

# *Love's Melody*



By  
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## CHAPTER 1

Dawn's hand clutched the telephone receiver tightly and the minute she heard a voice, she blurted out, "Laura, I'm pregnant."

"Dawn, that's great! I'll bet Mark is going crazy." Laura Somers and Dawn Fisher had been best friends since they were roommates at Cambridge College nine years ago and they were still as close as sisters.

"I haven't told him." She pulled the telephone receiver away from her ear and pushed back her shoulder length brown hair impatiently. She paced back and forth in front of the black Steinway baby grand piano in her living room, twirling the phone cord around her finger as she spoke, her bare feet padding silently on the pale gray carpeting.

"Why in the world not? You've been trying to get pregnant again for ages!"

"Laura, I'm just over two months pregnant."

"There's nothing wrong, is there? What'd the doctor say? What aren't you telling me?"

"I was in San Francisco in January. That was two months ago."

There was a long pause before Laura spoke again. "Oh my God. Are you telling me it's David's baby?"

"I'm telling you I don't know." There was total silence. "Laura, are you still there?"

"I'm trying to think of what to say." Her voice was almost a whisper. "Are you going to tell him?"

"Mark or David?"

"Well, I guess either one, both, God I don't know what I mean."

"I can't believe this is happening. Mark and I tried for so long and I didn't get pregnant. I guess I just thought I never would."

"I wish I were there for you Dawn. I know Portland is five hours away from Ashland, but I'll get in the car now and drive down if you want me to. Have you figured out what you're going to do?"

"I'm going to tell Mark when he gets home."

"You're just going to tell him you're pregnant, aren't you?"

"I don't know. I never told him I knew David; I never told him about the four years we were lovers in college; I never told him what really happened in San Francisco; how can I tell him I'm pregnant and I

don't know who the father is? I really thought I was doing the right thing not telling him before, but one lie just leads to another."

"Maybe it's Mark's baby and you're worrying for nothing. I mean it could be, right?"

"Maybe. But what if it isn't?"

"Well, then you've got a while before you have to decide what to do."

Laura was the only person she could confide in. She introduced her to David in college and she was the only one who knew that she never stopped loving him, not when she married Mark a few months after the breakup, not even now, five years later. She was also the only one who knew that Dawn was seriously considering ending her marriage even before she went to San Francisco.

"Dawn? It's not too late."

"Too late?"

"To change your mind. To go back to David."

"It wouldn't work, Laura. I know it wouldn't. His career is always going to come first with him. The last thing he needs is the responsibility of a baby." Dawn sighed. "And I don't know it's his baby anyway."

"I just think you ought to consider it, Dawn."

"It's not an option. It's not."

Dawn continued to pace in her living room after she hung up the phone. She hadn't called to ask Laura for advice and she knew nothing she said would assuage her guilt. Like the other decisions she had made, this was hers to decide. She just needed to tell someone the truth.

When Dawn looked around her, she saw everything she always expected marriage would be. They were buying this house, a comfortable, two-story home, with a big yard, perfect for the family they both wanted. Mark had a good, stable job as an English professor at Southern Oregon University and she had a successful career of her own. He loved her; she was the most important person in the world to him, just as her mother had always been the most important person to her father. And she loved and respected him as well.

But as she looked around the room, she realized how many reminders of her life with David were still around her. The vase of roses on top of her piano reminded her of the pencil drawings of roses David used to leave on the message board in her college dormitory lobby. Even the piano reminded her of the music they shared and the music that had ultimately separated them. She stopped pacing and sat at her piano, opened the first piece of music she saw and began to play, trying to avoid the decision she knew she had to face. The music only reminded her more of David. Finally, she just sat on the piano bench, staring at the music until the notes blurred and she could see the college campus and smell the crisp fall air and see David's face again.

She remembered the day almost nine years ago when Laura had introduced them. It was November of their freshman year. Laura had been having an ongoing feud with the man who sat first chair in the clarinet section of the band and gave him the derisive name of 'Clarinet Player' when he offered her a few unwanted tips on her oboe playing. It surprised Dawn to find out that this was the person who had asked to be introduced to her, although Laura insisted that Dawn would like him even though she didn't.

"There he is Dawn." Raising her arm and waving, she yelled across the crowded cafeteria, "Hey, 'Clarinet Player', over here."

Dawn blushed at her roommate's boisterous behavior. She took a deep breath, wondering why she suddenly felt as if someone had set loose a thousand butterflies in her stomach. She watched the handsome six-foot man approach them, admiring his broad shoulders and athletic build. He grabbed an empty chair from the larger table nearby and sat comfortably at the end of their small table.

"This is Dawn," Laura said with a satisfied smile, "the next star of the Metropolitan Opera. And Dawn, this is 'Clarinet Player'. He has similar aspirations."

She never remembered Laura leaving. They'd talked for a long while, discovering they had many of the same interests in addition to their common career goals. She'd been attracted to him immediately, captivated by his warm brown eyes. He had a disconcerting way of looking directly into her eyes when he spoke to her. It was almost too personal a gesture and Dawn felt a bit uncomfortable with the unfamiliar

excitement that produced. He'd asked her to go with him to a recital being held on the campus the next evening and she'd eagerly accepted.

They had a perfect autumn day for their first date and after the recital he kissed her goodnight for the first time. The evening had seemed like so much of a fantasy that she wrote "It really happened" on a piece of paper and taped it to her wall before she went to bed that evening so she would see it in the morning and realize it hadn't been a dream.

After that she and David were always together. They started meeting to practice every day; they ate their meals and studied together. From early morning until late into the night, one was rarely seen without the other. Everyone said "Dawn and David", one name no longer seeming appropriate without the other.

During the rare times they were apart, he would stop by and leave her a note. Often they just said "Hi" and had no signature. Sometimes they were longer. But the best of all the notes were the ones that were a pencil drawing of a long stemmed rose. Every girl on her dormitory floor had been envious.

In December, they went to the Christmas dance together. The night was like a fairy tale and Dawn was the princess. David had gotten her real roses for the dance, three perfect red roses in a corsage. They danced every dance together and once, when someone tried to cut in, he just shook his head at him and continued dancing with her. After they danced the last dance, he walked her back to her dormitory and they stood outside talking.

"Dawn?" David took both her hands in his and turned her to face him, his voice suddenly serious. "Don't fall in love with me."

"Excuse me?" She couldn't believe she had heard him correctly.

"I mean it. Don't fall in love with me. The only thing I'll ever really care about is music." He was still standing quietly, holding both her hands and looking into her eyes.

She looked back at him intently. "I don't think people have control over whether or not they love someone, do you?"

"Dawn, I don't want to love you."

She hesitated. She wanted to tell him she loved him already, but this was not how she wanted to do it. This was not how she had pictured telling someone she loved him for the first time. "Maybe you can decide how you're going to feel but it's not like that for me. My feelings just happen, I don't make a conscious decision about it."

"Are you saying you're in love with me?"

She took a deep breath before she answered. "Yes."

He was quiet for a long time, avoiding looking at her. "It's getting late, I should go," he said finally. "Goodnight." He didn't kiss her as he always had. He just left her at the door and walked away. She hadn't noticed how cold it was before but suddenly she felt the cold, wintry air. As the clock in the campus tower start to strike twelve, she watched him walk away from her, not sure if he would ever come back. She cried for hours that night, despising herself for her honesty and inexperience.

But the next morning, he acted as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened and their relationship continued, with one slight change. David no longer held her hand or kissed her goodnight or touched her in any way. She wanted to ask him about it, but she didn't know how and she was afraid she would break the fragile thread that remained between them. Finally, when they returned from Christmas break in January, he brought it up again.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking since the night of the dance, Dawn." David told her as they sat in the lobby of her dormitory. "I'm not really sure how to say this." He avoided looking at her.

"Just go ahead and say it, okay?" She was prepared for him to break things off with her. It would take less than a minute to make it to the safety of her room without giving him the satisfaction of seeing her tears.

"Well, you know what you said about how you feel about me?" He paused until she nodded. "Have you thought any more about that?"

It took all her courage to look at David, but she lifted her face and looked directly into his eyes. "The truth of the matter is, I was sorry I said it that night. But I'm not sorry that I love you. And the more I think about it, I'm not sorry I told you either."

"So you still feel that way?"

"What way? That I'm glad I told you?"

"No. That you love me."

Dawn jumped up. "What do you want from me? Isn't it enough that I told you I loved you and you told me I shouldn't?" She was too angry to cry. "I love you, okay? Whether or not you think I should, I love you. Are you satisfied?"

David grabbed her by the wrist as she started to walk away and pulled her back down on the couch. "Dawn, I do too."

"Do too' what?" She tugged to free her hand. "Let go of me!"

"I feel the same way about you."

As she looked back on it now, nine years later, she realized it was a statement that had not come easily to David. Love and commitment, the things that were so important to her and so easy for her were the things that were most difficult for him. Growing up, he'd been bounced from one foster home to another and had often commented, especially after numerous visits to Dawn's parent's home, that he couldn't imagine growing up as she had, in a stable home with two parents who adored her. They had been seeing each other for almost a year before he made love to her. That had confused her at the time, but later she realized that was something he knew she would perceive as commitment.

And yet, there was the song. She would never forget the day, just a few months before their graduation, that he arrived with it at the apartment she and Laura shared when they moved out of the dormitory their senior year.

"I finally finished this and I wanted you to hear it right away." He said the minute he came through her door and hurried over to her piano. She listened as he played the opening bars and tears filled her eyes as she heard the words, "Have you heard, that I need you the rest of my life . . ." He sang the song directly to her, caressing her with his eyes in a way that was almost more intimate than when he touched her with his hands. When he finished, he handed her the sheets of music. "It's for you, Dawn. If I ever publish it, I'm just going to call it 'Dawn'. Okay?"

She smiled now at the memory. They had shared everything with each other those four years; their dreams, their hopes, their passion; they were a rare combination of best friends and lovers. But she

forced herself to remember the unhappier memories too. The times when his ambition and devotion to the career he wanted got in the way of their relationship and he would refuse to compromise or discuss it, often walking out and not speaking to her for days at a time. And the worst of all the memories, the day he left her and didn't come back. Over the last five years she had replayed that late April night in their senior year so many times.

"I've got great news!" He burst in her door when she opened it. "Wait until you hear!" He took her hand and pulled her over to the couch.

"You remember I told you there was going to be an agent at that last concert I did?" He rushed on without waiting for her acknowledgment. "He liked me. He called today and wants me to sign a contract for a yearlong concert tour starting right after graduation. There might even be a recording deal! Can you believe it?"

"That's wonderful!" She was thrilled for him. A successful career in music was so important to him and she knew he had the talent to be successful. Although she had dreamed of a career performing when she first arrived at Cambridge and had sung frequently with David at weddings and other local events, she knew her own talents were nothing like his and were more suited for teaching.

"I won't be the lead act or anything, but it's a great start. I'll be leaving for Los Angeles the day after graduation. I don't know where I'm going after that, he's supposed to be sending me all that, but there are dozens of places!" David jumped up, too excited to sit still. "I think one of the concerts is in Portland. Maybe you could drive up there for that."

"I can see how excited you are and I'm happy for you. I really am. But what about us?"

"Us? You know I love you, Dawn. But this is the chance I've been waiting for all my life! I always told you that music came first."

Dawn had known in her heart that this day would come, although she always tried to avoid thinking about it. David loved her, in his own way, but he loved music more.

"Dawn, we'll still see each other." As he looked at her, she could see the confusion in his eyes over the pain he was causing her. "Just not as often as we do now. But it's not like I'll be on the road all the time. And we can write and there's the phone."

"That's not the kind of life I want. I don't want a long-distance relationship." Her normally quiet voice rose louder and she jumped up. "I want more than that and I hoped you did too."

"I never promised you more than what we have. You know that my first priority is my career."

"No, you didn't make me any promises." In spite of herself, she felt the tears sting her eyes. She would not cry. She angrily brushed at her eyes.

"Dawn." David took her hand and pulled her down beside him on the couch. "I need to put all my energies into singing right now. You said yourself that you don't want that kind of life, moving from one place to the other. I wouldn't have any time to spend with you anyway."

"That all sounds like a bunch of excuses to me," she said angrily pulling her hand away. "People have careers and still have relationships. Why don't you admit it? You just don't love me enough."

"Maybe not," David told her. "But I love you more than I thought I could love anyone. I thought you'd be happy for me."

"You just don't understand. You think this is about making a choice. Why can't you have both?"

"Dawn, I can't."

"Then I guess there isn't anything more to say."

Dawn watched him walk out of her life, knowing that this time he wouldn't be back. This time it was really over. Forever.

Time passed in the blur of her tears but she knew she could not look back. During the next few long sleepless nights, she decided on a plan for the rest of her life. She knew she would never see David again and was surprised when she checked her mail a few days later to find a letter from him. She looked at the envelope with the familiar handwriting for a long time before she opened it.

"Dawn," it began, "I love you. I can't give you what you want and you deserve to be happy. I know it's hard now, but it's better this way. In time, you'll see that. You're lucky, Dawn. You have your parents and they'll always be there for you. I've always envied you them and wished they were my own . . . and they almost were. Be happy Dawn. I'll always love you and cherish the time we had together." It was signed, "David".

She wiped away the tears that started again and then shook her head angrily. No. She wouldn't waste another tear; not today, not for the rest of her life. Nothing would ever hurt her like this again; she would never allow it to. She crumpled the letter in her hand and threw it in the direction of the wastebasket.

Without a backward glance, Dawn left her apartment for the last time carrying just a suitcase. She did not care about her untaken exams or the graduation just over a month away that she would not be a part of. She cared least of all about her scheduled senior recital. That was her past.

There were two things Dawn was certain of as she closed the door: she would never love anyone again and she would never again sing another note.

She'd gone back to Medford, found an apartment and returned to work at Illusions, the exclusive boutique where she'd worked every summer since she started college.

"Dawn, what are you doing here?" Marnie was surprised when she saw her walking into Illusions.

"I need a job," Dawn told her. "Full time. Permanent."

Marnie made her the manager of her new location in Ashland without questioning her.

The job helped occupy her thoughts. The new location in Ashland was busier than Marnie's boutique in Medford had ever been. Dawn poured her passion and energy into the job, working sixteen-hour days, and the business thrived. Although her customers and her neighbors constantly introduced her to men, she rarely went out with one more than a few times, preferring to spend her time working.

It had been almost six months since David had left her when Mark walked into Illusions to buy a birthday gift for his mother.

When he came back the next day, at first she thought he was coming in to exchange the gift, but he wasn't carrying a bag. "I came back to thank you again for your help," he told her. "My mother loved the outfit. I thought maybe I could buy you a cup of coffee, just to thank you."

She thought about this for a minute. He seemed like a nice man. Why not? They walked a few doors down the street to a coffeehouse. It was a cool morning, early in October, and the leaves had already turned to shades of orange and red. Fall had always been Dawn's favorite season but she hadn't even noticed the change in season until today.

Over an hour had gone by before she realized it. Mark was easy to talk to. He told her about himself and his family and his students at the college where he was an English professor and Dawn told him a little about herself, leaving out that she had left college two months before graduation. When he invited her to dinner that evening she accepted.

They went to a local Italian restaurant that served wonderful homemade food. She was amazed at how easily their conversation flowed, just the way it had that morning. The evening went by quickly and he asked her out again for the following night.

Mark sent her gardenias at the boutique the next morning and she found herself looking forward to their second dinner. She felt comfortable and relaxed with him. He made no demands on her and she continued to see him most evenings. They went to dinner and to movies; she never invited him in and he never asked. He kissed her goodnight at her door, but it was a gentle, friendly kiss, nothing like the passionate kisses she had known in the past.

They'd been seeing each other several weeks when they returned to her apartment and he held her longer, telling her he wanted to make love to her. Dawn hesitated. In her heart she felt she was betraying David; he was the only man she had ever been with and she still loved him. But there was a part of her that knew it was time to move on. When she nodded her agreement, Mark told her he loved her. Afterwards, she watched him sleep, thinking about what he had said. It didn't matter whether or not Mark loved her; she knew she would never love anyone the way she loved David. She pulled on her robe and went back into the living room.

"David," Dawn whispered in the darkness. "Why couldn't you have loved me enough?" She brushed away the beginnings of a tear and pulled her mauve silk robe more tightly around her.

"I didn't just say it because I wanted to make love, Dawn, I do love you," Mark told her when he joined her in the living room a few minutes later.

She made no response. She'd been so surprised when he asked her to marry him before he left her that evening that she was speechless, finally agreeing to think about it.

Dawn did think. She thought about what a life with Mark would be like. It would be the life she wanted, marriage and a family. She remembered Laura asking her what kind of man she wanted to marry when they first met at college.

"Handsome," Dawn had told her laughing. "Oh, and rich wouldn't hurt either." They had both laughed, but then Dawn looked more serious. "What I really want will sound silly to you Laura. I want what my parents have. They love each other and respect each other. They are the most important person in the world to each other. Nothing and no one would ever get in the way of that." She looked embarrassed. "That's what I want. Think it's possible?"

Now she wondered if that would be possible with Mark. They were alike; their backgrounds, their goals. She would be the most important person in Mark's life. Would that be enough for her?

"Who in the hell is this?" Laura snarled into the telephone when Dawn called her late that night after Mark left. "Dawn?" Laura said when she heard her voice. "My God, who died?"

"I know it's late Laura, but I needed someone to talk to." Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

"Sorry. You know how I am in the middle of the night. God, it's after two. Give me a minute here," Laura yawned audibly. "You know, I was going to call you tomorrow anyway. Did you see that article about David?"

"No," Dawn said. "But I wanted to get your advice about --"

"You didn't see the picture of him with that model-type blonde? Apparently they're living together and everything. Yesterday's paper, society section. Can't believe you missed that. You still get the 'Oregonian' there don't you?"

Yesterday's paper was still rolled in its rubber band. Dawn hadn't had time to look at the local paper in several days, let alone the Portland paper she still subscribed to. Her thoughts churned. David was living with someone? Actually living with her? He made a commitment to someone else? He had gone on with his life and she felt surprised and betrayed. She had actually thought about calling him tonight. It was over, now she had to accept it. She wouldn't get another chance with David. David was gone.

"You needed my advice you say, Dawn?" Laura was picking up on the conversation now that she was waking up.

"Yes, Laura. I need you to help me plan my wedding. I'm getting married."

A month later, she married Mark. Over the years she grew to love him, but it was never like the love she felt for David. That kind of love came along once in a lifetime and she never expected to feel that again. Still, most of their five-year marriage had been good, until she couldn't get pregnant again after her miscarriage three years ago. They had both wanted a big family and she felt guilty in spite of the fact that the specialists she saw told her there was no medical reason for her inability to conceive. It was a subject they couldn't talk about and they grew apart, over the last year alternating between arguing and avoiding each other. Mark rarely came home until very late now. Months would go by without him touching her and she wondered if he had found someone else. She sat for hours alone in the empty nursery, listening to David's albums over and over, questioning the decisions she had made.

One of their worst fights was just before she left for San Francisco two months ago. She'd taken the day off, something she rarely did since she purchased the boutiques from Marnie the previous year. Determined to try to close the distance between them, she had been planning the trip to San Francisco as a second honeymoon for months, although Mark refused to commit to going with her. She spent the day cooking his favorite meal and had the table set with candles when he came home that evening.

"What are you doing home?" he asked as he walked through the door. "I assumed you'd be working late again."

"I thought a romantic dinner would be nice," she said, ignoring his sarcasm. "Maybe we could talk."

"I already ate." Mark didn't look at her as he walked into the study.

She followed him, determined to hold her temper. "Maybe a glass of wine then. Would you like me to bring it in here?"

"I don't want anything. I've got work to do," he replied, still not looking at her.

"I'll leave you alone then," she said, more calmly than she felt. "Mark, I'm going to buy the tickets for the trip tomorrow. Have you decided if you want to go?"

“Damn it, Dawn. I told you I have work to do and I’m tired of hearing about this trip. Unlike you, I don’t make my own hours. I can’t just be running around the country every time you get the notion to take a trip.”

“That was totally uncalled for. I work every bit as hard as you do, and this trip was hardly a ‘notion’; we’ve been discussing it for months.” She was shaking with anger and trying not to show it.

“Cancel the trip. We’re not going.”

“You know, I’m getting a little tired of planning my life around your decisions,” she said. “We haven’t had a vacation in over two years and I think one would do us good right now.”

“If you need a vacation, feel free to go. You don’t need my permission.”

“You’re right, I don’t. And maybe I will go by myself.”

He had already started working on a pile of papers and she knew the conversation was over. But she made one more attempt. “Mark, do you even care whether or not I come back?”

“I don’t know, Dawn,” he said without looking up. “I don’t know.”

Dawn walked to the kitchen, calmly turned off the stove and removed the lasagna that was in the oven to keep warm. She opened the trashcan and dumped the lasagna, still in its pan, into the trash, wiped her hands on a towel and walked upstairs. There was no more to be done except pack.

When she returned from San Francisco, Mark seemed contrite and told her he wanted to make a fresh start and work on their marriage. He hadn’t let her tell him anything about the trip and he refused to answer her questions about what had made him change his mind, insisting that they just needed to go forward from here. Although she’d been prepared to come home and tell him she was moving out, she felt she owed it to them both to try again and for the last two months things had been better between them. Mark was more attentive and the constant anger of the previous year appeared to be gone.

Just a few days ago, she and Mark had gone to David’s concert in Portland. Mark surprised her with the tickets, knowing how she loved concerts. He had no idea that she knew David, and although she could easily have mentioned it then, she didn’t.

After the final song on the program, David had returned to the stage for an encore. He removed a long stemmed red rose from the vase on top of the piano and stood holding it while he spoke to the audience.

"The encore I'm going to sing is something very special. Several years ago, I wrote this song for the woman I loved. A few months ago we realized that even though we can't be together, we would be together forever in our hearts. She taught me how to love, but I never knew how much I loved her until I lost her. Every time I sing, I see her face and I feel the incredible love we will always share. Forever."

When Dawn made the decision not to stay with David in San Francisco, she was determined to put him in the part of her life reserved for her memories and move on. Until she discovered she was pregnant.

## CHAPTER 2

Dawn heard Mark's car in the driveway, abruptly bringing her thoughts back to the difficult conversation at hand. She got up from the piano bench and took a deep breath. Although she felt her stomach tighten, she forced herself to swallow and tried to calm her shaking as she walked toward the front door.

"Hi, sweetie," Mark's strong arms pulled her against him in an embrace and he kicked the door shut. The top of her head barely grazed his chin and his sweater tickled her cheek. The dark brown sweater set off his fair skin and complemented his blonde hair. "I didn't think you'd be home yet. I thought this was your night to work late."

"I've got something to tell you."

"You look serious. Is everything okay?" Mark's intelligent face clouded with concern. She noticed the highlights of gray in his hair; Mark was thirty-eight, eleven years older than she was. "Dawn?"

"I'm pregnant."

Mark's blue eyes appeared darker and an odd expression crossed his face, but it was gone as quickly as it came. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I went to the doctor today." She studied his face as he walked across the room to check the mail stacked on the table, but she couldn't tell what he was thinking. She reminded herself that he had no reason to suspect that this wasn't his child. "Mark, aren't you going to say anything?"

"I'm just surprised, that's all." He continued to shuffle through the mail, not looking at her.

She couldn't decide whether Mark was a little quiet during dinner or if it was just her own guilt. He made all the appropriate responses and seemed sincere when he toasted the upcoming baby with Perrier in champagne glasses. But when they went to bed, he gave her a quick kiss and then rolled over to the far side of the bed to go to sleep.

Early the next morning, Mark sat having coffee with his best friend, Sam. They'd met when they were both ten years old and Sam had been the new kid on the block. An instant friendship had formed, surviving even the time during their senior year of high school where they'd both been madly in love with the same girl. They stayed in touch when Sam was at law school and they still got together as frequently as their schedules allowed. These days it was often just the two of them since Sam's second marriage had ended two years earlier.

"Kind of early for a visit." Sam sipped his coffee. He was wearing sweats and had just returned from his morning run. In the past five years Mark had made these early appearances at his house twice before. Once Mark showed up in the middle of the night and spent the hours until morning pacing Sam's living room waiting to see if Dawn would accept his marriage proposal. The other time was just last year when Mark confided that he hadn't told Dawn that his low sperm count was the reason she wasn't getting pregnant.

"Dawn's pregnant." Mark wasn't drinking his coffee; he was staring into the cup.

"That's great! See, I told you that you were worrying for nothing."

"I don't know if the baby is mine."

"You're joking, right?"

"Do you know who David Avery is?" Mark hadn't slept at all the night before; he'd just gone over and over things in his mind.

"The singer?" Sam got up to refill his coffee. "Sure, who doesn't? The guy is famous. What's that got to do with anything?"

"Dawn knew him in college. She never told me."

"No kidding? Dawn actually knows him? How'd you find that out if she didn't tell you?"

"Right here." He shoved the program from last week's concert toward Sam and pointed to a paragraph. "Look at this biography. He graduated from Cambridge the same year she would have. The school isn't that big; they had to know each other."

"I wonder why she never said anything." Sam looked thoughtful for a minute, and then realized what Mark was saying. "Surely you don't think she had an affair with him?"

"I don't know. You remember when she went to San Francisco a few months ago? I think she may have seen him then."

"Maybe you better start at the beginning. This all sounds absolutely crazy to me."

"Not really." Mark pushed his untouched coffee away. "When she came back from the trip, she started singing again. She started listening to her opera recordings again. And you know she wouldn't even talk about anything to do with the singing career she was planning in college before that."

"What did she say about it?" Sam leaned forward, listening intently.

"I didn't ask her. But there's more. This concert," he gestured at the program that was still in front of Sam. "He sang an encore that I'm almost sure he wrote for Dawn. He made this big speech about how he'd written it for the woman he loved and that they'd been together again a few months before. Same time as her trip. The more I think about this the worse it gets." Mark got up from the kitchen table and started to pace.

"'Forever' was written for Dawn? Man, that's crazy! I think you're letting your imagination run away with you."

"No. I almost asked her about it the night of the concert, but things seemed like they were getting better between us and I didn't want to ruin that. For months, all we'd done is argue when we spoke to each other at all. Hell, I was afraid she'd find out I was the reason she wasn't getting pregnant and leave me; I knew she wanted a big family. That trip was supposed to be a chance to really talk and work things out, and I wouldn't go."

"So you think she went off and had an affair instead?"

"I don't know what to think. She's pregnant and the timing would have been about right. Damn it, how could she do that? She told me she loves me."

"She does love you. If they really had an affair, and personally I don't think they did, she could have stayed with him. Everyone knows he still loves whoever this mystery woman is." The newspapers had been full of speculation about the woman "Forever" was written for after the Portland concert, dubbing her "the mystery woman".

"I know you're trying to make me feel better, but I've got to face the fact that it may be his baby."

"I hope you've got the good sense not to go home and confront her with this. Besides, it still might be your baby. Right?"

"I don't know what to do." Mark stopped pacing and stood facing Sam. "I can't just pretend this doesn't exist."

"I wouldn't borrow trouble. Dawn is married to you. Now you'll have the baby you both want. Does anything else really matter?"

"Maybe not. But here's the other thing, I just can't seem to get it out of my mind that the song he sang, 'Forever', that I've heard it somewhere before." Mark thought a minute. "No, not heard the song, but it was familiar somehow."

"Wasn't that the first time he performed it?" Sam asked.

"Yes, I think so." Mark stared off into space. "I don't know how I could have heard --" He broke off suddenly, remembering the day Dawn's piano was delivered. After she came back from San Francisco, she finally unpacked the music that was sealed in a carton since college, and a few days later, the piano she'd had at her parent's house arrived. He remembered a handwritten sheet fluttering to the floor.

"Mark?" Sam said. "Did you remember where you heard it?"

"Not heard it, saw it." Mark remembered now. "She has a copy of it. I saw it the day her piano was delivered. I was putting her music on top of the piano." He dropped back into the chair with a thud. "That's where I saw it. I saw one of the pages of it then, even read the words, and just thought it was something from college, no big deal. But it wasn't. It was that song."

"You know, that still doesn't prove anything except that they had an affair in college," Sam pointed out. "That was before she even knew you. You don't know they were together in San Francisco."

"No, but I intend to find out."

"And just how do you plan to do that, ask Dawn?"

"I've got to know," Mark said.

"And then what?" Sam tried to reason with him. "What are you going to do if she tells you she was with him in San Francisco? Are you going to leave her?"

"Leave her?" Mark jumped up from the chair again. "Leave her? No! I love her." He sat back down and cradled his head in his hands. "What if she tells me she still loves him? What am I going to do then?"

"You can't believe she still loves him?"

"I can't believe any of this. But Dawn wouldn't have a casual affair." Mark shook his head. "She just wouldn't."

"Maybe it didn't happen," Sam said.

"Maybe it didn't. You're right. Maybe it didn't happen." Mark tried unsuccessfully to force a smile. "I can't ask her about it. I can't take that chance. And it's not impossible that the baby is mine."

"Of course the baby is yours." Sam walked with Mark to the door. "But Mark, no matter what, remember it takes more than biology to be a father."

Mark glanced at his watch as he let himself back into the house. It was just a little past seven; Dawn would still be asleep. Quickly, he walked over the piano and flipped through her music. Finally, he found what he was looking for. "Dawn" was written at the top of the music. Had that been the original title? But that was the song, "Forever." Still, maybe he'd been overreacting. He knew there was someone before him, now he knew that it was David Avery. It made no difference.

He slipped the three handwritten sheets back into the book of music where he found them. As he opened it to lay them in straight, he saw a concert program. When he looked at it, he realized that although it was a program from a David Avery concert, it was not the one he attended with Dawn. This concert was in San Francisco.

Mark stood with the program in his hand, barely seeing it. She went to the concert. It didn't mean that she had seen him. Or maybe they had just spoken together and resolved whatever it was that had caused Dawn to give up singing. Of course, that was it. Just because they had been together did not mean they had slept together. He straightened the pile of music and forced himself to put it out of his mind.

He walked up the stairs and into the master bedroom. He stood near the doorway, watching Dawn sleep. An image of another man holding her flashed through his mind and again he forced the

thought away. She wouldn't. She wouldn't. He walked over to the bed as she began to stir in her sleep and leaned over and kissed her gently on the forehead.

She opened her eyes and smiled. "You're up early. What time is it?"

"About seven-thirty." Mark sat beside her on the bed. "I was just thinking that we should have kept all the baby stuff." When she returned from San Francisco, he insisted she get rid of everything in the nursery, telling her he felt guilty about not being able to give her the baby she wanted. He couldn't tell her more; he couldn't risk losing her. He never realized how empty his life would be without her until he spent those two days alone. He'd had plenty of time to think about how badly he'd handled the last year, letting his anger at the situation direct itself at Dawn and he'd promised himself that if she only came home he would do whatever was necessary to keep her.

"Mark, I've got to tell you something. I should have told you before." She sat up, pulling the sheet up to her chin.

He didn't want to hear it. As long as she didn't tell him, he could pretend it was his baby. She tried to tell him something when she came home from that trip and he wouldn't let her, insisting they should make a fresh start. What would he do if she told him she wanted to be with someone else, someone who was the father of her baby?

"Mark?" She waited for him to respond.

"What?" He held his breath and waited for the worst.

"I still have all the baby stuff. It's at my parents' house."

Mark released his breath, his entire body relaxed. "Well, we can just go over and pick it all up then."

"I'm glad you're not angry," she said. "I'm anxious to tell them anyway, they're going to be so excited."

"We need to call everybody and tell them the news." He reached over and took her hand, forcing his doubts out of his mind. His mother would be excited too, but she had four other grandchildren. Dawn was an only child so it would be her parent's first grandchild. "I love you, Dawn."

"I love you, too." She squeezed his hand and smiled.

A few months later, Laura called to tell Dawn she was moving to Ashland.

“I don’t think Mike really wants to move, but it’s a good job they’re offering him and I hate it here,” Laura told her. “Besides, I’m closer to you than my parents and they’ll just drive me nuts after the baby comes.” She was expecting her first baby a few months before Dawn was due and she had mixed feelings about motherhood. “You remember how they always take control of a situation I’m sure.”

Laura, like Dawn, was an only child, but her relationship with her parents was totally different. The close relationship Dawn had with her parents had never existed in Laura’s family. Her parent’s disapproval of her throughout childhood resulted in a strained atmosphere between them as adults. They always thought she should be more serious when all Laura had wanted was to have a good time.

College had been a great opportunity for that and she dated numerous men, never wanting a serious relationship with any of them. She never had the same aspirations for love and marriage that Dawn did. Still, like many of her classmates, she married near the end of her senior year to a man who, as she told Dawn, “understands me”.

Dawn’s uncertainty over her baby’s paternity was a situation Laura could relate to, having spent more than one nervous month wondering if she was pregnant in college. She shook her head at the memory. She’d been lucky they had all been false alarms. Now she was married and “settled down” as her parents said, but she missed the excitement of being single and wondered if she would be able to live up to anyone’s expectations of her as a parent. At least with five hours between her and her parents she wouldn’t have to deal with them on a day-to-day basis.

Dawn was glad that Laura would be close by again and she looked forward to their children growing up together, being best friends and confidantes just like she and Laura were. But there were some things she couldn’t even tell Laura because she didn’t know how to put them into words herself. Like the morning she spent on the bathroom floor, too weak from morning sickness to even drag herself back to bed.

Her thoughts began to churn like her stomach. She started to cry and couldn’t stop. “What am I going to do?” she whispered, the guilt and loneliness overwhelming her.

And then she heard David's voice as clearly as if he were there in the bathroom with her. "If you ever need anything, Dawn, anything, promise me you'll call. That you won't let anyone or anything stop you. Promise me."

He said those words to her the last time they were together and she promised. She promised. She promised one more thing she couldn't do. She couldn't involve him in this when she wasn't even sure it was his baby. She cried until her throat was raw and she pounded the floor with her fists. And she knew she would never tell anyone about that, not even Laura. At dinner that night, makeup hid the red puffiness around her eyes and determination hid the guilt and frustration.

After the first trimester, the pregnancy itself had been easy, and Dawn refused to let herself think about anything else. There was nothing she could do until the baby was born she reminded herself every time she began to think about it.

"She's so cute, Laura." Dawn sat holding three month old Sara while she slept. Her own baby was due next month and she was getting more anxious for her arrival by the day.

"Pretty soon you'll have your own to spoil." Laura tugged at her jeans, still a little tight in the waist from the baby fat she hadn't quite lost. It was the only imperfection in her classic blonde good looks.

"Have you decided what you're going to do?"

"You mean whether or not I'm going to tell David if it turns out he's the father?" Dawn shifted the sleeping baby in her arms. "I don't know. I mean, it would probably be the right thing to do. He ought to be told he has a child. But there could be such awful publicity and I don't know how I could possibly tell my parents and Mark, and -- " She thought for a minute and shook her head. "Maybe I won't have to. Maybe Mark is the father."

"Are you going to be able to tell by blood type?"

"No, they both have the same type of blood. Of course I could have a DNA test done, but I imagine the baby will look like one of them. God, what a mess."

"It's not so bad. Babies don't look like anybody for a long while," Laura said. "It's not like she's going to start singing right away."

Dawn couldn't help laughing. "That's one of the reasons I like you, Laura. You always know how to keep things in perspective."

"Well, really Dawn, maybe it'll all work out okay. Maybe you'll never really know one way or the other and you can pretend whatever you want."

"I'm going to know." Dawn was sure she would be able to tell when she looked at her baby. Maybe not the minute she was born, but eventually. Then she would have to deal with things. She didn't want to think of the complications this could cause and she forced the thought from her mind.

That night, she sent Mark out for chocolate ice cream again.

"I'm getting a half gallon this time, Dawn. You've had this craving all week and it'll save me a trip or two." He laughed while he pulled on pants and a shirt to make the two-minute trip to the grocery store.

"Thank you, sweetie," She said through her spoonful of ice cream when he returned. Since she came back from San Francisco, Mark had been as loving and attentive as when they first met and she was convinced that her inability to get pregnant had been the cause of his anger at her. "What am I going to use for an excuse for these treats after she's born?"

"I'll still go get them for you. Just not at midnight."

Early on the morning of October 19, Dawn felt the first twinge of labor. At first, she didn't realize what it was, but by the time an hour had passed and she was still feeling pains, she knew this would be the day.

"Mark," she whispered.

"Mmmm?"

"Wake up."

"What time is it? It's still dark." He mumbled sleepily. "Is it time?" He bolted upright in the bed.

"Don't panic. There's plenty of time." She struggled to find a comfortable position in bed.

"What do you mean, we've got time? Let's get going! I'll get dressed -- Do you need me to help you dress?" Mark fumbled for the light, nearly knocking over the lamp. "Where did I put the suitcase? What do you need me to do?"

Dawn laughed. "They're right about nervous fathers. Come back to bed. It'll be hours and I can't see spending them in a hospital. Not yet."

Mark was going to be there with her through the labor and birth and she was glad to have him to share it with. Dawn was only excited, not at all afraid of whatever pain there might be. This was something she'd waited so long for. Her baby. By tonight she would be able to hold her. Or him. She had told her doctor she wanted to be surprised when the baby was born, not allowing him to tell her ahead of time whether it was a boy or a girl. All through the pregnancy though, she had joked with everyone about her intuition telling her that the baby was a girl. She shared with no one what her intuition told her about who her baby's father was.

By midmorning, Mark insisted they go to the hospital. When they finally wheeled her into the delivery room, Mark was at her side holding her hand. As she looked at him through the blur of pain she thought of David. She couldn't picture David going through this with her; she couldn't picture him taking care of her.

"One more push, Dawn," the doctor said finally. She was rewarded for her efforts with a loud cry. "You have a healthy baby girl."

"Oh, Dawn, she's beautiful. Wait until you see," Mark wiped Dawn's sweaty forehead. "They're cleaning her up."

She strained to sit up and see her baby. Finally, the nurse brought her over and put her in Dawn's arms. When she looked down into her perfect little face, Dawn knew she loved her already. And she knew she would give her life to protect her. Reluctantly, she let them take her to the nursery.

"You ought to have a few more, Dawn," the doctor told her when he left. "That was the easiest delivery I've had in months."

After Mark kissed Dawn and left her in her room to sleep, he went back to the nursery and looked at his daughter through the glass window. "Baby Girl Fisher" her basket said. She was sound asleep and Mark stood and watched her sleep for a long while. His daughter. She was his daughter. The only person in the world he loved more was Dawn.

Although excited, Dawn was tired and she easily fell asleep. She had only been awake a few minutes when the nurse appeared in her doorway holding her baby.

"Ready for a visit?" she asked.

"Oh, yes." Dawn squirmed to sit up in the bed so she could hold her. The nurse put the baby into her arms and Dawn cuddled her close. She stroked the soft skin of her cheek and was rewarded with the baby's eyes opening. A brilliant blue. Like Mark's.

"Melody," she said softly, "I'm so glad you're here, sweetheart." When Dawn admired Melody, she was sure she could see a resemblance to Mark, in spite of Laura telling her that all babies just looked like babies. But, the first time she held her in the delivery room, she was certain she was David's.

After Melody had been taken back to the nursery, Dawn lay staring at the ceiling and thinking about how different the situation would have been if she were with David. She couldn't picture him sharing this with her, in spite of the fact that right now she very much wanted to see him. And she shook her head at the thought, angry with herself. What they had was over and it had to stay that way.

"Visiting hours aren't over, are they?" Laura stuck her head in through the door interrupting her thoughts.

"Who cares, come on in." Dawn pointed at a chair. "I'm not sleepy anyway."

"Still too excited?" Laura tossed her sweater on the back of the chair and then sat down. "She's beautiful Dawn. Really beautiful. I just came from the nursery and she's definitely the best looking baby in there. Of course, some of them look like they belong in a zoo." Laura laughed.

"You're terrible. Every mother thinks her baby is beautiful." Dawn giggled. "Even the ones that look like they should be in a zoo."

"So, what do you think, is she Mark's or David's?"

"Well, she's got Mark's blue eyes," Dawn said. "But it's the strangest thing, Laura. When they put her in my arms that first time, I was so sure she was David's. I don't know why, it was just a feeling I had, you know?"

"Wishful thinking?"

"No, if anything life would be easier if it turns out she's Mark's. And I guess she must be. Wait until you see her eyes."

"All babies have blue eyes, Dawn."

Dawn remembered reading about that once. "But they're just like Mark's. I guess I thought . . ."

"Relax, Dawn. Mark doesn't know she might not be his anyway. Boy, is he ever the proud father. He was still down at the nursery when I came in." Laura chuckled. "So were your parents and his mother, too. That poor child is going to be spoiled rotten."

"He's going to make a great father. He was fabulous in the delivery room."

"Well, I wouldn't have expected anything else. He's always been like that with you, Dawn." Laura smiled at her. "You're lucky, you know. He loves you both so much."

"I know I'm lucky. And I love him, Laura, I do. I just don't want things to get complicated." She had thought about this constantly for the last nine months. "I made my decision to stay with Mark and David deserves to be able to go on with his life. And then there's the publicity it could cause, too."

"You're right." Laura sighed. "The press would have a really good time with that. They're still hot on the trail of the 'mystery woman'; everybody wants to know who she is."

"I know it. I've been watching that too and it's making me a little nervous." Dawn replied. "I don't even want to think about what news like this would do. Can you imagine what that would do to Melody as she got older? This is the only answer."

As the months went by and Dawn watched her daughter grow, there was no need for a paternity test; she knew who her father was. In her heart, she had always known. The time to change the decisions she had made was long past.

Mark was watching Melody too. A father and daughter couldn't have been closer. He changed her diapers, held her when she cried, even got up with her in the middle of the night, letting Dawn sleep. As she grew older, he would play with her and always seemed to have an endless supply of patience with her constant questions. He and Dawn took her everywhere with them.

Dawn had taken Melody with her to Illusions from the time she was a few weeks old. She had only taken off two weeks when she was born, and then gone back to working a few hours a day while

Melody slept in a bassinet in her office. She'd begun working full time again when Melody was three months old. It was the first time she could remember making a decision she knew her father would disapprove of. He insisted that she should stay at home and be a full time parent, but her mother had sided with her, knowing how important her work was to her. Sometimes Dawn felt guilty when she worked long hours, but she loved her job and she made sure Melody was always well cared for.

Illusions was her baby too, in a different way than Melody was. She loved her store in Ashland the most; it had been her salvation when her world had fallen apart after David left her. She'd worked sixteen-hour days then, anything to keep from thinking about him and remembering. But those long hours had paid off and created a successful business that she was proud of, just as she was proud of the child she hoped to nurture in the same way.

She still was surprised sometimes when she looked at the glamorous boutiques and realized that they were hers. Each of the three was just over fifteen hundred square feet and although they were not as lavish as stores in larger cities, they were impressive for the small Southern Oregon towns where they were located. She had done all the buying for them herself for almost two years now, travelling several times a year to San Francisco and Los Angeles. She still worked in the stores too, convinced that the only way to really know what her customers wanted was to be able to ask them. Marnie taught her that, just as she'd taught her everything about running a business.

She'd just been eighteen when she worked for Marnie that first summer and had been hesitant about approaching her for a job since Illusions catered to more mature customers. Still, she needed a summer job and there had been a sign in the window in downtown Medford.

"Who would I talk to about applying for the job?" she'd asked the sales woman who was old enough to be her mother.

The woman had looked at her closely and then asked her to wait. A few minutes later, a striking blonde woman appeared and asked her to come with her. "I'm Marnie Sanders," she told her as they walked toward the office at the back of the boutique. "I just need someone for the summer."

She worked there every summer through college and had helped out during Christmas breaks as well. Marnie had taken her with on a buying trip the last two summers and although Dawn loved fashion

and the excitement of travelling, at the time she had never thought she would be doing that as a career. She and Marnie had become good friends, in spite of over thirty years difference in age, and she had rehired her without questions when she returned after David left her. Marnie was just getting ready to open a second boutique in Ashland at the time and she patiently taught Dawn how to manage both people and a business.

She finally told Marnie about David after she'd been back for a month. It still hurt to talk about it but she felt she owed her an explanation, especially since Marnie had met David on several occasions and always assumed that Dawn would marry him. It had been more difficult telling her she was going to marry Mark.

"I'd like to see about taking a week off next month," she told her as they unpacked some of the new fall merchandise. "I'm getting married."

"Dawn! That's great!" Marnie dropped the Adrienne Vittadini sweater, still wrapped in its plastic, and hugged her. "I knew everything would work out with you two."

"Marnie, it's not David that I'm marrying," Dawn said. "It's someone else."

Marnie took her by the arm and pulled her out of the store. "Jean," she called over her shoulder to the sales woman, "Take over here, we're stepping out for a minute." She didn't say another word until they were two blocks away seated in a coffee shop. She shooed the waitress away with a hand gesture. "Dawn, I'm going to talk to you like you were my daughter. I don't know what you think you're doing, but I know how much you loved David. And I know you still love him."

"I will always love him Marnie, but I have to go on with my life. He's gone on with his."

"That's all well and good, but to get married so soon? Who is this man anyway; do I know him?"

"I don't believe so, no. He's a professor at the college and –"

"How long have you been seeing him?"

"Not long," Dawn avoided looking at her. "But Marnie, we're alike; we want the same things in life. He loves me and I believe I will learn to love him."

"Learn to love him," Marnie sniffed. "You're going to settle for that after what you had with David?"

"I'm not going to find a love like that again. It doesn't happen twice."

"Are you sure there's no chance for you with David?" she asked.

Dawn shook her head.

"I'm sorry to hear that; I always liked him." Marnie patted her arm. "I still think you should wait Dawn, but if you've made up your mind to this, I won't say more. Think about it before you do something you'll regret later. I'm here if you need an ear, alright?"

A year and a half ago, Marnie wanted to retire and she approached Dawn about buying Illusions. Her banker had worked out a payment schedule for her and in another three and a half years, they would be totally hers. Dawn had changed the boutiques somewhat since she purchased them, catering to a younger clientele, but basically the business remained what Marnie had started – a destination store with personalized service.

When Melody was four, Dawn made the final payment and celebrated her full ownership of Illusions. That was the same year Melody started piano lessons. She had a natural talent for music and had already been playing the piano by ear for a while. She loved to sing and could pick up the words and tune of a song after hearing it only a few times.

Mark sat watching her play the piano. She didn't even notice him watching, she was so absorbed in what she was doing. She had Dawn's musical talent, he reminded himself. Dawn's not David's.

Already advanced for her age, Melody could read Dr. Seuss and Golden Books with ease and used a vocabulary larger than her friends. She and Laura's daughter, Sara were best friends.

"Do you ever think about telling him?" Laura asked her. Melody and Sara were upstairs in Melody's bedroom, playing with their dolls.

"Yes, all the time. I feel guilty about it, but I can't risk doing it, Laura." It hadn't been an easy decision for Dawn once she knew that David was Melody's father. "I don't want her to have to deal with that. And she and Mark are so close." Dawn was content with her life. She had her career and her child and she had a comfortable closeness with Mark. There were none of the passionate dizzying highs to their relationship that she had experienced with David but there were none of the heartbreakingly painful lows either.

"I know. You shouldn't feel guilty about it Dawn." Laura said.

"But I do. I really wanted to tell Mark the truth about all of this before, but now, well, I just can't do it. I've waited too long." Dawn refilled their lemonade. "I don't know what David would do if I told him, anyway."

"You don't think he'd try to get custody of her or anything, do you?"

"No, nothing like that. It's just, I don't know. Having a child hardly fits into his life. He's got what he wants, his career." Dawn shook her head. "I can't disrupt his life again. And I can't disrupt everyone else's either. There's no other choice."

"Well, he's got a career all right. That man must be raking in the dough like crazy. You can't pick up a newspaper without seeing his name." Laura said. "You still get his albums?"

"Of course I do. Melody's crazy about them." She still read the newspaper articles too and although she was proud of David's accomplishments she still felt a little tug at her heart each time she saw him pictured with yet another woman.

"Do you think that's a good idea?"

"It isn't hurting anything. At least she can know that much about her father." She and Melody listened to the recordings together and sometimes Dawn would sing along with them. "You know 'Forever' went platinum."

"Thank God he changed the title. It would have been hard to explain that song having your name in it." Laura said. "I still see those articles from time to time wondering who the 'Mystery Woman' is."

"That's just publicity stuff. Nobody knows anything about that and they never will." Her greatest fear was that if she told anyone the truth about Melody's paternity that the publicity it caused would hurt Melody. She would prevent that from happening, no matter what she had to do.

While Dawn would never admit it, she still thought of David often, every time she looked at their daughter. And sometimes she even let herself wonder what her life might have been like if she had stayed with him in San Francisco, as she had been tempted to do.

### CHAPTER 3

Dawn rarely allowed herself to remember San Francisco. It was a memory she reserved for her worst days, when the recollections warmed her and gave her hope and made her remember how she could love. Then she would bring the memory out and unwrap it, like a treasured Christmas ornament, admire it and carefully wrap it back up. She could remember every detail, as if it were yesterday.

January of 1994. The trip to San Francisco was intended to be a chance for her and Mark to try to repair their marriage, but when he refused to go, Dawn went alone. While she waited at the airport, she flipped through the newspaper and noticed that David was performing in San Francisco that week. She only thought for a minute before she called a business associate of hers who had connections and was able to get a ticket at the last minute, even though the concert had been sold out for weeks.

That night, she felt like she was eighteen again rather than twenty-seven. Being able to see David and hear him sing, even though he would never know she'd been there, was the first thing she'd looked forward to in longer than she could remember. From her seat in the center section, Dawn surveyed the crowd. A full house. David had made it, she thought with pride. He had what he always told her he wanted most of all.

She was unprepared for the rush of emotions she felt when she saw him again, and she was glad the theater was dark so no one could see her face. As the lights came up for intermission, she grabbed her purse with trembling hands, impulsively scribbled a note and tipped an usher extravagantly to make sure that the note got to David. She wondered all through the second half of the concert if he received it, and if he had, if he would want to see her again. When he finished his encore, he held the note up and touched it to his lips before taking his final bows and Dawn smiled.

When she arrived back in her suite at the hotel, a fire was crackling warmly in the living room fireplace, soft music filled the room and a bottle of champagne was chilling in a silver urn. She was impressed with the service, thinking she would have to remember to tip generously. But then she realized

who had been responsible for these amenities. On the glass coffee table lay a single long stemmed red rose.

Dawn paced while she waited. Finally, there was a light knock at the door and she crossed the room to answer it. She paused and took a deep breath, trying to compose herself. Then she opened the door and smiled at David.

"Hi." She held the door open as he entered. "I'm glad you came."

"Dawn," his familiar voice caressed her as he entered the room. She closed the door. "I still can't believe it, after all these years."

She could hear her heart pounding in her ears. In the years since she had seen him, David had only become more handsome, more appealing. He still had the same effect on her as he had the first time she met him, she realized as she felt the butterflies in her stomach.

He walked closer and she gazed into his soft brown eyes. His hand reached out and gently caressed her cheek. "You're even more beautiful than I remembered, Dawn. How have you been?"

"I've been fine." Her hand touched his and she knew she was trembling. "You haven't changed either." She lowered her eyes quickly to hide her emotions.

He'd ordered dinner sent up to her room but they had little appetite for the food, barely able to take their eyes off each other.

"It's hard to know where to start to catch up." He said, taking her hand in his again as they paused in a conversation where words tumbled one over the other. "We've missed so much."

So many years. So many wasted years. And yet, sitting here across from David tonight it was as if someone had turned back time for them. They had never been apart; never taken the different paths that led them to their separate lives.

"Your concert was wonderful," she said in an attempt to lighten the mood. "I've listened to all of your recordings."

"But you haven't been to a performance before," his eyes searched hers as he spoke.

"No." She had never dared to and now she knew why.

"I'm glad you were at this one. I've thought about you so often over the years, Dawn. I almost called you once, but then I heard you were getting married and I decided not to."

"Really?" When David nodded, she wondered what might have happened if they'd had that telephone conversation. "I was going to call you once, too, but I heard you were living with someone and well--" Dawn looked into David's eyes. "I decided not to either."

"That was strictly a publicity thing." David paused. "Still married?"

"Yes," she rushed on, unwilling to talk about her marriage, "and I just bought several boutiques. They're doing very well."

"I know." David touched her hand lightly and she jumped when she felt the tingle that slight touch produced. "I've always kept track of what you were doing, you know."

"No, I didn't know. I've always known what you were doing too."

They ate quietly for a few minutes as each considered the consequences of their years of silence.

"So are you enjoying your fame?" Dawn broke the silence.

"Well, I'm doing what I wanted to do, I guess."

Their eyes met and held. David took one of the perfect ripe strawberries and twirled it in the fluffy white whipped cream. He held it out toward Dawn. She reached out her hand to take it, but he shook his head. Continuing to hold the strawberry, he touched it gently to her lips. She smiled and nibbled at the fruit, remembering the countless times they'd done this when they were together.

Playfully, she dipped a strawberry in the whipped cream and fed it to David. She laughed as he ate it, but her laughter stopped abruptly when he held on to her hand as she started to pull it away. He tightened his hold on her hand and gently licked the whipped cream off her fingers. Tremors of excitement ran through her body as she looked into his eyes.

"Listen." He said quietly, breaking the silence. "Remember this song?"

She focused on the music playing in the background, and smiled when she realizing they were playing one of the many songs they'd considered "their song".

"Remember dancing to it? Come on." David pulled her up from the table, his eyes still caressing her, his hand still holding hers.

"It's been a lot of years since I've danced," she said when she rose. "Since the last time I danced with you." Still holding her slightly sticky hand in his, he pulled her close to him and they moved in time to the music for a minute, but she could tell the dancing only an excuse to touch her. Dawn felt the heat of his body, first warming the silk of her clothing, then her skin and then penetrating deep into her. It warmed her heart, melting the barriers she erected so long ago and she began to tremble. His hands slid down her back in a caress, holding her more tightly. She could feel his heart pounding.

"You're shaking, Dawn. Just like you did the first time we danced together." When he moved away from her just enough to look into her eyes, they were filled with a desire she could no longer hide and she saw the same emotion mirrored in his eyes.

"It's not over for you either, is it Dawn." It wasn't a question. "There's still something between us."

His hand caressed her face, gently pushing back her hair as his lips met hers. He kissed her gently at first, but soon he was holding her so tightly she could barely breathe. His tongue parted her lips and she returned his kisses. She tightened her arms around him as he scooped her up effortlessly and still kissing her, he carried her to the bedroom. He laid her gently back on the bed without releasing her from his embrace and pulled her closer to him as he lay next to her. The warm hardness of his body overpowered any reason she might have had left and she strained closer to his warmth, returning his kisses with a passion she barely remembered.

"Oh, Dawn," he said as he kissed her again and again. "How could I have ever let you go? I love you."

"David, I –" she began, surprised at his words.

"I know I was never great at saying it all those years we were together." He held her tightly, his face inches from hers. "I know I don't have the right to ask you for anything, but Dawn, I'm asking. I want a second chance with you. I never stopped loving you."

Dawn closed her eyes as he kissed her again. How she had missed this. His body was so warm, so exciting and she wanted him more than she had ever wanted a man. She kissed him back.

"Tell me, Dawn," David demanded as his mouth devoured hers.

"I love you," she whispered between kisses. "I love you." Suddenly, she pulled away from David and sat up. "I love you, but I can't have some sleazy affair with you. I don't know what I'm doing." Her hand shook as she touched her mouth. It still felt warm from his kisses. No matter what her problems with Mark, she took her marriage vows seriously and she was still married. "God, I'm so confused."

David took her hand in his. "Dawn, I don't want to have an affair with you. I want to be with you for the rest of my life. Marry me. If I hadn't been such a fool, we'd be married now."

"I love you, David. God help me, I do love you." She touched his face gently. "But it's not that simple."

"I won't believe it's too late for us, Dawn. Not when we've found each other again." His eyes searched hers. "I know how badly I messed things up the first time. I can't go back and change that. Give me a chance to make it up to you. I won't hurt you again, I swear it."

Dawn looked into David's eyes and felt the years melt away. It felt so right to be with him; to feel this love, this passion. It had been so long since she'd felt anything like this. There was just the two of them, no one else. There was just now.

David held her closer and Dawn relaxed her body against his. He cupped her face gently and kissed her. It started as a tender kiss but as he kissed her, her lips softened and warmed and returned the kiss. Their eyes held as he slowly moved his hand down her bare throat to the first button on her blouse. His fingers freed the button and as he looked at her, she knew he was waiting for her to stop him.

Her eyes returned his gaze and his finger traced a line on her warm skin as he moved to the second button. He opened it, revealing the soft pink curves of her breasts visible above the lacy white bra she wore. He groaned as he undid the third button and buried his face against her skin. Dawn's body arched against his in response and he quickly opened the last two buttons and removed her white silk blouse. He pulled the straps of her bra down and as he continued to caress her he unhooked the undergarment. Her breasts pressed against his chest and she could feel the heat of his body through the shirt he still wore.

"I never thought I'd wanted a woman as much as I wanted you that first night we made love, but I was wrong," he said softly. "I want you so much more now."

"David," she whispered. Slowly, deliberately, Dawn unbuttoned his shirt, caressing his chest as she did. Her eyes never left his and the desire she saw when she looked at him excited her all the more. When she had undone the last button, she freed herself from his embrace enough to remove the shirt. Then she pulled him back to her, their mouths bruised each other as they clung together.

"I've missed you," she said softly as David reached between them to unzip her slacks and she lifted her hips so that he could remove them. His fingers burned her skin when they slipped under the elastic waistband of her lace panties and pulled them down. She finished wiggling free of the garments and lay bare and trembling with desire as David slid his hands under her hips to pull her closer to him.

Dawn's body ached to touch the hard excitement she could feel against her bare thighs. She struggled for a moment with David's belt and then unzipped his pants. Sliding her hands under them, she felt the soft cotton of the briefs he wore. Her breath came faster as she pushed the pants out of her way and caressed him through the cotton. He groaned when she slid her hands under the elastic of the briefs and closed her hands around him. She pulled his remaining clothing out of their way.

"I love you, Dawn," he whispered as she embraced him.

"I love you too," she whispered, breathless with passion, and her body welcomed him into its warmth.

They made love slowly, their eyes never leaving each other. Incredibly familiar and still so new. They memorized each touch, each caress.

"This time it will be different Dawn. This time is forever."

Afterwards, Dawn lay in David's arms and they talked. She told him about her work and her life and finally she even told him a little about Mark. When she told him about the baby she'd lost, she cried for the first time since he'd left her.

"You should have had children." David held her while she cried. "You'd have made a great mother."

"You never wanted kids, did you?" she asked as she dried her tears.

"I guess I never thought I'd be a very good parent. And what kind of life is this for a child? But it was different for you. I always could see you having kids. Not to mention your parents being grandparents."

"I've missed you so much," he said after he told her about his last few years. "I never realized how much I loved you until you were gone." He kissed her again and she felt their bodies responding. Hours later, when the sun was just starting to come up, they finally fell into an exhausted sleep, still lying wrapped in each other's arms.

Later that morning, she went with him to his hotel. They avoided the valet and were careful that no one saw them as they slipped into the nondescript rental car that David had arrived in the night before. They walked up the twelve flights of stairs to his suite rather than risk going through the lobby and taking the elevator. Dawn thought she glimpsed someone at one point and then dismissed it, thinking she was being paranoid.

"I want to sing with you again Dawn."

"David, I haven't sung since I sang with you."

"I know you don't sing professionally anymore, Dawn. This is just for fun."

"You don't understand. I meant I haven't sung at all."

He looked confused. "Not at all? Why?"

"It's not important." She avoided looking at him.

"Dawn," he put his hands on her shoulders, forcing her to look at him. "It is important. You spent years of your life taking lessons and practicing. Why did you stop singing?"

"Okay." She took a deep breath. "When you left me I felt like I'd lost you to music. That music was my rival. And I never sang again. Not ever."

"Oh, Dawn, I'm so sorry." He kissed her gently. "I never meant to hurt you, I swear it. Please sing with me again."

"I want to sing with you. This is the first time I've actually wanted to sing again. I'll probably sound horrible though." It had been almost five years since she had sung and she was terrified that when she opened her mouth all that might come out would be a croak. But David sat next to her on the piano bench with his arms around her and she knew it would be all right. When

she tentatively sang the first notes, she felt like a whole person again for the first time since he left her.

"See," he told her. "Not bad at all."

"You're just being nice. I don't sound anything like I used to."

"Well of course not. But you still sound good. You can't expect to have those high notes without practice again."

"I didn't realize how much I had missed this," Dawn said, her eyes filled with tears, when they had finished the song. "Thank you."

"I want you to be happy, Dawn. Even when I left you, I did want you to be happy."

"I know. I want you to be happy too."

"Jon will be here in a little while." David had told her about his manager last night. "I'm anxious for you to meet him. You'll like him."

"Are you sure it's okay I'm here?"

"He wouldn't say a word to anyone, Dawn. Believe me."

A knock at the door interrupted their conversation. David opened the door and Dawn watched Jon enter the room. She would have known him from David's description.

Jon stopped in mid step. "Dawn!" he exclaimed.

Dawn was puzzled. "I'm sorry. Have we met?"

"No, no. I'm sorry. It's just that I'd have known you anywhere. You look just like your picture."

"My picture?" she asked, looking from Jon back to David.

David hesitated a minute. "You'll think it's silly. I always look at your picture before I go on stage."

"I'm flattered," she said, surprised that he still thought of her so often.

She sat on the couch listening as they talked about business and David smiled and reached out to touch her hand. Dawn extended her hand to David's outstretched one and their fingertips touched and held for a moment. She felt warm excitement vibrate up her fingers and into her hand. The palms of their hands touched and then he entwined his fingers with hers and

held her hand tightly. He stopped talking abruptly, and pulled her into his arms. Then his lips met hers and rest of the world disappeared.

Jon watched them; they were oblivious to everything except each other. He had been David's manager for almost five years and over that time, David had told him about Dawn. He cherished the confidence; David did not trust people with personal details about his life easily. During the years they'd formed a friendship and Jon cherished this too. He had lost his wife shortly before meeting David and for a while he hadn't known how he would be able to go on without her. She had been everything to him.

What had happened to bring Dawn and David back together? There was a part of him that wanted to tell them not to waste a minute, that they never knew how long they would have, that they might never have another chance.

But it was the part of him that was David's manager that spoke when Dawn left the room a few minutes later. "Are you crazy?" he asked. "Not only is she a married woman, but she's no one. If she were at least someone famous, it might work, but for heaven's sake –"

"Jon, I love her. And I intend to do everything in my power to keep her with me."

"Out of the question," Jon said shortly.

"It's not your decision to make," David replied angrily.

"If your career is as important to you as you say, you'll listen to me. This will ruin your career. You have to end it."

Dawn waited before she entered the room, Jon's words ringing in her ears. "This will ruin your career." If she stayed with David, her life would change in so many ways, she would hurt so many people. She could have dealt with that. But she was not willing to risk hurting David's career. She knew what it meant to him. As she thought about what would happen if she stayed with him, she knew there was only one decision she could make; she knew she had known it all along.

"But this isn't real, don't you see?" She'd told him late that night. "These two days aren't what it would be like every day. We'd have to go back to being a part of the real world. We still

want such different things in life. I'd want all of you, David. I always have and I always will. And I can't ask you for that."

"I'll give you that, Dawn. I know I can give you what you want."

"No you can't. This is your life. You belong to the world. The last few days you've belonged just to me."

"I'll give this all up, if that's what you want. We'll buy a house and settle down somewhere. It'll just be the two of us."

She held him closer. "I love you too much to even let you consider that. You've worked all your life for this. You love it."

"But I love you too, Dawn."

"In time you'd hate me for making you give this up. We don't belong together, David. We never have. You were right all those years ago. I was just too stubborn to see it. I thought we loved each other enough to make it work. But love isn't enough."

"Is what you have enough, Dawn? Is the life you're going back to what you want?" his eyes searched hers.

"We don't always get exactly what we want, you know. Maybe it's too much to expect to have it all." She did not know what she was going back to or even if she would stay with Mark, but she did not tell David this. She wasn't the same person she was the last time they went their separate ways and this time she knew she was strong enough to do whatever she had to do.

"Maybe you're right, maybe we can't have it all. But Dawn, I don't want to let you go again; I love you."

"I love you too. I love you enough to let you go." Her eyes filled with tears. "I will always love you, always. You have given me something so special, something I will cherish every day of my life."

"What can I say that will change your mind?"

"You can't. This is the right thing for us both, I believe that."

He nodded. "If you ever change your mind, I'm here. Remember I'll always love you. Forever." David pulled her into his arms to make love to her one last time.

They soared together, higher and higher, until they reached a place they had only been together. It was a place where their love would live forever. And it was where they said their final goodbye.

"Every time I sing, you know I'll be singing to you, Dawn." David told her when she lay in his arms afterwards.

"I'll be listening. And, David, I'll be listening with a smile, not with tears."

In those few days they had crammed yesterday and today and the tomorrows they knew they would not have. Alone in her tomorrow, Dawn reached up to touch her face as she returned to the present. It was wet with her tears.

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