window. The daily deluge had arrived.

“Margo,” he repeated, his tone insistent. “Are we happy?”

She blinked. She wanted them to be happy. She thought he did too. But the truth was, their marriage had been on a downhill slope for quite some time. As much as she might want to return to the halcyon early days, was it too late? Despite the doctor’s warning to avoid stressful subjects, David deserved to hear the truth. She took a shuddery breath and managed, “We’ve had some problems.”

“What do you mean?” His face took on a guarded look while his fingers drummed nervously on one knee.

“Between work and the kids, we don’t spend much time together,” she began. “When we do, it seems like we can’t get through a day without a fight. Money. The boys. You name it, we fight over it.” She swallowed and added a silent *Charlie*.

“Is there someone else? Have you found someone else?” He winced and put a hand to his forehead. “Have I?”

The urge to reassure him was so overwhelming she leaned forward and clasped his hand in hers. “No. There’s no one else.” Tomorrow, things might be different. Tomorrow, he might prove her wrong. But David had sworn he wasn’t involved with his assistant, and for right now, right this minute, Charlie didn’t deserve a mention.

“Well, that’s something at least.” Flopping back onto his pillows, he drew in a thready breath. “Do

you mind if we take a break? My head is pounding.”

Afraid she'd pushed him too far, she slipped all but two pictures into her bag. Placing one candid shot of each boy on the stand by David's bed, she offered to get the nurse.

“I think I'd like some more of those pain pills,” he said with a soft moan that wrenched her heart.

“I'll get right on it,” she whispered.

Her sandals slapping, she made a beeline for the nurses' station where she requested medication for her husband. Concerned that he might have a setback, she didn't relax until the nurse explained that headaches were totally expected in cases like David's.

“Actually, I'm surprised he didn't need something after the therapist worked with him. Most patients do.” With an economy of motion, the rail-thin black woman consulted a digitized chart before eyeing Margo with a frown. “It says here that you came in before breakfast. Mind if I give you some advice?” Without waiting for a response, she forged ahead. “The pills I'm going to give your husband will make him sleep. You should go home. Get a good night's rest. Don't come back till regular visiting hours tomorrow. You won't do him any good if you're exhausted when he finally gets out of here.”

“But I...” Margo stopped. The nurse was right. Besides, she wanted to check in with her folks, say good night to the boys before they went to bed.

By the time she said good-bye to David and

made it downstairs, thick clouds blanketed the sky. Without light from the moon and stars, the road gleamed, black and wet. Unwilling to put off calling her mother-in-law any longer, she hit the speed dial while her headlights cut a narrow channel through a drifting patch of fog. She had just filled Betty in on the details of David's accident when an opossum darted out of the grass at the side of the road. Jamming on the brakes, she put the conversation on hold.

"Margo, are you still there? Is everything all right?" Her mother-in-law's voice wavered through the car speakers.

"Yeah, yeah, Betty," she answered, offering quick reassurance to the woman who'd lost her husband in a car accident three years earlier. "Everything's okay, but we almost had possum for dinner." She waited while the white, ratlike creature crossed the road in front of her. Once it had waddled into the tall grass on the other side, she gingerly pressed the gas pedal. Both hands on the wheel, she gave David's mother the abbreviated version of his prognosis. "According to the neurologist, he has something called transient global amnesia. It's temporary. It might last a day, a week. But it's not permanent."

"Do you want me to come down?"

"No. Not right now, anyway." Slowing, she signaled for the turn into her development. "The doctor said he needs to remain calm. If he sees you, he'll ask about Pops. I don't think..." She sighed.

Right now David had enough to deal with without reliving the night they'd gotten the news about his dad.

"What about the boys? I might be able to help with them."

The slight hesitancy was so different from her own parents' reaction, Margo took a second to remind herself that her mom and dad were fifteen years younger than David's mother. They were far more active too, thanks in part to a mild heart attack that had scared her dad into becoming a health nut four years ago.

"My folks are going to keep Davey and Jeremy at the ranch. You can imagine how much the boys love that! I think Dad has already outfitted them in boots and hats."

"Next thing you know, he'll be buying them their own ponies."

"They're a little young yet," she said, laughing, "but I wouldn't put it past him." She'd had her own pony when she wasn't much older than David. But thinking of her four-year-old riding solo was more than she could handle at the moment so, deliberately, she focused on the older David. "David's arm will be in a cast for six weeks or more. There'll be plenty of time for you to visit, make all his favorite foods and spoil him rotten. I'm sure he'd appreciate it."

"Oh. I'd like that. I'll bring a pound cake. What else do you think he'd like?" While Betty launched into a one-sided discussion of David's favorite



foods, Margo drew in a relieved breath. It sounded as if she'd have all the time she needed to win back her place in David's heart.

If she hadn't already burned that bridge today.



Food carts rattled at the end of the hall where staff from the kitchen scraped and stacked the lunch trays. Her emotions on edge after a sleepless night and a fruitless morning, Margo ground her teeth. Doubts about her marriage had kept her awake until the wee hours. Then, even though she'd arrived at the hospital early, David had already been whisked down to Radiology for another X-ray of his arm. The orderlies hadn't returned him to his room until nearly lunch when, complaining of a pounding headache, he'd asked for medication and fallen asleep. Hoping the pills had worked their magic while she was in the cafeteria, she banished her frustrations at her husband's door.

"You doing okay?" she asked, bending low to place a chaste kiss on David's forehead. His unbandaged head, she noted. At some point, one of the nurses had removed the heavy gauze wrappings. Staring at a neat line of barely visible stitches beneath his hair, she fought a rising sense that time was running out. If she had any hope of salvaging her marriage, she had to act before David's memories returned and ruined everything. "Headache better?"

“Much.” David blinked like one of the owls that nested in her parents’ barn. “That medicine packs a wallop.”

“Did you eat?” she asked, trying her best to sound upbeat. “I hope it was something good.” Whatever it was, it had to’ve been better than the tasteless eggs she’d pushed around her plate with a slice of burnt toast.

“Turkey and mashed potatoes.” He rocked one hand in the air. “So-so. The stuffing couldn’t hold a candle to your cornbread dressing.”

She frowned, puzzled that he recalled the dish. *When did I first use my grandmother’s recipe?*

“Oh, no. That’s not right. My mom always makes the dressing, doesn’t she? How could I forget that?” David rubbed his forehead, then brightened. “But there was ice cream in one of those little paper cups with a wooden spoon. Excellent!”

Drinking in guilty relief at his confusion, she settled into the guest chair. There was still time and, in the afternoon lull, she intended to pick up their conversation from yesterday. Watching for an opening, she waited until David turned to her, his trademark smile in place.

“Thanks for leaving those.” He aimed a thumb toward the two photos propped against an empty glass on the nightstand. “It helped to have them here. It was a long night.”

“Yeah?” Had he wrestled with the same demons she’d fought?

“Strange bed. Strange noises. Weird dreams.” David shrugged. “Plus I’m not sure rest is a high priority around here. Every time I drifted off, someone woke me to check my blood pressure or draw blood.”

“It was the same after I had the boys,” she agreed, thinking of the only two times she’d ever stayed in a hospital overnight. “By the time they finally sent me home, I was exhausted.”

“Speaking of home...” Drawing the word out, he withdrew a slip of paper from the small drawer built into the bed tray.

“What do you have there? Did you make a list?” One hand on her hip, she shook her finger in a mock rebuke. Until he’d started recording them on his phone, she used to find his lists all over the house. He’d said they helped him prioritize his tasks at work, although how *Make reservations for anniversary, gas up Margo’s car or check plans for the weekend* did that, she never knew. With a jolt, she realized he hadn’t told the truth. The notes had everything to do with family and nothing to do with his job. The realization shook her, and she dabbed at her eyes.

“Allergies,” she said, telling a little white lie. She grabbed a tissue. Damping down her tears, she faced him. “Okay, what do you want to know?”

“Did we get the house?” Her blank look must have begged a question, because he added, “The one we saved for instead of taking a honeymoon?”

“Not that one precisely.” Ten years ago and

childless, they'd set their sights on a sprawling Tudor and four wooded acres. "Once we had the boys, we wanted a family-oriented neighborhood. We found a great house with a pool the boys swim in all summer. A lot of their friends live close by," she told David. "We're not far from my folks, either. It's perfect for us."

Her voice faltered. The truth was, he spent so little time at home, she didn't know whether he liked being there or not. What *had* become abundantly clear was that he worked so hard to provide them with the house, the cars, the expensive gadgets, that he didn't have time to enjoy any of it.

And that was just plain wrong.

It had taken nearly losing him for her to realize how much she loved David. Seeing him lying on the ground the other night had given her a new perspective. Once he recovered, she thought, it might be time to change their lifestyle.

And some other things too, she added.

Take the night of Jeremy's birthday party, for example. Wanting to tell David all about it, she'd done her very best to wait up for him. Finally, though, she'd muted the television and drifted off on the couch after the ten-o'clock news. The flickering screen had provided the only light when the sound of his voice woke her.

"Margo!"

Still half asleep, she'd stumbled to her feet.

"What's wrong? What is it?" she'd cried,

convinced their home was being invaded or the place was on fire. In her groggy, disoriented state, she couldn't come up with any other reason why her husband would yell loud enough to wake the dead. She'd hurried from room to room until she discovered David in the hallway, a toy dump truck in one hand, accusation written all over his face.

"How many times have I asked you to make them put their toys away?" he'd demanded.

His tone had raised her hackles.

"Shhh. You'll wake the boys," she answered in a stage whisper. "It took hours to get them to settle down tonight. It was after nine before they finally drifted off."

"I'm tired of having the house look like a tornado swept through it." He kicked a block so hard it ricocheted off the stereo cabinet into the tile entryway.

"Quiet!" she hissed. Her arms folded across her chest, she pointed out the obvious. "We haven't figured out where to keep all the toys Jeremy got for his birthday. You did remember today was his birthday, didn't you?"

In the dim light, she watched him color and knew he hadn't. But that didn't stop him from strutting up and down the hall like a banty rooster crowing about his kingdom.

"They don't appreciate what they have already. They leave their stuff out for people to trip over all the time." His voice rising, he demanded, "Is it too

much to ask that all their junk is put away when I come home at night?"

At that point, having spent the day entertaining a dozen messy toddlers and their parents—none of whom had had an unkind word to say about her housekeeping—she lost it. Matching his anger note for note, she demanded to know why she should keep a clean house for someone who was never in it. His answering shouts had woken both boys. With an aggravated huff, she raced up the stairs.

By the time she settled the boys down again, David had poured himself a drink and retreated to his office.

Afterward they hadn't spoken for a week.

Now she gave him a solemn look. "And while we love it there, you complain about the mess. The boys don't know how to clean up after themselves yet. We're working on it."

But, she had to admit, saying they didn't clean up after themselves was probably an understatement of the first order. It didn't matter how many times she insisted they eat at the table, stains of unknown origins still marred the plush carpet she and David had chosen as an upgrade to the builder's plans. Abandoned toys littered every horizontal surface. Books spilled from bookcases. Scuff marks from Jeremy's red wagon marred the entryway's white marble. Davey was especially good at escaping her hawklike efforts to watch him. Just last week, he'd practiced his newfound skill with a pen by drawing circles around the divan's embroidered flowers.

“I’ll try harder,” she vowed, determined to do her part. “I’ll pick up after them more. And”—her voice shuddered—“and I’ll teach them to help out too.”

“Kids aren’t perfect, Margo.” David patted her hand as if she was the one who needed a lesson in parenting. “You should have seen me and my brothers. I think we drove my mother crazy at that age.”

The tiny crow’s-feet at the corners of his eyes deepening, he launched into a familiar story as if he’d never told it before. “One time—I must have been about four, the same age as Davey Junior—Billy dropped a stick of butter on the floor. It squirted out of his fingers when he tried to pick it up, and that was all it took. He got this harebrained idea to grease the kitchen floor and go skating.”

Laughter, deep and infectious, bubbled out of his chest. “Oh, man, did we have fun. I remember thinking it was the best day of my life...right up until Mom caught us. She was some kind of pissed off. Do you have any idea how hard it is to clean butter off tile? We made such a mess of it she ended up making us sit there and watch while she scrubbed.”

His voice strangled, he wiped his eyes. “I thought I’d be in time-out for the rest of my life. All the while, Mom kept saying, ‘Wait till your father comes home.’ Only when Dad got there, he ’bout died laughing. That’s when Billy, he leaned over and whispered, ‘It was worth it.’” David’s hair fell

onto his forehead while another round of chuckles shook his shoulders.

The story never grew old, no matter how many times she heard it. Laughing along with him, Margo blotted a few tears from her own eyes. When she looked up, though, David had grown sober. He stared at her, his brow furrowed, his features tense.

“From the little you’ve told me, it sounds like I’ve been an ass. I want you to know, I’ll do better. I want to be a better husband. A better father. If you’ll—” His chest heaved. A shudder shook his shoulders. “I love you more than you’ll ever know. No matter what else has changed between us, that never will change. If you’ll stick it out, we’ll find a way to make it work between us.”

The heartfelt emotion in David’s dark eyes focused a white heat on the icy reserve in her heart. The last of her doubts and reservations melting, she closed the short distance between them. Hot and wet, her tears threatened. Her throat tightened, but she forced herself to let him know how she felt.

“It’s not just you. We’ve both been at fault. You work so hard to provide for us. I work just as hard raising the kids. But somewhere along the way we got so wrapped up in the day-to-day chaos we lost sight of our love for one another. We’re a team. We can’t ever forget that again.”

“We’ll both do better, Margo,” David said, his voice breaking. “I love you.”

Her tears running freely, she managed to speak



past a hiccup-y sob. "I love you too. When I think of how close I came to losing you..."

"Shhh, shhh," he whispered, holding her tight. "Everything's going to be all right."

With David's voice restoring the balance in her world, she tilted her face toward his. He didn't waste a second. With lips that hinted of rich vanilla, he sealed his commitment with a kiss that took her breath away. Hungry for more, she leaned into him. The brush of his hand against her skin dispelled any concerns she might have about where they were or who might walk in on them. As she gave herself to the kiss, she relished his touch, his taste. She savored the moment, knowing she wanted it to go on forever.

Sooner than either of them wanted, sound drifted in from the hall. Shoes squeaked on the polished tile. A wheel on a passing cart wobbled. At a sharp rat-a-tat-tat, they reluctantly pulled apart.

"We have to get a lock for that door," David groused good-naturedly.

"There's a lock on our bedroom door...at home," Margo managed just before two tall figures in white coats swept into the room.

"Maybe they'll spring me today." David nodded at the approaching figures while he gave her hand a final squeeze.

"David. Mrs. Langdon." Dr. Baines gave each of them a curt nod. "This is my assistant, Dr. Shelby." With a bare tilt of his head, he indicated the slim blonde who served as his aide-de-camp. While she

hovered at the foot of the bed and typed furiously on a handheld device, Dr. Baines stepped close to David's side. "You're looking better than you did the last time I saw you."

"I feel better, Doc," he answered, pulling himself as erect as any man could while sitting in a hospital bed.

"I've gone over your test results. Everything looks good. You should be back to your old self in a day or two." As if she'd read his mind, Dr. Shelby placed her computer notebook in Baines's outstretched hand. The older doctor scrolled through it and handed it back. "The night you were brought in, you were having some memory problems. Any improvement in that area?"

Margo squelched a tiny sliver of doubt. Now that they'd reconnected, their marriage could survive anything. Even if his memory returned today, she knew in her heart they'd be fine. Which didn't stop her from muffling a relieved, "Oh!" when David admitted he still couldn't remember anything from the past ten years.

Cupping David's chin in one hand, Dr. Baines pulled a penlight from his lab coat. "Don't move your head," he ordered. "Follow the light."

With nothing else to do while Baines put his patient through a thorough neurological exam, Margo studied the woman who recorded everything the lead doctor said or did. What was it like to have someone hang on your every word, every gesture, she wondered. It had to be heady stuff. Tempting

even. Her gaze shifted between the two doctors. Did the two of them have something going on beyond their mentor/student roles? She drummed her fingers against her thigh. She didn't pick up that vibe between them, but, then again, she hadn't thought there was anything going on between David and Charlie...right up to the moment she'd realized Charlie was short for Charlotte.

Not liking what that said about herself, she blinked slowly. Didn't she honestly believe a man and woman could work closely together without getting involved?

Aware the room had grown silent all of a sudden, she swung to find Dr. Baines staring at her, an expectant look on his face.

He cleared his throat. "Mrs. Langdon?"

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Make an appointment for your husband to see Dr. Shelby by the end of next week. She'll be handling his follow-up."

"Of course." She accepted a business card that identified Grace Shelby as board certified in neurology. Impressive, she thought, slipping the card into her purse.

His attention once more focused on David, Baines said, "I want you to have another CT scan. Give me until tomorrow around noon to look it over. Unless something unexpected shows up, you should be ready to leave here shortly after lunch."

"It'll be good to get home."

Margo's tummy quivered with anticipation at

the sly smile David shot her once Dr. Baines turned to his assistant.

“I’ll want that CT scan today. Write up his release orders.” Baines started for the door.

Speaking for the first time since she’d entered the room, Dr. Shelby followed a curt “Already done” with a nod. Without another word, she trailed Dr. Baines from the room.

“Home.” Margo smiled. She squeezed David’s hand. Ideas for his homecoming celebration formed on the tip of her tongue. Before she had a chance to voice them, the door once more burst open. A figure in blue scrubs breezed into the room.

“So, your discharge orders are already in the system for tomorrow afternoon, Mr. Langdon. You’ll be given a set of instructions to follow and a list of your medications before you leave. We’ll be sending you down to Radiology as soon as transportation gets here to take you.” Sylvia, according to the nurse’s badge, spoke in a rush. “Any questions?”

“I’ll be ready when they get here,” David said, straightening. “How long will it take, do you think?”

“A couple of hours if Radiology is backed up,” came the answer. “And they’re always backed up.”

Margo glanced out the window where the sun was sinking toward the horizon. There were a few things she wanted to do before David came home, and she asked, “Do you mind if I cut out of here for the evening? If I go now, I can make it to the

grocery store before the rush, fix something special for dinner tomorrow night.”

David’s nose crinkled. “Lasagna?”

“Sure.” She brushed an errant strand of hair behind her ear. She’d been thinking more along the lines of the marinated steak and twice-baked potatoes that had been David’s favorites in college. Lasagna was good too, but he’d never liked it much back then.

“You’ll be back in the morning?”

“First thing,” she promised, eager to move forward. “How ’bout I stop for coffee on the way? The Roasted Bean sound good?”

“You’re the best,” he said on a dreamy sigh. “But no cinnamon rolls.” He patted his flat stomach. “A bagel maybe. But not if you have to make an extra stop.”

After a lingering kiss that promised better things to come, she was halfway out the door when it occurred to her that David had developed a penchant for bagels only two years ago. Wondering if he was hiding something, she lingered in the doorway. “David?”

“Hmmm?” He’d settled against his pillows, his broken arm propped on the bed rail.

“I’m sorry you got hurt. It was my fault,” she said, thinking of the call she should have made. “And, well, I just wanted to say I’m sorry.”

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about.” Deep furrows cut a path across David’s brow. “They told me I fell from a ladder.” He gave a brief shrug, and

his features smoothed. “Whatever happened, you heard what the doctor said. I’m gonna be fine. We’ll be fine too,” he said with a certainty that put an end to the discussion.

Satisfied that the past hadn’t caught up to them yet, she nodded. “Love you. See you in the morning,” she whispered, aware that she’d fallen again—lock, stock and barrel—for the man who’d stolen her heart in college. Even better, he felt the same way. Her fingers crossed, she whispered a little prayer that things would only improve once David’s memory returned.



Margo’s grip on the coffee tray tightened at the trill of brittle laughter drifting into the hall from David’s room. She bit her lip. She hadn’t expected the line at the Roasted Bean to stretch to the door on a Wednesday morning. Or that the young apprentice in front of her would have the devil’s own time deciphering his scribbled notes for his office’s morning coffee run. By the time she left the café loaded down with her own purchases, sun glinted off the river beyond the highway, and she was running late. Too late, considering David’s first visitor had beaten her to the hospital. She paused just beyond the doorway and waited, trying her best to identify which of their friends had shown up before breakfast.

“And then Ol’ Man Waterson, he turned red as a

beet. Seriously, he was so angry, I thought he'd blow a gasket...if he didn't throttle Jimmy first."

"Waterson always has had a temper," David murmured.

From her listening post in the hall, Margo sucked in a sharp breath.

*Waterson. He remembers Waterson.*

Doubt bubbled like the acid in her empty stomach. She pressed a hand to her middle. Stay calm, she told herself. She'd known from the outset it was only a matter of time before David regained his lost memories. They'd put the interim to good use—using the time to renew their love for one another.

*But will he still love me?*

She edged another step into David's room. A single glimpse of his personal assistant rocked her confidence. She skimmed a hand over the flouncy sundress that had seemed sexy and darling when she pulled it from the closet this morning. It didn't hold a candle to Charlie's tailor-made suit. Teetering on stilettos, a pencil skirt clinging to every curve, the voluptuous blonde had staked out a spot at David's bedside like she owned the place. The smug bravado set Margo's teeth on edge, and she firmed her resolve, determined not to give up without a fight.

"Well, the kid was lucky all Waterson did was reassign him. Too bad he didn't work for you. You'd have given him a second chance."

"Only if he deserved one," David countered.

“People make mistakes. I’m all about forgiveness...as long as the ones in the wrong apologize, learn their lesson and move on. Like you did.”

Another brittle laugh rang out. “Careful now. People might get the idea there’s a heart of gold underneath that tough exterior. You wouldn’t want that, would you?” Her voice slid down several registers before she ventured a sly, “Or did that blow to the head scramble your brains?”

*That’s quite enough.*

Margo rattled the bagel bag as if she were issuing a battle cry. Mustering every ounce of self-confidence in her arsenal, she draped it about her like chain mail. With her emotions hidden behind a smiling mask, she marched into the room while the heels of her shoes slapped loudly against the tile.

Charlie jerked away from David like a kid who’d been caught with her hand in the cookie jar. Her fingers fell from his forehead where, apparently, she’d been admiring his stitches. One tendril of thick blond hair escaped a stylish chignon. She tucked it behind a diamond-studded ear.

“I didn’t expect to see you here today.” Rapidly losing warmth, the assistant’s voice flattened.

Jealousy, deep and dark and green, stretched its tentacles upward from Margo’s belly as her gaze traveled from Charlie’s frozen smile to David’s fading trademark grin. For a man who’d professed his love for her only yesterday, her husband looked perfectly at ease sitting with his legs dangling off the edge of his bed, a thin blanket draped over his



shoulders like a mantle. Brushing the assistant aside, Margo smoothed a wrinkle in the bedsheet.

“I’ve been here every day,” she said pointedly. “What’s your excuse?”

“I, uh—” Charlie’s flawless skin paled.

David interrupted. “The office sent flowers. Charlie drew the short straw and had to play delivery person.”

For the first time, Margo noted the sweet hothouse scent drifting in the otherwise tasteless air. She took in the immense spray of gladiolas and baby’s breath centered on the counter above the windowsill. A card, names and get-well wishes scrawled across it, sat next to the vase.

“That was nice of everyone,” she admitted.

“Actually, the flowers and card are only part of the reason I’m here.” Charlie threaded the hem of her jacket between her fingers.

“I’m sure,” Margo muttered, launching another volley into the conversation. Paper crackled as she pulled David’s breakfast bagel from the sack.

Looking decidedly uncomfortable, Charlie reached into the stylish messenger bag that hung from one shoulder. While she scrolled through her Smartphone, she addressed David. “I’ve been fielding calls from all over. Makworthy wants to set up a meeting at the factory in two weeks.”

The eighteen-hour flights to Makworthy’s offices in Beijing were hardly worth the effort for less than a week’s stay. A Cheshire grin tickled Margo’s lips. *Time for David to burst Charlie’s*

*bubble*. Skipping the trip would prove his new commitment to her and the boys. Slowly, she spread cream cheese on the bagel, all the while watching for the younger woman's reaction when she learned she'd lost her bid for her boss's affections.

"The handoff on the wireless deal is in two weeks. That'll be in the Portland office," the assistant continued.

When David remained silent, Margo cut him a quick glance. *Why hasn't he said anything yet? He isn't going, is he?* The knife in her hand wobbled.

"Look into preliminary dates and travel arrangements. We'll firm everything up once I'm back in the office," David ordered at last.

*He's made his choice. It isn't us.*

Her stomach sank. Wasn't this exactly what she'd been afraid of? From the very beginning, she'd feared that once David regained his memories, he'd choose his high-powered job over his marriage, prestige and influence over a relationship with his children. Apparently her worst nightmares had come true. *This* David had his sights set on a future that didn't include her or their children. The old David, the man she'd fallen in love with all over again, was gone.

Fresh heartbreak ripped open the barely healed places in her heart. A flood of mascara-ruining tears gathered in her eyes. The knife fell from her grasp. It clattered to the tabletop, the dull thud

sounding out the death knell of their marriage. Desperate for something to steady herself, Margo grabbed her coffee cup and turned away.

“If that’s all...,” David said, dropping a broad hint.

“Right.” Charlie resettled her purse on her shoulder. “I need to get going anyway. The early bird gets the worm, as you always say.”

“As I always say.”

“I guess I’ll see you in the office in...” She let the rest hang between them.

“As soon as possible,” David finished smoothly. “No one’s more anxious than I am to get things back on track.”

Her eyes fixed on the coffee Margo held, Charlie murmured, “I’m sorry,” as she edged past.

*For what? Ruining my marriage? Everything?*

Her fragile composure ready to shatter, Margo downed her drink in an effort to stave off the tears that would fall once she was alone.

“Close the door, will you?” David called.

The shapely blonde cut off Margo’s escape route before she disappeared around the corner. Margo spun when a rustle and moan drew her attention to the bed where David had slumped forward.

“You all right?” The paper cup dented beneath her tightening fingers.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m okay.” He straightened. The hands he’d pressed to his face dropped away. “I’ve never seen Charlie lose her cool the way she does

whenever you're around." Mirth danced in David's dark eyes. Laughter shook his shoulders.

"So it's true. You do remember." Margo ran a hand through her hair. *What now?*

The laughter in David's eyes died as his expression grew serious. "I do. That night and all the others too. The night of the accident I remember dragging out the ladder, propping it against the tree. From there, things get a little hazy until I woke up in the hospital. But, yeah. Pretty much everything else." He paused for the longest second of Margo's life. "I also remember how much I love you. How much I'm looking forward to the future with you and our boys."

While her head pounded to her heart's staccato beat, she took a long minute to digest what she was hearing. "But...but what about Charlie?" she sputtered.

"She's not perfect. I'll give you that. She apologized to me for ruining our party when you're the one she should have spoken to. But I guess that's because she's scared to death of you."

"Me?" Margo tried and failed to wrap her head around the idea. "Why would she be?"

David's gaze intensified. "Charlie's a lot of things, but she's not dumb. She knows it would only take one word from you and she'd be standing on a corner with her hat in her hand."

"Really?" She hiked her brows as close to the ceiling as she could get them.

"No doubt about it." David straightened, then

added, "I suspect that's what was really behind her meltdown at the party. She wanted everything to be perfect, and when Davey spoiled that image, she lost it." He grimaced. "She practically had to get down on her knees and grovel to Waterson afterward. He wanted to can her. In the end, I convinced him to give her one more chance."

When he put it like that, Margo almost felt sorry for the girl. Deciding she'd do her best to see Charlie in a different light, she let the jealousy she'd harbored about David's personal assistant swirl away like water down a drain. "Maybe I should try to get to know her better," she suggested.

"Who knows? You might like her. She certainly reminds me of myself when I was starting out...and you like me," he said with a grin. "I hope you'll still like me when I'm home more often. My days of spending months on the road, of working sixty- and seventy-hour weeks are over."

"So you're not going to Beijing? Or Portland?" she asked, not certain she could bear it if he thought their marriage would survive another year of the same old, same old.

"Charlie will handle those trips. I've worked closely with her for the past six months, prepping her to shoulder more of the load."

"All this time, you were training her to replace you?" Trying the strange idea on for size, she shook her head. "You really aren't attracted to her?"

"How could I be?" David slipped one hand under her chin and tipped her face to his. "There's

only one woman who's ever caught my eye, and I'm looking at her. Our marriage might have hit some rough water, but we'll tough it out. You have my word on that. I want you in my life, now and forever."

Lightly, she punched his good arm. "You could have told me. Could have saved us all this heartache."

"I thought you knew." He nuzzled her neck. "Don't you know everything I do is for you and the boys?"

Reminded of a phrase she often used with Davey, she tapped his shoulder. "Sometimes," she said slowly. "Sometimes you need to use your words."

David threw his head back and laughed. "Okay. You have me there. I'll do better with that too. Now I have a word or two for you."

"Yeah?"

"C'mere and kiss me."

"That's four," she started but forgot the rest when David pressed his lips against hers.

Later—after yet another nurse reviewed his discharge instructions, after Margo charged David one kiss for every button while she helped him dress, after an orderly pushed him to the exit in a wheelchair, after she slipped behind the wheel—he turned to her.

"Hospital food gets old pretty fast, and you know I'm dying for your lasagna. But would you mind if we waited awhile?"

"Change of plans?" The casserole was all

assembled and ready to pop into the oven anytime. She tilted her head. Wasn't there something she wanted to ask him about? She lost her train of thought when she caught a glimpse of David's boyish grin.

"I have a sudden hankering for ice cream. Is that little shop in the Village still there?"

She risked a quick glance away from the road to study the man who'd given up sweets. "Don't you remember? You don't eat ice cream anymore."

"I didn't. But that was before I nearly died." He cradled his cast with his free arm. "I'm a new man now. One who's made his wife and sons his number one priority. And thinks everyone should have dessert once in a while. Let's go crazy and have ours before dinner."

Beneath clear, sunlit skies, she spun the wheel, heading for the quiet tree-lined streets they'd strolled not so very long ago. "I have to admit, I like this carefree side of you."

"Good thing, 'cause you're going to be seeing a lot more of it in the future."

Twenty minutes and a short walk later, they sat on a bench in the park. Between bites of hand-churned ice cream in tall waffle cones, Margo considered David's change of heart. Something about his recovery didn't add up. While they talked, she let her thoughts drift until she pinpointed the bothersome piece in the puzzle.

"David," she said losing interest in her ice cream. "There's something I don't get."

“Oh, yeah?” He caught a dribble of strawberry with the tip of his tongue.

“If your memories returned this morning, why’d you ask for lasagna the other day? You never ate pasta when we were in college. Said you hated the stuff. You didn’t develop a taste for it till you spent that month in Italy on the Johnson deal.” That had been two years ago, just after Jeremy was born.

Busy with his cone, David kept her waiting. When he finally responded, he answered her question with a question of his own. “Who said I got my memory back today?”

She mopped a run of sticky vanilla with her napkin.

*So when, exactly, did he remember?*

She thought back, recalling several instances where David’s present had blended with his past. At the time, she hadn’t given it any thought, but she did now. She pinned him with a hard look. “When did you get your memory back?”

“Truth?” he asked.

“Truth,” she assured him.

He took his time with his ice cream, catching a drip before it ran down the side of his cone. “I never lost it.”

“Wait! What?” She took a minute to mull that over. “Why?” was all she could manage.

As if he was afraid to meet her gaze, David stared at an empty swing set. “Desperate men resort to desperate measures, and I was desperate, sweetheart. Our lawyers were on speed dial. The



separation agreement was on the table. Once we signed those papers, I knew it'd be over for us. I had to do something, anything, to find out if you still loved me, if we had a chance."

"And how long were you going to keep that up?" she asked once she'd wrapped her head around what she was hearing.

David's dark eyes met hers. "Until you gave me a reason to remember."

"So," she began, breathless. "So, yesterday, when you said you loved me. You'd already..."

One dark eyebrow lifted in a sly glance. "Oh, yeah. I knew."

The moment stretched out while the last of her worries that David might change his mind about her, about them, scattered like grains of sand in a windstorm.

"You have a little something on your cheek," he said, tipping his cone toward her.

She blotted her face with a napkin.

"Nope. Missed it. Here, let me." He smudged his thumb against her skin. From there, his fingers drifted down until he cupped her face in his hand.

"When do the boys come home?" he whispered as a light breeze stirred through the leaves overhead.

A familiar thrill spread from her midsection. "My folks are planning to keep them overnight."

"Then I'll have you all to myself tonight?" David tossed his half-eaten cone into a nearby trash can. "I can't wait to restart our future together."

“Didn’t the doctor say not to exert yourself?” she cautioned.

“Making love to you is never work, Margo.” Standing, he held out his hand. “Let’s go home. Try for a girl this time.”

Not even a week ago, they’d been headed for divorce court. Their property divided, custody of their boys decided, the papers waiting for signatures on their dining room table. It had taken an accident for them to get their priorities straight. Not every marriage got a second chance, but theirs had and, determined to make the most of it, Margo stood beside her husband.

“Another baby? Let me think about it.” She closed her eyes. In the time it took her to blink, she made her decision. Linking her arm in his, she gave him her sauciest smile.



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# *Acknowledgments*

Behind every book is an amazing team.

Many thanks to:

Cover design: Lou Harper, Harper by Design

Interior formatting: Author E.M.S

Copyedits: Joyce Lamb

Proofs: Anne Victor

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