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When Butterlies Fly

Chantanell Santos

**Chapter 1**

**“How It All Began”**

“Don’t be ashamed of your story it will inspire others.”

-Unknown

In life we meet new people and we lose people. The saddest thing about life is we lose people

and they never come back, they die. I learned early that young people die just like old people.

In school we learn mathematics, science, social studies, reading, that type of stuff. They should

teach us about life, what to expect, and how to deal with it. Maybe if I had learned about death

early on I would have been able to deal with my loss better.

I’ll admit my life was great I had an awesome mom. She gave me everything; it was us against the world; what more did I need? Growing up I felt alone; I always wished I had siblings, but it didn’t turn out that way. I had some pretty great cousins, but they lived miles and miles away. I only got to spend time with them in the summer.

When I was in the fifth grade we moved away. I had to leave all my old friends and it was heart breaking. I started a new school and everyone were strangers. At school I was known as the shy girl with big hair. As a child I was always skinny, I was light skinned, I had small moles in my face and I had big sandy colored brown hair. In my world I was all alone, fighting a never ending battle about my life and who I was. My mom always took time out for me and she knew I was lonely and I was. I was different from the other girls in my city and they seemed to point it out every single day of school. I hated school; every day of school was dreadful. I wished I was home schooled, but my mom had to work to provide for her and me.

I can recall one day at school I was in a huge tight and I had to go to the restroom. Since we were on our last recess outside, I was much closer to the gym so I went into the gym restroom. Once I came out of the bathroom stall those girls were in there. They were all looking at me, smiling. I didn’t say anything; I never said anything I always let them talk about me in my face. I just always walked away. After I washed my hands, I tried to walk off but they wouldn’t let me. It was four them, it was always the four of them and just me, by myself.

“Could I get by?” Alba asks. “No.” Dorian said. Then Maya got in Alba’s way. “Why is your hair so big?” Dorian asks. “God made me like this.” Alba responded. “Smart ass.” Tomeka said pushing her into Dorian and then Dorian pushed her back. “Could you all just leave me alone?” Alba said. “You’re a mutt aren’t’ you.” Maya said. “If you say so.” Alba frowned. “No we want to hear you say it.” Dorian smiled. “Let me by.” Alba said pushing Dorian. “She’s bold today.” Tomeka said. “Every day you four pick on me; I’ve never done anything to any of you.” Alba said.

“You think you’re so much better than everybody.” Maya said. “I never said I was.” Alba said. “But you think you are.” Maya said. “How many different races are you?” Tomeka asks. “I’m human just like everybody else.” “Well you sure don’t look like everybody else.” “Your hair is light brown, your eyes are green and you have freckles or moles all over your face and neck.” Dorian says. “So.” Alba frowned. “Stop trying to get by us, we’re not letting you leave.” Connie said. “We’ll let you leave if you say you’re a mutt.” Tomeka smiled. Alba just looked at all of them trying to push her way past all them but they just pushed her back and forth. “Just leave me alone.” Alba said raising her voice. Then they all held Alba down and they began slapping her face. Alba refused to cry, she swore they would never see her cry and she didn’t cry.

“Say you’re a mutt and we’ll let you go.” Maya said holding her neck. “No.” Alba responded. Dorian start pulling Alba’s hair and Tomeka bite her arm and that made Alba scream but she refused to cry. “Oh looks like the poor baby wants to cry.” Tomeka said. “Come on guys let’s go, I think she’s had enough.” Connie said. “You’re chickening out Connie.” Dorian frowned. “Hell no.” Connie frowned. “Well get your ass down here and bite her.” Connie was much nicer than her friends, she was a follower and she did everything they told her to do. Alba finally gave up and she said, “I’m a mutt ok, now just let me up.”

My life had finally changed when Zoey arrived. She made everything so much better. I felt like I had finally gotten the sister that I always wanted. She was everything a girl could ask for and that school year we were inseparable. Everything was better because of Zoey and my Mom knew it. Zoey took up for me and no one would mess with me while she was around. It really felt good to hear Zoey put Dorian, Maya, Tomeka, and Connie in their places. I was finally smiling and nothing was going to bend that smile, nothing.

School was finally over and Zoey and I had passed to the sixth grade; we were happy. We knew with summer ahead of us we’d have the time of our lives and we did. We spent so much time together and it was great. Half of our summer was over and suddenly Zoey had to go to Dallas, her hometown. Zoey told me about her best friend in Dallas. They had a very close relationship like she and I did. “Promise that you’ll come back Zoey.” Alba said. “I’m coming back; I’ll only be gone for a month.” Zoey said. “You’re not coming back; I’ll be alone if you move back to Dallas.” “Alba I’m coming back ask my Mom, she’ll tell you.” Alba gave Zoey a hug and Zoey left.

The rest of the summer it was my Mom and me. “Come here.” Susan smiled. Alba walked over to the couch where her Mom was sitting. “Are you so down because Zoey is gone to Texas?” “Yes, I don’t have anyone to joke around with or talk to.” Alba frowned. “You got me.” “Mommy I can’t talk about the things I talk to Zoey about.” “What do you two talk about; boys?” Alba blushed and said, “No Mommy.” “You’re blushing you talk about boys; so who do you like?”

Saturday; my Mom took me school shopping. She always wanted me to wear these girly clothes. I hated girl clothes; boys always tried to look under my dress and it irritated me. To make my Mom happy I’d choose one girly outfit so she’d be proud.

The entire summer I begged my Mom to perm my hair; I wanted straight hair just like the rest of the girls and then just maybe they’d stop making fun of my light brown curly hair. My mom just wouldn’t budge; she loved my hair she said it felt like cotton and reminded her of Jasmine Guy’s hair. I guess that was a compliment but my hair was never complimented at school.

It was a week before school and Zoey still wasn’t home; I walked to her house every day. She lived behind my house, so all I had to do was cut through my yard to get to hers. “Why the long face?” Susan asks. “Zoey’s still gone; Mommy is she really coming back?” Alba asks. “Of course she is.” “Brenda said they’d be back this week she didn’t give me a particular day.” “Turn that frown to a smile.” Alba smiled and said, “Mom why do you always say that?” “Because you’re much prettier smiling instead of frowning.”

That night Alba laid in her bed fast asleep when she heard something hit her window. Alba looked out her window and it was Zoey. Alba let her window up and said, “Is that really you?” “Yes, come outside.” Alba put on her shoes and ran outside. The two of them laughed and hugged each other. “I brought you something.” Zoey said handing Alba the bag. “You didn’t have to buy me anything.” “You’re my best friend.” Zoey smiled. Alba opened it to reveal a half of a heart, best friend necklace. “This is so nice.” Zoey touched her necklace and said, “I have the other half; we’re friends forever.” “Thank you; I brought you something too, but I won’t give it to you until tomorrow.” “That’s fine.” Zoey smiled.

The next day Alba and Zoey hung out all day. They sat on Alba’s porch and Zoey braided Alba’s hair to the back into one big braid. “I wonder why everyone at school are so concerned with your hair and the color of your skin.” “I don’t know Zoey.” “Well it doesn’t matter what you look like; you’re pretty to me.” “Thank you Zoey and you’re pretty to me.” Alba smiled. “I like your hair I wish mine was this color.” Alba frowned and said, “Come on Zoey I wish my hair was jet black like yours.” “Different is better Alba.” Alba turned around and said, “I hate being different; different gets you picked on.” “No one ever picks on you.” “The girls pick on you because you’re quiet and prettier than them and all the boys pick on you because they like you.” “I don’t like any of them.” “That’s because you’re into the white ones; tell me again why you like white boys.” Alba laughed and said, “Shut up Zoey.”

Two days later; Zoey and Alba went to the store. “Guess what I found on the road.” Zoey said. “What did you find?” “Money.” Zoey answered. “How much?” Alba asks. “Ten dollars but it’s a food stamp.” “Really.” “Yes, you can have anything you want and plus we pay no tax.” Zoey smiled. “Ok, thank you.” Alba smiled. After the two spent the entire ten dollar food stamp they sat at Zoey’s house on the steps and enjoyed all their junk food.

“This is the life.” Zoey said. “I know huh.” Alba agreed. “I’ll be glad when we’re in high school.” “Me too.” “I want a boyfriend and you and I should join the cheerleading squad.” “I’m too shy to be on the cheerleading squad; I don’t think I’d look good in the outfit.” “Come on Alba, you have long hair, long legs, and you’re skinny, you’re the perfect cheerleader.” Zoey smiled.

School finally started; Alba and Zoey dressed alike just different colors. Alba was happy her Mom straightened her hair and let her wear her hair down for the first day of school. “Alba the bus is coming have fun today.” Susan smiled. “You too Mommy.” “Don’t let those girls get to you; kill them with kindness.” Susan smiled. “I will Mommy bye.” Alba said walking out of the front door.

Around eight o’clock that night Alba and Zoey laid across her bed just talking. “Alba, why don’t you like black boys?” “Zoey I never said I didn’t like black boys, I want someone exotic.” Alba smiled. “Why do you think like that?” “I don’t know; have you ever just seen a Puerto Rican guy; their beautiful.” Alba smiled. “What do they look like?” Zoey asks. “I’ll show you.” Alba said opening the drawer to her desk. “Look at these five guys.” Alba smiled. “So this is how a Puerto Rican looks.” Zoey smiled. “What do you think?” “You’re right their beautiful.” “You and I should go to Puerto Rico one day for like a month before we go to college.” “Ok, I’ll go, but when you meet this guy you can’t forget about me.” “Never.” Alba said.

**Chapter 2**

**“Zoey”**

“Good friends are like stars you don’t always see them, but you know they’re always there.” -Unknown

Alba and Zoey were finally in the eighth grade; they were happy one more year and they’d be in high school. The two of them planned on going to the same college. “One more year of this and we’ll finally be in high school.” Zoey smiled. “I know.” Alba smiled. “Things are going to be better.” “What does your schedule look like?” “I have to go see my guidance counselor to change two of my classes; I took them last year.” “Me too; did you realize we aren’t in the same home room?” Alba asks. “We’re not.” Zoey frowned. “No.”

After school Alba and Zoey did what they had always done; studied, finished homework and then talked about boys. “Alba it’s time for dinner.” Susan said. “I knew she was coming any minute.” Zoey said. “I wish my Mom was more like yours.” Alba said. “My mom works late that’s why I do what I want.” “Well go in, eat and whatever Mrs. Susan has you doing and sneak out like you always do.” “I’ll see you around ten.” Alba smiled. “Bye.” Zoey smiled putting her back pack.

Thanksgiving break had finally come and gone, but Zoey didn’t come back to school. Alba thought maybe they were visiting their relatives longer. When Christmas break came Alba was near her breaking point. “Mom please find out why Zoey’s not in school.” “Alba sit down.” Alba sat down beside her Mom. Her mom took her hand and said, “Alba, Zoey’s grand mom died that’s why they haven’t come home.” “Zoey’s mom has a lot to handle in Texas that’s why they haven’t come back.” “She put Zoey in school in Texas.” “Mom does that mean she’s not coming back?” Alba asks panicking. “Alba honey calm down; Brenda is bringing Zoey back home.” “She’ll stay with us until Brenda comes back.” Alba began smiling and she said, “Really mom.” “Really.” Alba hugged her Mom and then ran to her bedroom.

The next night; Alba and Zoey sat inside her bedroom on the bed. “Zoey I’m sorry your grand mom died.” “I wish you had called me.” Alba says. “Thank you, my aunt’s phone doesn’t call long distance.” “You could have called me collect, my mom wouldn’t care.” “Next time I will.” Zoey smiled. “Here I brought you this.” Alba said handing her a gift bag. “What is it?” “Open it silly.” Alba smiled. “Alba this is nice; no one’s ever given me an angel.” “You’re welcome.”

Alba and Zoey finally entered high school; they were so excited. “Cheerleading try outs.” Zoey said handing Alba the paper. Alba read the paper and said, “You’re trying out?” “We are trying out.” “Zoey I can’t.” “Why not?” Zoey asks. “Because I’m shy I can’t do this in front of people.” “Alba you’re skinny and tall why not.” “I’m not coordinated like you are; I’m always off beat.” Alba frowned. “Yes you are; you just have to practice.” “I promise I will have you ready for tryouts.” Zoey smiled. “You promise?” Alba asks. “I promise, friends help friends.” Zoey said taking her hand. “Ok.” Alba frowned.

Two weeks later; Alba and Zoey were ready for tryouts; they had practiced and practiced on their routine and Alba was so afraid of screwing it up. “Alba you can do this; just breathe and smile.” “Make sure you give the judges eye contact and please don’t look at your feet.” “If you mess up; just get back in routine, don’t stand there and look at the rest of us.” Zoey said. “Ok, I got it.” Alba smiled nervously. Once they walked out in front of the judges, Zoey said, “Smile Alba.”

After tryouts; Alba and Zoey sat inside the locker room. Alba was down because she messed up. Zoey put her arm around Alba’s shoulder and said, “If you don’t make it and I do I won’t join.” “It’s both of us or none of us ok.” Zoey smiled. “You’d do that for me?” Alba asks. “Yes you’re my best friend Alba; I’d do that for you.” “You don’t have to quit because I screwed up.” “I want you to be on the squad even if I don’t get picked.” Alba smiled. “Thank you Alba you’re the best.” “You are too.”

Zoey and Alba came home both of them were so happy they made the cheerleading squad. The two of them had been cheerleading for two months and things were great. Alba and Zoey loved how the boys flirted with them. Zoey had started to date one of the guys on the basketball team. He was older and Zoey felt lucky. On bus rides out of town Zoey would always sit with him instead of her.

“Alba, could I sit with you?” Alba turned around to see it was one of the guys in the twelfth grade. “Ah ok.” Alba said. “You’re shy.” Alonzo said. Alba just smiled. “You’re pretty, that’s why all the guys like you.” “Oh.” Alba blushed. “I’m serious; how about being my girl.” Alonzo smiled. “I don’t know.” Alba responded. “Think about it.” Alonzo said getting up.

Zoey got out of the seat with her boyfriend and went to sit with Alba. “Why was Alonzo sitting with you?” Zoey asks. “I don’t know; I think the boys have some bet going on.” Alba frowned. “I haven’t heard anything about a bet.” “Come on what did he want.” Zoey smiled. “He wants me to be his girl, girlfriend, whatever that means.” Alba said. “Alba do it.” “No I don’t like him.” “Do you really wanna be a virgin for the rest of your life?” Zoey asks. “You’re not a virgin anymore?” Alba asks. “I am, but I think I love Ray; I’m thinking about doing it.” “Zoe don’t we have our whole life for that.” Alba said. “Alba I don’t mean to hurt your feelings, but you’re never going to find this dream guy.” “There are no Puerto Rican guys in Louisiana.” “Zoey, I don’t like Alonzo, he’s not my type.” Alba said. “I’m going back to sit with Ray.” “Bye Zoe.” Alba said looking back out the window.

December finally came and then Christmas break it seemed Alba and Zoey were so busy with basketball tournaments. They spent so much time on the road they couldn’t be with their families. The girls had cheered three games in a row. Alba noticed that Zoey wasn’t at her full potential. “Zoe what’s wrong?” Alba asks. “Nothing.” “Yes, something’s wrong; you’re always full of energy and you’re not; what’s the matter?” “I don’t know I just feel tired.” “Come here lie on the bench and put your head on my lap.” “You have time to relax before the next game.” Alba says. “Thank you.” Zoey said closing her eyes. “Relax I’m right here.” Alba smiled.

The girls were back on the sidelines cheering their butts off. Alba couldn’t focus on the game because she was worried about Zoey. Half time had finally come and all the cheerleaders were in the middle of the floor performing giving it all they had. That’s when Zoey collapsed. Alba saw what was going on and she yelled out “Zoey!” Alba ran to her friend and she yelled, “She’s not breathing.” Alba was taking CPR in school so she knew exactly what to do and she began performing CPR on her friend as everyone stood around them. Alba felt like she was moving in slow motion; she was trying to stay calm.

Alba rode in the ambulance with Zoey. Alba held Zoey’s hand and said, “I’m here Zoe; you’re going to be fine.” “You’re going to be fine Zoe.” Alba cried. Once they got to the hospital Zoey and Alba’s mom were there. Alba was so happy to see her Mom. Susan hugged her daughter the minute she got next to her. “I heard what you did; you’re amazing Alba Malveaux.” Susan smiled. “Will Zoey be alright?” Alba asks. “Of course, we have to pray.” “I’ve prayed.” Alba said. “Good girl.” Susan said touching the back of her head.

The holidays were over and Alba was at school without her best friend. Alba missed Zoey so much and that day at school Alba found out that Zoey wasn’t coming back to school. Alba felt heart broken and sick. For days Alba couldn’t eat and she would cry. Susan hated to see her daughter sad just when she was so happy. Alba continued to cheer because she knew it was what Zoey would want. Alba became very popular and all the girls that hated her so much wanted to hang out with Alba. Alba didn’t understand how one day she turned popular. All the cool guys wanted to date her but she wasn’t allowed to date.

Susan had been teaching Alba how to drive and she was getting really good at it. “I’m gonna trust you to drive to the store to pick up a few things for me.” “What?” Alba smiled. “Mommy did you say drive?” Alba said getting excited. “Yes.” Susan smiled handing Alba a list. “Be back in fifteen minutes.” Susan smiled. “Ok Mommy; you’re the best.”

Alba jumped into her Mom’s black Pontiac Grand Am. Alba made a few blocks around the neighborhood then she headed to the store. Alba finally walked out the store with two bags. As she was putting them inside the car she heard someone say, “Little Miss Alba’s growing up.” Alba turned around with a smile on her face to see it was a guy she had a crush on for years. He walked up to the car and said, “How are you.” Alba blushed and said, “I’m fine.” “I’m surprised your girl isn’t with you.” “Zoey.” Alba said. “Yeah Zoey.” “Oh.” “I didn’t know you drove.” Alex smiled. “I do sometimes.” “Who are you dating?” “I’m not allowed to date.” Alba said not thinking. Then Alba thought to herself, “Why the hell would you say that out loud?” ““So could I call you sometimes?” Alex asks. “Ah sure.” Alba smiled.

Alba had been sneaking talking to the older guy for a couple months. Susan never expected it; Alba wondered did her mom know because she began talking about sex. Alba hated those conversations they made her feel so uncomfortable. “Mom I’m not gonna get pregnant.” “Alba I’m just making sure you know about everything.” “I don’t want you giving anybody your most precious gift.” “Alba once it’s gone, it’s gone and there’s no way of getting it back.” “A man has to earn that; a real man will wait on you.” Susan says. “Mommy I know that.” Alba frowned. “Alba I don’t want you like Nicky and Amanda running around the town screwing every guy that comes into their path.” “Mom, I’m not stupid.” “I know you’re not; you’re my daughter, but some girls are very naive.”

School was finally over; Alba had been talking to Zoey on the phone for two months. Alba found out that Zoey really wouldn’t be back in Alexandria. The news really hurt Alba, she was sad she’d never see her best friend again. It was nice to talk to her one the phone. “Zoe don’t forget about me; I know you’re back with Stacey.” “Alba you know you and Stacey would be great friends too.” “I always tell her about you.” Zoey smiled. “I don’t wanna be friends with Stacey; the only friend I want is you.” Alba smiled. “I hear you’re popular at school now all the boys are crazy about you.” “Zoe I don’t take any of them seriously.”

The end of June; Alba was getting her clothes together; her Mom was taking her to Texas to visit Zoey. “Mom where are we going; you’re pulling up at a Children’s Hospital.” Alba said. “Alba there’s something I haven’t told you.” Susan said putting the car in park. “Ok what is it?” “Zoey’s in Texas because she has cancer.” “Mom come on.” Alba said. “Alba; I’m sorry baby girl, but Zoey’s sick.” “Zoe can’t be sick; she’d tell me.” Alba said. “She didn’t want you to worry about her.” “Mom how long have you known this?” Alba asks getting upset. “Since Zoey passed out.” “What?” “Alba baby, please don’t be mad.” “Is she going to die?” Alba asks. “I don’t know baby, I don’t know.”

Alba had been in Texas for three days and she spent most of the day with Zoey. Alba could look at her and tell she was in a lot of pain. All of her hair had come out and she looked so pale. Alba didn’t look at her any different things were still the same. Alba didn’t want to make her feel bad.

Alba sat by Zoey’s hospital bed staring at her. “Alba I’m going to be fine.” Zoey smiled reaching out to grab her hand. Alba wiped her tears away and said, “I heard the nurse say you were going to die.” “What am I gonna do without you?” “Alba I’ll always be with you.” “You know you’re dying?” Alba asks. “Of course I do; I’ve always known that I wouldn’t be on this Earth long.” “I’ve been living with this illness for years now and I’m tired Alba.” “Zoey don’t say that please.” “Alba you’ll get through this I promise; no matter what I’m always with you.”

Alba sat for thirty more minutes, stood up, and said, “I’m going to the cafeteria; do you want anything?” “No, I’m just going to close my eyes and rest.” Alba sat back down and asks, “Promise me you’ll be here when I get back.” “I’ll be here Alba I promise.” Once Alba walked back into Zoey’s room someone else was inside her room. Zoey sat up and said, “Alba this is Stacey.” Stacey smiled and said, “Hi Alba.” “Hi, nice to meet you.” Alba said. Zoey could tell it was awkward both of her bests friends in the same room. She knew Alba and Stacey were uncomfortable.

Alba sat on the other side of Zoey and offered her food to both of them and they said, “No thank you.” “Alba, Stacey when I’m gone I think it would be great for you and two to become friends.” “Zoe you’re not going anywhere.” Alba said. “Don’t talk like that Zoey.” Stacey said. “I’m dying, I know I am; I’m ok with it.” “When it’s your time it’s your time and there’s nothing that can prevent it.” Zoey says. “I don’t want you to die.” Alba said putting her fork down. “Could you two make one promise for me?” Zoey asks. “What’s that?” Stacey asks. “To become best friends; you two are going to need each other for the rest of your lives.” “I’ve seen it.” Zoey says.

Stacey looked at Alba and Alba looked at her and then Zoey said, “Are you two going to give me this wish or what?” “Whatever you want.” Stacey smiled. “Sure Zoe.” Alba agreed. “I’m holding you both to your promise.”

Zoey was laid to rest the second weekend in August. The funeral was filled with a lot of her classmates from Texas and Louisiana. Alba and Stacey were both broken by this loss. They sat beside each other during the funeral and held hands. The two of them stood up and spoke about Zoey and they continued to hold hands at the burial site. “Stacey it was nice getting to know you.” Alba said. “It was nice getting to know you too.” “I promise I’ll call you.” Stacey said. “We’ll keep in touch.” Alba smiled. “I hope so.” “Be safe.” Alba said. “You be safe too.” Stacey smiled. Alba walked away and waved goodbye.

**Chapter 3**

**“Life Without Zoey”**

“And now I’m living in the past with all these regrets.” “Looking at all the chances I was too afraid to take and the people I was too scared to admit my feelings to”. “Life is moving on but I still can’t go off all these regrets.”

–Mahmoud El Hallab

Alba was back at school and she didn’t feel much like doing anything. “Alba if you need more time home it’s alright; you can make up your work.” Mrs. Wright said. Alba wiped her eyes and said, “Are you sure?” “Of course; go home; come back next week ready to learn.” “Thank you Mrs. Wright.” Alba said then left out of her classroom. Alba grabbed her things and immediately walked home and that’s when she ran into Alex.

“What’s wrong?” Alex asks concerned. “I don’t feel like talking about it.” Alba said wiping her tears. “You didn’t get suspended or in a fight did you?” “No nothing like that.” Alba said still wiping her tears. “How about you come sit at my house; I’ll make you feel better.” Alex smiled. “Ok for a little while.” Alba said. After Alba finished explaining Alex said, “I’m sorry I heard something about Zoey, but I didn’t know she had died.” “I’m really sorry Alba.” Alex said concerned. “Thank you.”

Alba struggled every day at school it wasn’t the school work it was Zoey being out of her life for good; she was dead and Alba felt dead inside. Alba realized she was now alone in the world. Alba isolated herself away from classmates. Alba would sit alone and admire the butterflies outside. Everyone at school knew Alba was depressed. No one could seem to get Alba to talk, the only time Alba was full of happiness was cheering and after that she’d be back to her depression. It was something about cheerleading that made Alba leave all her worries behind.

“Alba I know it’s hard, but you can’t go on with your life like this.” “You’ve got to get out and have fun, experience life.” “Mom I don’t want to.” Alba said looking down at the floor. “Alba I know it sucks that your best friend died; life isn’t fair sometimes baby.” “I can’t explain to you why Zoey had to leave you, all I know is that God needed her more.” Susan says putting her arm around Alba’s neck. “Then why didn’t he take me too, it’s hard.” “I hate my life.” “This life isn’t fair I just want to kill myself.” Alba says. Susan put her arms around Alba’s waist and held her. “You can’t say things like that; you’re not going to kill yourself.” Susan said. “I hate my life Mommy; I hate my life.” Alba cried. “You hate your life because your best friend is gone; you’ll get other friends trust me.” “Zoey is always with you baby girl.” Susan said still holding her.

Spring had come and Alba was coping with Zoey’s death better. Alba had begun talking to Stacey on the phone every day. Susan’s phone bill was higher than usual, but Susan didn’t care. She felt if talking to Stacey was going to help her daughter she could talk to her anytime, it didn’t matter she just wanted her happy little girl to smile again.

Monday Alba came home and she had someone with her. Susan was surprised Alba had made a friend. “Mom this is Jessica; is it alright if we study here?” Alba asks. “Of course baby; would you two like some cookies and something to eat while you study?” Susan smiled. “Sure.” Alba smiled. “Your Mom’s so nice.” Jessica smiled. “She is.” Alba smiled walking towards her bedroom.

Alba and Jessica had developed a very close relationship and Susan was happy. Soon Alba had two more friends. Susan was realizing that Alba was popular. Boys would come over and shoot basketball with Alba and Susan kept an eye on them. Susan knew Alba wasn’t ready for a boyfriend, but she always made sure she talked to Alba about the birds and the bees.

Alba was now in the twelfth grade; she still had a lot of new friends and she was still very popular. Alba could care less about the popularity. She enjoyed being a role model to girls younger than her. Alba wanted to set a better example than what the other girls her age had set. Being the captain of the cheerleading squad was great and she had a lot of followers that wanted to be just like her. Of course Alba had her enemies but she didn’t care who disliked her. Alba was stronger now and more confident than ever. Alba felt Zoey with her every day. During the warm days Alba found herself having a liking for butterflies. They always came around her and they were beautiful, the blue butterflies always fluttered her way.

Alba sat outside under the breeze way reading a copy of Teen Vogue. “Alba what is it with you and butterflies?” Jessica asks. “I don’t know their beautiful to me.” Alba smiled. “Every time we’re outside they come near you.” “I don’t know; butterflies are such beautiful creatures.” “Sometimes I think it’s Zoey hanging around me.” Alba smiled. “Oh.” Jessica said grabbing Alba’s magazine. “Give it back silly.” Alba smiled.

After school Alba met up with Alex. Alba had been seeing him for a while. Her mom hadn’t suspected a thing. Alba was afraid to tell her mom about him because he was out of school and he was four years older than her. She knew her Mom would have a fit. Alex was such a handsome guy; he was the first black guy that had caught her eye and he was sensitive too. Alba loved that about him. He brought Alba any and everything she wanted. He made her laugh and he made her smile, but there was one thing about him that Alba didn’t like; he was jealous. Alba thought maybe she could change him.

“I wasn’t doing anything wrong.” “I was just talking to him; what is so wrong with that?” Alba asks. “He likes you.” Alex said. “So what a lot of guys like me; that doesn’t mean I like them.” “I like you why isn’t that enough?” Alba asks. “Talking to those guys only makes them think that you want them.” “Alex that’s crazy.” Alba laughed. “Something funny.” “Don’t holler at me Alex.” Alba said raising her voice. “You’re being stupid; if you’re with me you don’t have a reason to talk to anybody but me.” “I’m going home I don’t have time for this.” Alba said walking off and Alex grabbed her arm. “What?” “Come here.” “Stop twisting my arm what the hell is wrong with you!” Alba yelled. Then he pushed her and Alba left out of the front door.

Alba finally made it home she was so pissed because of the argument she and Alex had and she couldn’t believe he had pushed her. Alba walked in the door to be surprised that her Mom was lying on the couch kissing a man. “Mom.” Alba said shocked. Susan sat up and fixed her clothes. “Alba I thought you’d be gone for another hour.” Susan said. “Whose this man; you never bring men into our house?” Alba frowned. Susan looked at the man and he said, “Alba I’m your Father.” Alba blinked her eyes and shook her head. Susan stood up and said, “Alba your Father he’s back.” “Why is he back?” Alba asks getting upset. “I’m back because your Mom let me come back.” Her Father said. “Clint let me talk to Alba she’ll be fine.” Susan said. “I’ll be outside.” Clint said getting up.

Once Clint went out the front door Susan said, “You don’t seem like you’re happy that your Father’s back.” “Why are you happy?” Alba asks. “Because he’s my husband.” Susan said. “He’s never done anything for me and you’re just going to welcome him back into our lives.” “I don’t want him here.” Alba frowned folding her arms. “He’s back Alba so please be nice.” “’I can’t believe you Mom, he’s done nothing for us and he’s just back like nothing ever happened.” “Alba don’t be like that.” Susan said. Alba walked away pissed.

A couple days later; Alba was over to Jessica’s house not doing much of anything. “Every day you’re with Alex; your mom is going to find out sooner or later.” “Jessica she won’t.” Alba said. “If you say so; you still didn’t tell me what happened to your arm.” “She won’t find out because she’s busy having the time of her life with my Dad to even notice me.” “I heard he was back.” “What does he look like?” Jessica asks. “Like a white man.” Alba frowned. “I heard he was really good looking; they say you look just like him.” “I look like my Mom.” Alba frowned. “Your Mom isn’t your real Mom.” “Jessica you don’t have to say that; she is my Mom no matter what anyone says.” “I’m sorry I didn’t mean it like that.”

Alba had finally made it to the twelfth grade; she was still on the cheerleading squad, beta club, 4-H club, and photography club. Alba did a lot of volunteering and she recently joined a mentoring program at school. Alba was officially dating Alex and her Mom had no problem with it, but her Dad seemed to really hate Alex. Alba didn’t care how her Dad felt about it as long as she was interested in Alex she wasn’t about to let him tell her what to do.

“Will you just move and let me by.” Alba said. “I said you couldn’t go anywhere; so go to your room.” Clint said. “Mom please could you tell Clint to get out of my way!” Alba yelled. Susan walked towards the door and she said, “Clint, honey I told Alba she could go out tonight; she knows she has to be home by midnight.” “You give her too much freedom; she’s going to be pregnant and live a fast life just like those other girls.” “You never have anything nice to say about me; it’s always bad.” Alba pouted.

Spring break had come and Alba was spending more and more time with Alex. The two of them had begun to have sex and it seemed their relationship was stronger. Alex was still so jealous and Alba couldn’t understand why he was the way he was. “We argue about this stuff all the time; I don’t want any of those guys.” Alba said. “Then why do you have to sit by him and talk to him?” “Alex he’s my lab partner what do you expect me to do?” Alba asks. “I expect you to respect me.” “I do respect you; you’re the one who has cheated on me twice with those low life’s.” “When I do sleep with another man you’ll be the first to know.” Alba said and that’s when Alex slapped her in the face. Alba was shocked, she stared at Alex and then she ran out of his house. Alex caught her on the porch and pulled her back inside his house. “You’re not going anywhere.” Alex said. “I’m going home, let me go!” Alba yelled.

Two weeks later; Alba was sitting in Jessica’s bedroom. “I think I’m going to break up with Alex.” Alba said staring out the window. “Why?” “Because he’s too jealous; I’m tired of all the arguing.” “Arguing about what?” Jessica asks. “The basketball players; every single day that’s all I hear about, it’s getting old.” Alba pouted. “He loves you that’s why he acts that way.” Alba stood up and said, “I guess you’re right.” “Danielle’s picking us up; are you ready?” Jessica asks. “Yeah let me grab my bag.”

It was two months before graduation and Alba had discovered something that she knew her parents would flip out about. “Alba you’re what?” Alex asks. “I’m pregnant.” Alba said. Alex picked her up and spines her around, “We’re having a baby.” “Yeah put me down.” Alba said. Alex put her down and then he kissed her. “Why are you happy about this?” Alba asks. “Because I love you.” “I love you too but there’s no way I can go to college pregnant.” Alba said. “College; we’re getting married you don’t have to go to college.” “I have to go to college.” “This pregnancy is going to ruin all my plans.” Alba pouted. “What plans; I should be a part of your plans.” Alex said getting upset. “You are but a baby is not.” “Stop talking like you’re not happy about this baby.”

Alba stood in the mirror in the girls’ restroom, she just stared at herself and then she starts to cry. “Alba just tell me what is wrong?” Jessica asks. “You can’t tell anybody.” “Alba we’re best friends who am I going to tell?” “Jessica this has to stay between you and I ok.” Alba said. “I promise.” “I’m pregnant, I’m three months I think and I’m scared.” “What am I gonna do?” Alba asks.

Two days later; Jessica and her Mom took Alba to a clinic to get prenatal vitamins and exam her. “You’re right you’re around thirteen weeks.” The doctor smiled. After the doctor visit Jessica’s mom took them to Mc Donald’s for lunch. “How do you feel?” Jessica asks. “I don’t want this baby.” Alba admitted. “Why; Alex has a good job, he can take care of both of you.” “I don’t think having this baby is a good idea.” “Alba do you want an abortion?” Jessica asks. Then Jessica’s Mom sat down and the two of them stop talking. Jessica’s Mom told Alba, “You have to tell your parents about this baby; you’ll be showing soon.” “I’m gonna tell them.

**Chapter 4**

**“A Brand New Start”**

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.” -C. S. Lewis

Alba finished packing her things and began putting everything inside her car and inside the trunk. “Alba are you sure you want to leave?” Susan asks. “I need a new start; I wanna get away from Alex, I hate him.” Alba said. “I’m sorry he broke your heart.” “I am too; he gets me pregnant and cheats on me again.” Alba frowned. “Jayden will be fine with us; when you get settled you can send for him.” “Take your time, your Dad and I want you to go off into the world and experience life.” “Enjoy yourself Alba and don’t let anyone else bend your smile.” Susan said hugging her daughter. “Thank you Mom.”

Alba walked back inside the house and awakened her four year old son. “Mommy’s about to go.” Alba said rubbing his head. “Can I go too?” Jayden asks. “Not today, when I get on my feet I promise I’ll come back for you.” “Ok.” Jayden smiled. “I love you so much Jayden and one day I’ll be able to give you everything you need.” Alba smiled. “Ok Mommy.” Jayden smiled. After Alba gave her Mom and Dad a hug and a kiss she drove away. They waved goodbye; Jayden too. Alba rode down the road in tears she was going to miss her family.

Alba made it to Texas around three o’clock; Stacey met her outside with a smile. “You’re here; you’re finally here.” Stacey smiled giving her a hug. “I’m so happy to see you.” Alba smiled. “Let’s get all your things and get you settled in. After they got all of Alba’s things inside Stacey’s apartment. Stacey began to help Alba unpack. “You have a lot of stuff.” Stacey said. “You wouldn’t believe it but some of my things are still in Louisiana.” Alba teased. “I believe you.”

Alba had been in Texas for four months and she was already working. Alba loved her job, it was simple, the company was small and there weren’t many workers. Every day Alba and Stacey made it home around the same time. The two of them talked on their cellphones to each other riding home; until they parked.

“How was work?” Stacey asks. “Work was fun as always.” Alba smiled. “Whose trying to get your number today?” “The Asian guy; I don’t believe in dating people I work with.” “I don’t blame you; it can be so messy.” “Even though you’re talking to a guy you work with.” “No one knows.” Stacey said. “Keep it that way.” After Alba and Stacey settled inside they went out by the pool and relaxed drinking the strawberry daiquiri that Alba had made both of them.

“Stacey what do you want most in life?” “I want a husband and two children; a girl and a boy.” Stacey smiled. “Me too; I want the husband; Puerto Rican of course, a daughter and a better career.” Alba said. “So is your cousin really moving to Dallas?” Stacey asks. “Yes, she got transferred here; her transfer goes through in a couple months.” “Well that’s good; do you think she’ll try to get you to move in with her?” “No; did you want me to move in with her?” “Of course not we have the best time.” Stacey smiled. “Even though we share the same room.” “Yes, like sisters.” “I like it too.” Alba smiled.

Alba and Stacey were headed back to their apartment and Alba asks, “Have you seen the guys that live here?” “No.” “Well there’s one guy here, he’s gorgeous.” “Is he Hispanic?” “I don’t think he’s Hispanic, he looks more Cuban or Venezuelan I’m not sure, but he’s not Hispanic.” “Ok then.” Stacey smiled.

Friday; Alba’s cousin; Bridget had come to Dallas for the weekend. Bridget was staying at the Intercontinental Dallas. Friday night they all decided to go a Karaoke bar. “Alba don’t get there acting all shy.” Bridget said. “Whatever Bridget.” Alba said. “Alba’s not gonna get on stage in front of everyone; she’s too shy.” Stacey said. “Come on stop talking about me like I’m not even in this car.” Alba pouted. “Alba it’s ok.” Bridget said.

They finally arrived at Five Element Karaoke Grill & Bar in Plano. “It’s live already in here.” Bridget smiled. The girls finally got a seat; Alba ordered a Coors light, Bridget and Stacey ordered a Budweiser. The girls were really enjoying their selves. “I think I’m gonna go up, I wanna sing, “I Wanna Dance with Somebody.” Stacey said getting. After Stacey sung she and Bridget sung “Reunited” by Peaches & Herb. Alba sat down and cheered them on.

Alba noticed the guy staring at her and he’d wink his eye when she looked his way. Alba blushed and continued to pay attention to her friends. Then he got up and walked to her table. “May I sit down?” He smiled. “Ah sure.” Alba said nervously. “I know that you’ve noticed me watching you since you walked in.” “I’m Juan.” “Oh I’m Alba.” Alba smiled. “You have a beautiful smile.” “Thank you.” “So where’s your boyfriend?” “I don’t have one.” Alba said.

After they exchanged numbers Bridget and Stacey walked off the stage. “Who was that guy?” Stacey asks. “Damn he’s fine.” Bridget said. “His name is Juan.” “Did you give him the digits?” Stacey asks. “Of course I did; he’s gorgeous.” Alba smiled. “That he is and it’s dark in here.”

Sunday; Alba was getting out of her car about to walk towards her apartment when this black Silverado truck passed by her with the windows down and then he stopped. “Alba.” Alba backed up to see who it was and she said, “Juan.” “Hey what are you doing over here?” “I live right there.” Alba pointed. “Small world, I live right across the way.” “You have a few roommates?” Alba asks. “I do; is that you that’s always by the pool with another girl?” “You always wear pink swimsuits.” Juan says. Alba smiled and said, “Yes that’s me.” “Why haven’t you ever knocked at my door?” Juan asks. “I don’t know; you have a lot of girls in and out of your apartment.” “They’re not there for me.”

Alba walked inside and Stacey asks, “Who was that driving the black truck?” “Juan.” “Oh, you already told him where you stay?” “No he lives over here.” “Small world.” “That’s what Juan said.” “I have to get dressed we’re going out for dinner and a movie.” Alba smiled. “What about me?” “Call Bridge she’d love to hang out before she leaves tomorrow.” “Ok just forget about me then.” Stacey said then snapped her finger.

Alba had been going out with Juan for a little over a month and she was falling hard for him. She had never had a man like him. He was so attentive to her needs and he wanted to share all his time with her. The way he looked at her took her breathe away and she wanted to be around him every single day. Alba had begun to stay with him a few nights out of the week. The two of them weren’t having sex but they were kissing a lot and all over each other.

Alba walked inside the house and Stacey said, “You’re leaving me tonight?” “What’s wrong with you?” Alba asks. “Nothing, you’re always gone.” “You have the house to yourself; I thought that would make you happy some nights you get the bed to yourself.” “No, that doesn’t make me happy.” Stacey frowned. “I’m sorry.” “So you’re going to be with him tonight?” “No I’m staying home with you; I thought you and I could have movie night.” Alba smiled. “Of course we can.” Stacey smiled.

Saturday; Alba talked to Juan for a couple hours on the phone. Alba walked inside the bathroom where Stacey was and she asks, “Do you have anything planned today?” “I thought we were going to go shopping.” “Juan wanted to see if we’d like to go to a pool party at a friend’s house a couple minutes away from here.” “Do you know these people?” “Of course not Stacey, I trust Juan.” Alba said. “I don’t know.” “Bridget’s going and Juan wants you two to meet some of his friends.”

Stacey and Bridget rode in Alba’s car once they made it to the house and parked Alba gave Juan a call and he met them outside. Once Juan got next to Alba he gave her an amazing kiss and Stacey and Bridget stood there looking like “Damn.” Alba finally came up for air and blushed. Stacey and Bridget whispered, “Damn foreign men don’t mind taking your breath away.” “Where is he from again?” Bridget asks. “Alba said, “He’s from Colombia.”

Alba and her friends were having the time of their lives. “And you two didn’t think you’d have fun.” Alba smiled. “Juan grabs your butt a lot.” Bridget frowned. “I know, he just won’t stop that.” “Alba; who is the guy in the yellow shorts?” Stacey asks. “That’s Juan’s roommate; Luis.” “He is fine.” Bridget smiled. “Bridget hold on I asks first.” Stacey said. “Stace you should go talk to him; I hear that he’s single and plus he asks, “Did I have any sisters and I said, “Of course her name is Stacey.” “And what about me?” Bridget asks. “I forgot about you sorry.” Alba said. “I don’t know.” Stacey said doubting herself. “Go.” “What if he doesn’t like me?” Stacey asks. “Then I’ll intervene and get his attention.” “Bridget no.” Alba said.

Once Alba heard Juan calling her name she walked off. “Beautiful I want to introduce you to some of my friends.” Juan said taking her hand. “Ok.” After the introductions Alba asks, “What’s up with your friend; Luis?” Juan smiled and said, “He’s been looking at your sister all day.” “Which one?” “That one.” Juan pointed. “Stacey.” “Yeah Stacey; she’s single right?” “She is; tell him, he should go talk to her.” “Ok, stay here I’ll be right back.”

Stacey was finishing her food when Luis walked up. “You’re Stacey right?” “Ah yeah.” Stacey blushed. “I’m Luis.” He said with his hand out for her to shake. “Ok.” “My friend tells me you’re single.” “I am.” “Could I take you out to a club or to dinner sometimes?” Luis asks. “Sure.” Stacey fell hard for Luis; they were together every single night and Alba thought, “And she talks about me and I’ve only been staying with Juan for a couple nights she stays almost every single night.”

Two months later; Alba and Juan rented an apartment together and Stacey and Luis rented an apartment together. Alba and Stacey had started their new lives with the men of their dreams. Alba and Stacey still saw each other every single day because they lived in apartments buildings on the same street. Being a fifty feet away from one another wasn’t going to stop their friendship.

Sunday; Alba knocked at Stacey’s door and Stacey immediately answered the door. “Are you getting married?” Alba asks. Stacey smiled nervously and asks, “Who told you that?” “Answer the damn question are you marrying Luis?” “Ah yeah we’re getting married.” “Where’s the ring?” “I don’t have the ring yet.” “How is it that all Luis’s friends know about the proposal, but I know nothing?” “How are we sister’s, best friends and I don’t know shit.” Alba says raising her voice. “I was going to tell you, I was trying to find the right way to say it.”

“When is the wedding?” Alba asks. “In two weeks.” “Two weeks are you crazy!” Alba yelled. “Alba I love him.” “I love Juan too, but that doesn’t make me want to marry a man I don’t know that well.” “You don’t know him Stacey.” “Alba just because you’re not ready doesn’t mean I’m not ready.” “I’ve wanted this for so long and it’s finally happening.” Stacey says. “Marry him then, but don’t expect me to be there ok.” Alba said then she left.

A couple days later; Alba got over her anger with Stacey and decided to support her friend because she loved her a lot and she didn’t want to lose their friendship. Alba was helping Stacey pick out a wedding dress. “I didn’t know that this was going to be so emotional.” “I’ve been crying all day.” Alba says. Stacey smiled as she looked at herself in the mirror. “You look so beautiful, but I think this dress would look stunning on you; could you try on this dress please?” Alba asks. “Ok.” Stacey smiled grabbing the dress.

Alba was finally home; Juan was lying in bed watching television. “So how was dress shopping?” Juan asks. “It was great; Stacey’s going to be a beautiful bride.” “Did she find a dress?” “Of course; she got everything down to the garter.” Alba smiled straddling Juan in the bed. “I’m gonna marry you one day, I know you’re not ready right now.” Juan said grabbing both of her hands. “I know you will.” “Kiss me.” Juan smiled. Alba gave Juan a kiss and then he came up for air and said, “I love you Alba.” “I love you too Juan.”

Saturday night; Luis and Stacey invited Juan and Alba out to eat. They all went to Fogo de Chao in Addison. “This place is nice.” Alba smiled. “It is.” Stacey agreed. As always Juan sat very close to Alba and she loved that. “I can’t wait to go home and take that dress off of you; I’m really getting turned on.” Juan whispered. “Stop you’re making me blush.” Alba said getting his hand off of her thigh. After every one finished eating and drinking Luis stood up and said, “I want to say something.” Luis took a ring box out of his pocket and that’s when he got on one knee. Stacey was shocked, she didn’t expect this. “Stacey I love you and you are the woman I want to spend the rest of my life with; will you marry me baby?” Stacey was in tears and Alba and Juan clapped. “Of course I will.” Stacey said holding her hand out so he could put the ring on her finger.

**Chapter 5**

**“My New Friend”**

“It is said that love doesn’t just sit there like a stone; it has to be made like bread, remade all the time, made new.” -Unknown

Years later…

Saturday; Alba met Stacey at The Cheesecake Factory. The two were seated along with Stacey’s daughter; London. “So how is everything going with the divorce?” Stacey asks. “Everything’s moving along, I just wish it were over.” Alba said. “I’m sorry you’re going through all that.” “Me too, anyways we’re here to enjoy not talk about my divorce that better be final this month.” Alba smiled lifting her glass.

As the two of them sat enjoying each other’s company their server came by their table with drinks and Alba said, “These aren’t ours.” “A gentleman at the bar had me to bring these over.” Alba smiled and asks, “Are you serious?” “I am, enjoy.” “Thank you.” After the server walked off Stacey said, “What gentleman?” “I have no idea, but these drinks look good.” Alba said standing up to see the people sitting at the bar. “I can’t see guys face over here.” Alba said then sat back down.

Stacey picked up her beverage and said, “Whoever he is he has good taste in drinks.” “You alcoholic.” Alba laughed. “Cheers.” Stacey smiled. After the ladies finished eating and drinking they were ready to head out. Before they left Alba stopped their server, she wanted him to point out the gentleman that brought them the drink. “Damn he looks good.” Stacey said. “You’re married remember.” Alba reminded. “I know but I can look.” As the two of them walked off Alba said, “We should thank him.” “If you want to.” Stacey agreed.

Alba and Stacey walked over to the bar where the gentleman was sitting Alba said, “Excuse me.” He turned around and smiled at Alba. She tried her best not to blush as she always did when a handsome man showed her attention. “I just came over to thank you for the drinks that you brought us.” “You’re welcome; I’m Ricardo.” Ricardo smiled with his hand out. Alba shook his hand and said, “I’m Alba and this is my sister; Stacey and my niece; London.” “Nice to meet you.” Ricardo smiled. “Nice to meet you too.” Stacey smiled. Alba was about to walk off with Stacey until Ricardo said, “Alba.”

Alba turned back around and he asks, “Could I take you out sometimes?” “No, I’m sorry.” Alba responded. “I don’t see a ring.” “You don’t because I’m in the middle of a divorce.” “I see, well it was nice meeting you maybe I’ll run into you in the future.” Ricardo smiled. “Maybe.” Alba said then she walked off. “She’s playing hard to get.” Chad said. “I’ll be back.” Ricardo said getting up. Before Ricardo could walk outside the server walked up with a cellphone in his hand.

Once Alba, Stacey, and London got outside Stacey picked up London and asks, “Why didn’t you give him your number; he’s fine.” “I need friends in my life not men that are only interested in sleeping with me.” Alba frowned. “Ok, he could have been different.” “Ricardo is handsome, but it wouldn’t work because I’m still in love with Juan.” “No guy is going to ever wait for a woman to fall out of love with her ex they never do.” Alba frowns.

Alba finally made it home and headed upstairs to see what her teenage son was up to. “I was just about to leave.” Jayden said. “Where are you going?” Alba asks. “To the bowling alley with a few friends.” Jayden responded. “Have fun and don’t miss curfew.” “I won’t.” Alba finally headed back downstairs and realized she didn’t have her cellphone. So she went into her garage to search for it. “It’s not inside my purse; where could it be?”

Alba grabbed her cordless phone and called Stacey. “No, I don’t have it.” “I bet I left it at the restaurant.” “Well you better call to see.” Stacey said. “I’ll talk to you later.” After Alba got off the phone she paced the floor. “If it’s not there; where could it be?” Alba thought for a few seconds and grabbed her Ipad. She sat on her sofa to facetime her phone and someone answered, Alba was surprised. She sat there nervously wondering whose face would appear. It was the guy from the restaurant. “You have my phone.” Alba smiled. “I do, I tried to catch you outside but you had already left.” Ricardo said. “Oh; could I meet you somewhere tomorrow to get my phone?” Alba asks. “Of course you can.” Ricardo smiled. “What’s a good spot to meet you?” Alba asks.

The next day after work Alba met Ricardo at one of the local hospitals in the city. He met her in the parking lot. “Thank you so much.” Alba smiled. “You’re welcome.” “Ah do I owe you anything for finding my phone; how much do I owe you?” Ricardo smiled and said, “You don’t owe me anything; I’d like to see you again.” Alba was about to speak and Ricardo said, “I understand that you’re not up for dating anyone right now; we could be friends.” “I don’t think men are capable of being friends with females.” “I can prove you wrong; men are capable, real men.” Ricardo smiled. Alba smiled and said, “Ok.” “So you’ll take my number?” “I’m sure it’s already in my phone since my cell wasn’t locked.” Ricardo smiled and said, “I’ll see you later.” “Bye.” “Call me.” Ricardo smiled. “I’ll be sure to do that.”

It had been a week since Alba saw Ricardo; she sat inside her kitchen at the bar contemplating on calling him. Ricardo was walking to his car after work talking to Chad. “Mrs. Thomas is doing great; I think she’ll be in remission in no time.” Ricardo smiled. “That would be great after all she’s been through.” “Hold on.” Ricardo said grabbing his cell out of his lap coat. Ricardo smiled and said, “This call is important; I’ll talk to you later.” “Ok later.”

“I thought you’d never call.” Ricardo smiled. “I said I’d call.” Alba smiled. “You did, it’s been over a week I thought maybe you told me a little white lie.” Ricardo smiled opening his car door. “I’ve been kind of busy with school and work.” “School; what are you going to school for?” “Sonogram.” “That’s a great career; where do you work?” Ricardo asks. “You ask a lot of questions.” Alba said. “I’m sorry just curious to where a beautiful woman like you works, but where ever it is I bet the men go crazy every time you come into their presence.” Ricardo smiled. Alba began to blush and she didn’t say anything.

“Alba I’d like to see you.” “I don’t date.” “I didn’t say a date; I meant it when I said, “I’d like to be your friend.” Alba smiled and said, “You really wanna be my friend, seriously?” “Yes I meant it.” “Ok.” Alba smiled. “So when can I see you?” Ricardo asks. “Tomorrow I plan to go to Barnes and Nobles if you’d like to meet me there.” “Of course I would; what time?” Ricardo asks pulling out of the hospital. “Around four o’clock.” “I’ll see you at four o’clock.” “Ok.” Alba smiled. “Wait a minute which Barnes and Nobles?” “You caught that huh.” Alba smiled. “I sure did.”

After Alba fixed herself something to eat; she sat outside on the back and had a drink. Alba picked up her cell when she saw Stacey calling. “Hello.” “What are you doing?” “Sitting outside having a drink.” “I need a favor.” “Ok.” “Could you watch Giselle and London for a couple hours; I have.” Alba cut Stacey off and said, “Of course I can.” Alba smiled. “Thank you.”

Alba enjoyed her god daughters running around the house just being kids. “Let’s go upstairs to the play room.” Alba said taking their hands. “I want the doll.” Giselle said. “Both of you can get a doll ok.” Alba smiled. Around ten Stacey still wasn’t back; Alba put the girls in the tub and they all snuggled in Alba’s bed downstairs.

Ricardo sat home on his couch in front of the television. He couldn’t get Alba off of his mind. “What the hell.” Ricardo smiled picking up his phone. Alba laid in bed next to the sleeping girls, she saw her cell light up and then she began smiling. Alba stood up and sat on the chair in her bedroom and put her feet up on the ottoman. “Hi.” “I didn’t wake you did I?” Ricardo asks. “Of course not; I was putting the girls to sleep.” “You have children.” “I do, but not girls; they’re my nieces.” “I have three boys.” Alba said. “Ok.” “Any children for you?” “No, no children, no girlfriend, and no wife; it’s just me.” Ricardo smiled. “Hum that’s a lonely life huh?” Alba asks. Ricardo didn’t respond and Alba said, “I’m sorry I shouldn’t have said that; I’m sure being a bachelor has all its perks.” Ricardo smiled and said, “I get lonely at times; that’s why I need you in my life.” “Oh really.” Alba smiled.

A week later; Alba and Ricardo were still talking on the phone and seeing each other. “When are you going to come visit me?” “I don’t bite?” Ricardo said. “I don’t know you well enough.” Alba responded. “I understand you’re cautious, but I’d be the last person to hurt you.” “Only time will tell.” Alba said. “Alba I do want to be your friend.” “I wanna know what makes you smiled?” “What makes you happy?” “What makes you the person you are today?” Ricardo says. “You wanna know a lot; I’ve never told my best friend every single detail of my life.” “I wanna be different from her.” Ricardo said.

Three weeks had passed and Alba was talking to Ricardo on the phone or on facetime every other night. The two of them were enjoying each other’s conversation. Alba was starting to get use to Juan being out of her life, but she still missed him a lot. Alba was focusing on work, school, and her children.

Saturday; Alba was on the phone with Stacey. “We hadn’t talked in three days because you’re always on the phone with Ricardo.” “What do you two talk about?” “Not a whole lot.” Alba responded. “I don’t think you wanna tell me.” “How’s are my nieces?” Alba smiled. “They’re great getting into a lot.” “They’re with Luis upstairs.” “Oh, tell them I have a present for each of them.” “I’ll drop it by tomorrow.” Alba said. “Drop it by.” “Ricardo and I are going to a movie.” “I thought you weren’t up for dates.” “Stacey this is like I’m going out with you.” “He likes you.” Stacey frowned. “And he said he understood I wanted a friend not a man.” “If he doesn’t hold up on his part of the deal he’s out of my life.” “I don’t want a man right now.” Alba says. “Ok.”

After Alba got off the phone with Stacey, Ricardo was knocking at her door. Alba opened the door, greeted Ricardo, and then he took a seat on the sofa. “How are you?” Ricardo asks. “I’m better, thanks for asking.” “I brought over a few movies I thought you’d like.” Ricardo said handing them to her. “These are girl movies.” “Yes.” “I like more than girl movies Ricardo.” “I know that; I am getting to know you.” “Sorry.” Alba said sitting beside Ricardo.

“So when are you going to introduce me to your boys?” Ricardo asks. “Jayden’s upstairs and the two youngest boys are with their Dad this week.” Alba explained. “Ok.” “So why don’t you have any children?” “It just never happened for me.” “I was more focused on leaving Puerto Rico and getting into medical school.” Alba scratched her head and said, “Medical school, I thought you were the janitor at the hospital.” Ricardo sat up and said, “So can I meet Jayden?” Alba looked at Ricardo she noticed that he avoided answering her question. Alba stood up and said, “Of course you can meet him.”

Once Alba and Ricardo got upstairs Alba knocked at her son’s door. “Come in.” Jayden said with the covers over his head. They walked inside and Alba said, “Get up I have someone for you to meet.” Jayden sat up and said, “Is this your new boyfriend?” “No he’s a friend smart ass.” “This is Ricardo; Jayden.” Alba said. “Nice to meet you Ricardo, I’m Jayden.” Jayden said shaking his hand. Ricardo talked to Jayden for a few minutes, but Alba had left out.

A month later; Alba was visiting Ricardo. “Your townhouse is really nice.” Alba smiled. “Thank you; you can have a seat.” The two of them sat quietly and Alba said, “You’re quiet.” Ricardo smiled and said, “I’m just taking all this in; I can’t believe you’re finally here under my roof.” “Oh.” Alba smiled. “So what would you like to do?” Ricardo asks. “I don’t know.” “What do you and Stacey do when you two are together?” “We talk, we have appetizers, and we drink wine.” Ricardo smiled and said, “Wine; what kind of wine do you like?” “White wine.” Ricardo smiled and said, “White; I bet you like sweet wine.” “I do.” Alba smiled.

Ricardo stood up and reached his hand for Alba to grab. She took his hand and stood up. Ricardo said, “I have a sweet white wine I think you’d love.” “Ok.” “Come into my kitchen.” Alba let his hand go and followed him inside the kitchen. She was impressed with how nice his kitchen was. “Your kitchen looks amazing.” Alba smiled. Ricardo smiled and said, “Thank you.” “Have a seat at the bar.” Ricardo said. “Ok.”

Ricardo grabbed the two bottles of wine and sat them on the bar and then he grabbed two wine glasses. “I brought this wine in Italy three years ago.” “I hope you like it.” Ricardo said unscrewing the cork. Alba took a drink and her eyes lit up. “This is good; really good.” “I can tell; you’re smiling; you’re beautiful when you smile.” “Thank you.” Alba blushed. The two of them went back inside his living room. They sat on the floor with the television on. Ricardo was happy that Alba was opening up to him. He knew there was a lot to her and he wanted to know everything.

“You’re strong.” Ricardo said. “How do you know that?” Alba asks. “It’s something I picked up when I first spoke to you.” “Oh really.” Alba smiled. “Alba I can look at you and I can tell you have a lot of things you’re holding back.” “Tell me something no one knows about you.” Alba smiled and said, “You wouldn’t want to know.” “I wanna know everything about you.” Ricardo said. “I’ll admit I have a lot of secrets; that’s because their painful.” “I don’t like going deep into my past it hurts too much.” Alba says. “Talking about that pain may be what you need to have a brighter future.” Ricardo said putting his hand on top of hers.

“My Mom died when I was born; it was a difficult pregnancy.” “My step mom; Susan raised me.” “I didn’t know my dad until I was a teenager.” “He and my step mom got together while my real mom was pregnant.” “He was living a double life and neither of the women knew.” “After my real mom died, he married Susan.” “My dad couldn’t deal with his family life anymore so he left me with Susan and she went on with her life to raise me.” “She’s a really great Mom.” Alba says. “I’m sorry.” Ricardo said. “Where’s your family?” Alba asks. “Puerto Rico; my Dad died when I was ten years old.” “My mama’ she’s a great woman.” “She’s very positive and hard on all of us; I have two sisters.” Ricardo smiled. “Oh; I have no siblings.” Alba said.

“So how’s your relationship with your father now?” Ricardo asks. “Better than it has been, but sometimes it’s hard for me to talk to him.” “I tolerate him because of my mom.” “She took him back; I was so pissed.” “I couldn’t understand how she could take him back after all that he had done.” “He said he left because he couldn’t stand to look at me.” “That hurt; I felt looking at me should have made him want to be a good dad but he wasn’t.” Alba said as a tear fell from her eye. Ricardo took his finger and wiped her tear away and said, “I’m sorry.” Alba smiled and said, “Thank you.”

Two months later; Alba and Ricardo’s friendship had blossomed into something beautiful. Stacey was feeling jealous because she wasn’t on top of Alba’s list anymore it was all Ricardo. “Come on it’s not like that.” Alba said. “We never talk, we never go out, and the girls have forgotten how you look.” Stacey frowned. Alba smiled and said, “Come on I just saw you all yesterday.” Stacey didn’t say anything else that’s when Alba heard her doorbell and said, “Someone’s at the door I’ll come over tomorrow.” “Ok bye.” Stacey said hanging up the phone quickly.

Alba opened the door to see it was Ricardo, “Hey I didn’t know you were coming over.” “Last night I told you I was coming over.” Ricardo said walking inside. “I forgot.” “You look nice today.” Ricardo smiled. “I was about to do some shopping; wanna come along?” Alba asks. “Sure, we can take my car.” “Ok.” Once the two of them got outside Ricardo walked up to an Audi RS 7, Alba thought, “How does a janitor at a hospital afford this kind of car?”

After they got inside his car Ricardo noticed that Alba wasn’t talking. “What’s wrong?” Ricardo asks. “Nothing.” Alba responded quickly. “Where did you wanna go?” “The Galleria is fine.” Alba said taking out her cell. Alba sent Stacey a text message. Ricardo noticed that she was quiet and texting on her phone the entire time. She normally didn’t touch her phone when they were together. “You’re very busy on your phone today.” Ricardo said. “No, Stacey was texting me, I’m done.” Alba said putting her cell inside her purse.

Ricardo pulled up at the Galleria and asks, “Valet or parking garage?” Alba didn’t respond and Ricardo asks, “What’s wrong?” And out of nowhere Alba asks, “Are you a drug dealer?” “What?” Ricardo asks shocked. “I’m sorry.” “Is that why you’re nervous?” “You drive a hundred thousand dollar car and you’re a janitor.” Alba said. Ricardo began to laugh and he said, “I’m not a janitor; you think I’m a janitor?” “That’s what you told me.” “Alba I was joking, it was a joke.” “Are you serious?” Alba frowned. “I’m an oncologist at the hospital that you met me at, not a janitor.” “I thought you knew I was joking.” Ricardo smiled.

Sunday; Ricardo was over to Alba’s the two of them were inside the kitchen talking while she cooked dinner and then the doorbell rang. “I’ll be right back.” Alba said taking off her apron. “I can get the door.” Ricardo said standing up. “It’s my ex-husband with the twins.” “It won’t take long.” “Ok.” Ricardo said then sat back down. Alba answered the door and Juan said, “Could we talk?” “Boys go take your things upstairs.” “Ok Mommy.” Leonardo said. “Juan we’ve already said everything we can possibly say to one another.” Alba frowned. “I don’t want this divorce.” Juan said. “You had another woman for how many years and you don’t want a divorce.” “For years you made my life a living hell and you made everyone think that I was being a bitch.” “I told you over and over that I wasn’t happy and you didn’t care as long as you had your lover and all the freedom in the world.” “You broke this marriage up, not me and we don’t have anything else to talk about.” Alba says.

Juan wiped the tears from his eyes and said, “I’m sorry.” “You are now because you know in a few weeks we’ll really be over.” “I’m getting my life back without you.” “You can’t buy my happiness with just material things.” “All I ever wanted from you was some affection and your attention and you couldn’t do that.” Alba says. “Alba I have done everything for you and the kids.” “I brought you this house and you still have the house.” Juan says. “That’s the least you could do after everything.” Alba said then walked off. “Baby I’m sorry for every bad thing I’ve done to destroy this marriage I just need another chance please.” Juan begged.

Alba turned around and then looked back at Juan and said, “Remember you promised that I was the only woman in your world.” “I knew there was someone else because you weren’t sleeping with me.” “Alba that’s because you wouldn’t let me touch you.” “Juan why the hell would I; you’re fucking that nasty Brazilian bitch and you think I want you to touch me.” “Get the hell out of my face.” “When you come here to get your boys just leave me the hell alone you got that!” Alba says raising her voice and then she slammed the door.

Alba stormed back into the kitchen totally forgetting that Ricardo was there. “What’s wrong?” Ricardo asks standing up. Alba wiped her tears and said, “Nothing.” “What did he say to you?” Ricardo asks putting his arms around her waist. Alba began to cry in his arms and he held on to her as long as she needed him too. Once Alba got herself together she pulled away and said, “I’m sorry.” “That’s ok; what did he say to you?” “I don’t wanna talk about him.” “Ok.” Ricardo said. Then the twins walked inside the kitchen and Alba said, “Leonardo and Leanardo this is my friend; Ricardo.” “Hey.” Leonardo smiled. “Could we go outside?” Leanardo asks. “Sure, go out back where I can watch you.” Alba smiled. “Ok.” Leonardo said walking towards the door.

“Handsome boys.” Ricardo said. “Thank you.” Alba smiled. Alba sat beside Ricardo and Ricardo asks, “So what did your ex-husband say that upset you so much?” “After all he put me through with his double life and he has the nerves to ask me to take him back.” “Just because I’m still in love with him doesn’t mean I’d ever stop this divorce.” “I’m getting my life back on track without him.” “He broke my heart and I’ve come to realize that I’m a better woman without him.” Alba says. “And you’re sure that you want this divorce; even though you’re in love with him?” “I’m sure, it’s hard, but I deserve better than him.” “He’s put me through a lot over the past five years and it’s what I deserve to be free of him.” Alba says.

Ricardo was at work he had finally seen his last patient. He was inside his office finishing up some paperwork when there was a knock at his door. “You wanted to see me.” “Yes, come on inside.” Ricardo smiled. “Ms. Pilar you’ve always given me great advice.” “I have; what’s going on?” Pilar asks. “Well I’ve been seeing this gorgeous woman for months now.” “I told her I’d be her friend when I’m clearly smitten with her.” “She’s going through a divorce and she’s not interested in any relationships; she only wants friends.” Ricardo explained.

“Don’t tell me you lied and told her you’d be her friend.” Pilar said. “I did, but that’s the only way I could be in her life.” Ricardo said. “Dr. Cruz you just can’t lead her on; it sounds like she really needs a friend.” “I’d never lead her on.” “I do want to be her friend, but in the future I want her to look at me as more than a friend; when her heart is healed.” Ricardo says. “If you want that you can’t talk to her about her relationships.” “If you start she’ll confide in you more and more then she’ll see you as nothing more than a friend; someone she can bring her problems to.” Pilar says.

Ricardo walked back towards the patient rooms when Dr. Gibson stopped him. Ricardo walked inside his office and Dr. Gibson asks, “Who is this woman?” “Woman.” Ricardo asks. “Yeah woman; you’ve been dressing up in a tie almost every day; you’re happier.” “Who is she?” Dr. Gibson smiled. “The woman I met when we were having drinks at The Cheesecake Factory.” “Oh that woman; she is fine.” “She is.” “Ah I thought you said she had kids.” Dr. Gibson said. “She does, but that doesn’t bother me.” “How many does she have?” “Three boys.” “Damn three that’s a lot of baggage.” “I don’t think Alba would call her children baggage.” “Yes in the past a woman with children was always off limits, but Alba’s different.” Ricardo explained.

Dr. Gibson began to laugh and he said, “Different there are a lot of women with children who are beautiful.” “True, but Alba’s not looking for a man.” “She simply wants a friend, she tells me how it is and I like that.” “She’s strong; she’s not one of those criers you know.” “She has this attitude that drives me crazy.” “I’ve got to have her and if it takes me a few years to get her I’m willing to give her that time.” Ricardo smiles. “Damn you already sound in love.” Ricardo smiled and said, “I’m not in love with her looks, it’s that attitude; she’s got that spice about her.” “Damn that spice huh.” Dr. Gibson smiled. “Yes that spice.”

**Chapter 6**

**“A Close Bond”**

“Sometimes, reaching out and taking someone’s hand is the beginning of a journey.” -Vera Nazarian

“It’s always beautiful in Dallas for the holidays.” Alba said. “I take December is your favorite month.” “It is.” Alba smiled. “You have a birthday this month don’t you?” Ricardo asks. “I do on the thirty-first.” “What would you like on your big day?” Ricardo asks. “Nothing being around my friends is good enough for me.” Alba smiled. “Ok.”

Ricardo finally pulled into Stacey’s drive way. Stacey answered the door holding London; it looked like London had just eaten she had food all over her face. Alba reached out and grabbed London out of Stacey’s arms. “Come on inside.” Stacey smiled. “How are you Stacey I hadn’t seen you in a few weeks.” Ricardo said. “I’m fine; I see you’re keeping Alba busy.” “I keep him busy.” Alba smiled then sat down. “Stacey, Alba tells me that your husband and I have something in common.” “Really; what?” Stacey smiled. “They both love Triathlon.” Alba said. “Really.” “Yes, I tried to get Alba to go to out of town with me last month but she couldn’t get off work.”

Luis walked downstairs and Stacey said, “Luis this is Alba’s friend; Ricardo.” “He’s into Triathlon like you.” “Really.” Luis smiled. Luis and Ricardo began having their own conversation so Stacey and Alba went inside the kitchen to get a glass of wine. “Looks like they’re getting along.” Alba said. “Maybe we can double date.” Stacey smiled. “Whatever they’ll never be anything romantic between the two of us.” Alba reminded. “Alba your divorce is finally final and Ricardo is well established.” “I know I’m not ready for a relationship.” Alba said. “I understand, I just want you to be happy.” “Stacey I am happy; you don’t have to worry about me.” Alba smiles. Stacey and Alba talked for ten minutes; Alba looked at her watch and said, “It’s time for us to go before we miss our movie.”

Alba and Ricardo were finally walking out and Luis said, “Alba don’t forget to give Ricardo my phone number.” “I’ll give it to him.” Alba said. “Bye.” Luis and Stacey said. “Bye.” Alba and Ricardo said. They finally got inside Ricardo’s car and Ricardo said, “He seems like a cool guy.” “He’s ok when he’s in a good mood.” “What does that supposed to mean?” “Sometimes he can be an ass.” Alba smiled. “So where are we going?” Ricardo asks. “I don’t know, you’re driving.” “We’re going somewhere you haven’t ever been before.” Ricardo smiled. “Have you ever been to this place?” Alba asks. “No.” “Where are we going?” “The Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden.” Ricardo responded. “It’s open in December?” “It sure is.” “What about the movie?” Alba asks. “We can always see a movie.”

Alba was enjoying her time with Ricardo. “Leonardo and Leanardo would love this place.” Alba smiled. “We’ll bring them next time.” Ricardo smiled. After Ricardo and Alba saw most of the place they headed to grab a bite to eat. Alba loved when they were riding somewhere listening to a CD or the radio Ricardo would always sing the song in Spanish. Alba loved when he sang. He had such an amazing voice; Alba enjoyed looking at him because he was so handsome and she had such a great time with him. “What are you thinking about?” Ricardo asks. “Nothing; I’m just really enjoying myself.” Alba smiled. “Good me too.”

Ricardo and Alba finally made it back to his house. Ricardo turned on the fireplace and fixed him and Alba hot cocoa. “This looks delicious.” Alba smiled. “It is; it’s my take on a peppermint hot cocoa.” “Ok.” “Tell me what you think.” Ricardo smiled. Alba took a sip and she said, “This is different but good; I like it.” “Good.” Ricardo said sitting beside her. “You never finished telling me about the first ex.” Alba sat her hot cocoa on the coffee table and said, “Why do you want to know so much about me?” “Because we’re friends I’d like to know the good and the bad; it’s what makes you who you are.”

“The things I tell you; do you promise you’ll never tell anyone?” Alba asks. Ricardo held out his hand and Alba laid her hand on top of his and Ricardo said, “What goes on inside this house stays between you and I.” “I’ll never betray your trust.” “Ok I trust you.” Alba said. “I trust you too.” Ricardo smiled. “I never told anyone how my son was conceived.” “I got pregnant when I was in high school.” “My ex had a drinking problem and he was very jealous.” “If a guy spoke to me he’d get so angry.” “He’d call me names, pull my hair.” Ricardo sat looking Alba in the eye as she talked.

“It was one day after I got out of class.” “In high school we always did group assignments.” “My Mom had brought me a cellphone, they weren’t too popular then, but I had one.” “One of my group partners called my cell; I was inside the restroom when he called.” “Alex was furious; I tried to explain, but he wouldn’t let me.” “He began to hit me and I always fought back, but he was too strong.” Alba says. Ricardo cut her off and said, “Hey you don’t have to talk about this.” “No I need to get this out.” “I’ve been holding this in for so long and I trust you.” Alba said. Ricardo took her hand and she continued to talk. “He hit me so hard in the top of my head; my vision became blurred.”

“Afterwards he said, “I know you’re fucking that guy you bitch and then he went on to rape me.” “I cried and I cried.” “I felt horrible and I didn’t speak to him for a month.” “When I discovered I was pregnant.” “I was so stressed out; I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat.” “I hid my unhappiness so good.” “My mom never knew this had happened to me.” “I went into labor at thirty weeks.” “I delivered one child which was my son.” “My daughter she didn’t live.” “I remember having to push out my dead baby.” “That killed my soul and I thought I was going to die.” “I wouldn’t wish that on my worst enemy.” “Alex was there with me through all that pain, that’s why I forgave him, but I lived with so much anger for years because of all I had endured.” “I was lonely and I had no one to talk to; I felt empty inside.” Alba says.

“Alba I am sorry.” Ricardo said putting his arms around her. “I’m ok.” Alba sniffled. “You are strong Alba.” “I’m so sorry that you had to go through all that.” “I wish I had known you then.” “I would have taken you away from all of that.” Ricardo says putting his hand on the side of her face. “I know you would have.” After that deep conversation Ricardo thought it was best for them to talk about happy things.

Sunday; Alba and Ricardo did some Christmas shopping for decorations. “I want my house nice like yours but not as much.” Ricardo smiled. “I know you want it manly with a woman’s touch.” Alba smiled. “Exactly.” “Let’s drive over to Hobby Lobby; they have some amazing trees this year.” “Where is that?” “We’re on the right track just keep driving.” Once they got to the store Alba saw this silver tree. “Oh my God; this tree is amazing.” Alba smiled. “It’s silver.” “I know I think it would look great inside your family room.” “Whatever you think is best.” “Well good; grab the tree and we have to get more decorations for the tree.” “What was all that we got at Neiman Marcus?” “Window and fireplace décor.” Alba responded.

While Alba did the decorating; Ricardo went inside the kitchen fixing appetizers and drinks. “Here you go.” Ricardo said handing Alba a drink. Alba took a taste and asks, “What is this; it tastes pretty good?” “It’s coquito a Puerto Rican Christmas drink; kind of like eggnog, but much better.” Ricardo smiled. Alba smiled and said, “This is really good; can you teach me how to make it?” “Of course I can.” “It’s looking nice in here; you’re a great decorator.” Ricardo complimented. “Thank you; I’m almost done.” “You’re welcome.”

It had been three days and Alba hadn’t seen Ricardo; he was so busy at the hospital. She had begun to miss him a lot. Alba laid in bed sleep and her cell rang around midnight. “Hello.” Alba said trying to open her eyes. “Hey; you were sleep weren’t you?” “That’s ok; I’ve been waiting on your call.” Alba said yawning. “I just got off; I’m tired, at least I go in late tomorrow.” “Why so many long nights?” Alba asks. “Well it’s the job; a lot of cases you know.” “I understand.” “I know my schedule is hectic, just be patient with me.” Ricardo said. “I’d never be upset because you can’t spend all your time with me.” “I understand; you don’t have to apologize to me.” “Thank you; you always understand me.”

“So would you like for me to come over?” “It’s late aren’t you tired?” Alba asks. “I could stay if you let me; I’ll sleep on the couch.” “Of course use your key.” Alba smiled. “I’ll see you in ten minutes.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.” Alba jumped out of the bed, brushed her teeth and washed her face. Alba looked in the mirror and said, “My hairs a mess.” By the time she fixed her hair and sprayed on some body spray she heard Ricardo walking inside.

Alba jumped in bed and closed her eyes. Ricardo walked to her side of the bed and kissed her on the cheek. “Alba.” Ricardo whispered. “Hey.” Alba whispered. “I’m about to shower.” Alba sat up and said, “Ok; are you hungry?” “I could fix you a sandwich or heat up the taco soup I made.” Ricardo smiled and said, “I’d love some taco soup.” “Ok, it’ll be ready when you finish in there.” “Thank you, you’re the best you know.” Alba just blushed she loved hearing that.

Ricardo walked inside the kitchen and said, “The soup smells really good.” “Have a seat and enjoy.” Alba smiled sitting the bowl of soup and sandwich in front of him.” “Wow grilled cheese and taco soup.” “You’ve been working extra-long hours and the days have been hard so you deserve this.” “Thank you; I appreciate this but most of all I appreciate you.” Ricardo smiled. Alba sat beside him and watched him enjoy the late night meal.

Thursday morning Alba rolled over on her back, she hated to get up and go to work. She wanted to stay in bed next to Ricardo. He was sleeping like a baby. Alba got up and headed to the bathroom and then the kitchen to make her mocha latte. That’s when Ricardo walked inside and said, “Good morning.” “Good morning; I thought you were sleeping in.” Alba smiled. “I wanted to, but I have to go home.” “Would you like a mocha latte?” “Of course.” Ricardo smiled.

Friday after Alba got off work she headed to the beauty salon. Alba sat in the chair while her beautician combed her hair and then her cell rang. “Do you mind if I answer this?” Alba asks. “Go ahead.” The beautician smiled. “Thank you.” “Hello.” “Where are you?” Ricardo asks. “At the beauty salon, getting my hair colored.” Alba responded. “You’re where you normally go?” “Yes.” “I’ll be over there in twenty minutes.” “Ok.” By the time the beautician was adding the color to Alba’s hair Ricardo walked inside. He instantly spotted Alba and walked up to her. “Hi.” Ricardo spoke. The beautician smiled and spoke back.

After the beautician had rinsed the color out of Alba’s hair she said, “Any man that waits on a woman getting her hair done must really like her.” Alba smiled and said, “He’s just a friend.” “A friend that wants more than your friendship.” “I don’t know; I thinks it’s better for us to be friends.” Alba smiled. “Ok, but he likes you.” After Alba’s hair was done she and Ricardo left out together. “That color looks good on you.” Ricardo complimented. “You don’t think it’s too much?” “Of course not; your natural color is like a chestnut blonde; you just went a tad bit lighter it really works for you.” “Thank you.” Alba smiled.

Saturday; Alba drove to the airport to pick up her cousin; Bridget. “So how was it in Jersey?” Alba asks. “It was fun; Patricia took me to the casino, shopping, alot of places.” “You know we clubbed every single night.” “New York is everything that we thought it would be Alba.” “Next time you should come with me.” Bridget smiled. “One day I will.” Alba smiled.

After Alba dropped Bridget off at her apartment Alba headed over to Ricardo’s house. “Are you baking?” Alba asks walking inside. “I’m making a dessert.” Ricardo smiled. “Oh.” Alba smiled. “I’m making something extra special for you.” “I thought it would be good for you to get a taste of Puerto Rico.” “Ok.” “It’s only been inside the fridge twenty minutes, so it has a little more time to chill.” “Ok; what is it?” Alba asks walking over to the IPod dock. “Tembleque.” Ricardo answered. “Never heard of that.” “It’s kind of like flan.” Alba turned around and said, “Well I’ll love it then.” “Good.” “What would you like to listen to?” Alba asks. “Marc Anthony.” Ricardo responded. “Why am I not surprised.” Alba smiled. “He’s one of the best you know.” “I agree.”

Around nine o’clock Alba could feel herself getting sleepy. “You can lie on the couch.” Ricardo said. Alba yawned and said, “I’m ok; I left my cell inside my car.” “I better call and check on Jayden.” “Ok.” Once Alba got outside she called her son who was out and about with friends. “Jayden be home at eleven ok.” “Are you coming home tonight?” Jayden asks. “I come home every single night.” “Ok.” Jayden smiled. “Bye.” Alba smiled.

Sunday night Alba and Ricardo sat over to her house having a deep conversation about his life. “Gloria was a horrible girlfriend.” Alba said. “She was if I never have to see her again I’d be so happy.” “So do you think she’s still with that guy she left you for?” “I don’t have the slightest idea.” “So she’s the only woman you’ve ever loved?” Alba asks. “Yeah.” “So how many times have you been in love?” Ricardo asks. “Twice and I got my heart broken every single time.” “I’ll never be so stupid to open my heart again.” Alba says. “Don’t be like that; you’re strong I think you could get through anything.” “Don’t let what those two jerks did stop you from making another guy happy and him making you happy.” Ricardo says.

Alba and Ricardo sat inside her bedroom. Alba sat up at the head of the bed and Ricardo laid at the foot of the bed on his back. “I don’t know why I trust you so much.” “I tell you everything; things I’d never in a million years tell Stacey or anybody for that matter.” “I’m a different type of friend.” Ricardo smiled. Alba smiled and said, “I guess you are.” Ricardo sat up in front of Alba but they had distance between them, he said, “Could I asks you a question?” “Sure.” “What drew you to Juan?” Ricardo asks. “His smile, he was very affectionate, and the fact that he’s a hard worker.” “Juan was always so romantic; he always took my breath away.” “He swept me off my feet and I fell head over heels in love with him.” Alba smiled and said, “I always hated kissing, but Juan; he is the one who kissed me with such passion.” “The way he held me in his arms and kissed me that made me want to have forever with him.”

“Why did he stop; I mean why did all the romance stop?” Ricardo asks. “I know things change when children come, but I didn’t think that our relationship would take such a big hit.” “I thought sooner or later things would get back to normal once the twins were older.” “Things got worst; Juan began smoking cigarettes because he said he was stressed all of the time. “I’ve always avoided men who smoke.” “I just really hate cigarette smoke.” “I thought if anyone should be smoking it should be me.” “I’m not working; I’m dealing with our small children every single day.” “I don’t get a break because he never helps me.” “He just never really helped me with the boys; it was very hard for me.”

“Juan never once asks me how my day was.” “I remember sometimes I would lock myself inside the bedroom and cry.” “No one knew my pain, not even Stacey.” “I kept all my pain inside most of the time.” “The sad thing is he never once cared when I told him our relationship is going downhill and he always said, “Alba you’re just a little stressed, you’re happy.” “I make you happy.” “The relationship with him was so hard.” “Sometimes I hated looking at Juan.” “I really tried everything I could possibly do to fix the relationship; he wouldn’t fight with me.” “I couldn’t fight for it alone.”

“Ricardo I must have tried everything to repair the relationship and I’m not going to put the entire blame on him.” “I had fault in it too; maybe I should have been more understanding.” “Maybe I should have been having sex with him more and just maybe he wouldn’t have cheated.” “Maybe when I felt a certain way I shouldn’t have thrown it in his face.” “Ricardo I just wanted things to be like they were when we first met.” “I just wanted to feel wanted again.” “I remember after having the twins I still had the sixty pounds.” “The extra weight gain was hard to lose.” “But I did it, I did everything to lose that weight and when I was back to my normal weight he still never complimented me.” “He just never said, “Alba you’re beautiful.” “He didn’t look at me like he used to and that’s what really hurt me the most.” “All I wanted was to be loved.” “I wanted to feel it and I never did.” “I’d go out in public and strangers would always compliment me.” “My husband never did.”

“I remember saying Juan you never compliment me; am I still beautiful to you; do you still find me attractive?” “He’d say yes you’re beautiful, but he’d never tell me.” “I refused to let a man make me doubt myself.” “I always said I know I’m beautiful, I am beautiful but I’m much more than beauty.” “I’m a smart, lively woman and I deserve a man who will love me and make me happy.” “He never took me out anymore.” “We never did anything together.” “People on the outside looking in thought wow she has a good; man she doesn’t have to work.” “I never said anything, for what, it wasn’t going to help.”

“Then the cigarette smoking just got outrageous.” “I hated for him to be in my face talking to me.” “His breath made me sick and to kiss him made me want to vomit.” “So I decided not to kiss him passionately until he quit, but he never did.” “I haven’t been kissed passionately in over three years.” Alba says. “That long?” Ricardo asks. “That long; I don’t know how it feels to be in love or to be loved anymore.” “Sometimes I think maybe I don’t deserve a good man because they always start out perfect for me and it just always ends badly.” Alba says. “You deserve a great man; a strong man that can handle a strong woman like you.” “One day Alba you’ll get that man and you’ll be happy.” Ricardo says.

**Chapter 7**

**“Bad Things Happen To Good People”**

“A connection is an essential ingredient in any healthy physical relationship.” -C. Nzingha Smith

“Alba I’m gonna run to the store I’m out of ice.” Ricardo said grabbing his car keys. “You’re cooking I’ll go.” “It’s your birthday.” “Ricardo I can go get ice ok.” “Don’t be long the foods almost ready.” Ricardo smiled. “Ice is that all?” Alba asks. “A lighter too.” “Ok, I’ll be back in ten minutes.” Alba smiled walking out of the kitchen.

Alba finally got to the store; she got the ice and left out of the store. Once Alba pulled onto the road she realized she didn’t have the lighter. “Alba you would forget something.” She thought. So Alba pulled back up to the store and went inside. Alba walked inside the bathroom to get something out of her eye and once she came out she heard gun shots. Alba hid behind the door; she suddenly became afraid for her life. Alba dialed 911 and then she texted Ricardo. Alba turned her phone on silent and then she went to hide. Alba saw there was a door in the back but when she tried to open it wouldn’t budge.

Ricardo walked in his living room. “Alba where are you?” Ricardo asks looking out the window. Ricardo looked at his watch and said, “She’s been gone twenty minutes already.” Ricardo walked back inside the kitchen to grab the plates. After he sat the plates on the table he walked back inside the kitchen still not realizing his phone was blinking. Alba was still in the back of the store. She was nervous; she knew that the two store clerks had been shot she wasn’t sure if they were alive. Alba began to fear she was next. She began to hear one of the robbers walking her way so she hid behind some boxes that were in the back of the store.

Once Alba heard him getting close she tried to move over that’s when the boxes fell to the floor. “Whose back there come on out before I shot.” The robber said. Alba began to feel her tears roll down her cheek, she began to shake. “Come out now!” The robber yelled. Alba came out and she said, “Please don’t shot me; I’m a customer.” The robber began to laugh and he said, “You’re a pretty one.” He grabbed her arm and pulled her to the front of the store.

“Look what I found.” He smiled. “She’s pretty; where are you headed?” The other robber asks. “Home.” “You’re dressed nice; you’re celebrating the New Year.” Alba didn’t respond and he said, “I think you should celebrate with me.” He grabbed her arm and Alba said, “Please don’t hurt me.” The robber that found her said, “Man we’ve got to go we have the money.” “We have a girl now too; watch the door I’ll be back.” “Are you going to rape me?” The robber smiled and he said, “No, you’re going to be a willing participant.” “So do what I ask you to do and I won’t have to shoot you.” “Hurry we have to leave.” The other robber said.

Ricardo grabbed his cell and walked inside his bedroom. He grabbed the presents he had brought Alba. He took them to the living room, and then he sat down on the couch. Ricardo looked at his phone to see Alba had texted him, he began to smile. Once he read the message he could feel a cold chill. Ricardo jumped up and ran out the door dialing 911 on his cellphone.

Once he took Alba in the back he pushed her into some boxes and said, “Take off that dress now.” Alba nearly fell over with the boxes, that’s when she saw the box cutter. Alba took off her dress and grabbed the box cutter off the floor when he wasn’t looking. He turned around said, “Good girl if you do what I say I won’t hurt you.” “Now come here.” Alba held on to the box cutter underneath her dress she was holding. Alba was nervous and she knew this was her moment and she had to make the best of it. She had to hit him where it hurt. Once Alba got close to him, he sat the gun on one of the stacked boxes and said, “Once I’m done with you, you’ll never forget me.”

Alba stared into his eyes and all she could see was a horrible evil man, his eyes were blood shot like fire and his breath reeked of alcohol. He touched Alba’s shoulder and said, “Give me the dress you don’t need this anymore.” That’s when Alba went for it; she cut him in his stomach with the box cutter. He couldn’t believe it. “You bitch.” He said falling over the boxes. Alba began to run towards the bathroom that’s when he fired the gun at her. Alba ran into an office and locked herself inside. “Please someone come help me.” “God please let me get out of here; I wanna see my children please.” Alba says. Alba put her dress back on and that’s when she felt a pain in her shoulder.

Ricardo made it to the store, police were all over. Ricardo parked in the back and got out of the car. “You can’t go in there.” A police officer said. “My wife is in there.” Ricardo lied. Ricardo saw one of the robbers inside the police car and then they were bringing out two people on the stretcher. They were covered up so Ricardo knew whoever they were they were dead. “God please don’t let that be Alba.” “Is that Alba, please just tell me.” Ricardo said feeling sick to his stomach. “I’m not sure; let me find out, stay right here.” The police officer said.

Ricardo saw them bringing someone else out of the store, but it wasn’t Alba. “Alba where are you?” Ricardo asks himself. “The two bodies were men; your wife isn’t here.” “She’s here, that’s her car right there.” Ricardo pointed. The officer went to speak with the other officers. While inside the store the officers noticed they saw blood by one of the office doors. “Is anyone in here?” The officer asks beating on the door. “Open the door no one’s gonna hurt you.” Alba heard them but she was afraid it was a trick so she didn’t unlock the door.

One of the officers walked outside and said, “Did you say the ladies husband was out here?” “Yeah he’s over there sitting on the hood of his car.” The officer pointed. “Sir we think your wife is locked in one of the offices in the store.” “She won’t come out; maybe if she hears your voice she’ll come out.” “Ok.” Ricardo said standing up. They finally got inside the store. Ricardo knocked on the door and said, “Alba it’s me open the door you’re safe now.” Alba stood up but she said nothing. She could feel herself shaking and she was cold. “Alba baby open the door I’m here I promise no one’s going to hurt you again.” “Alba it’s Ricardo.” “Ricardo.” Alba cried. “Yes open the door, they got the robbers.” Alba opened the door and she passed out in Ricardo’s arms.

The next day; Ricardo and Stacey sat inside Alba’s room. “Thank God she’s safe.” Stacey said. “I’m glad she fought back, she’s strong.” Ricardo said. “She is.” Stacey agreed. Alba began to wake up; Ricardo stood up and walked over to her hospital bed. “Ricardo.” Alba said. Ricardo touched her cheek and said, “I’m right here, Stacey’s here too.” “Am I home?” “You’re in the hospital.” Ricardo responded. Stacey stood on the other side of the bed and said, “You’re going to be alright.” Alba looked at Stacey and said, “Don’t cry, I’m fine.”

Alba was finally out of the hospital; Ricardo decided to stay at her house with her. “You can go home I’m fine.” Alba said. “You were shot twice; you need someone to help you.” Ricardo said sitting beside her. “Jayden can help me.” Alba responded. “Friends help friends ok; Stacey will be here later and I’ll go home get a few things and come back.” “Let your friends help you.” “Thank you Ricardo.” Alba smiled. “You’re welcome.”

Two days later; Alba had been having that same dream about the robbers at the store. Ricardo rolled over and looked at Alba. “You’re awake.” Ricardo said. “I can’t sleep.” Alba responded rubbing her eyes. “You’re having that dream again.” “I just wish it would stop, I keep seeing him over and over.” “My birthday will always be ruined now, because of that night.” Alba says. “We’ll make better memories every year; one day you won’t even think about that.” Ricardo said. “He was going to rape me; I had to take his life.” Alba said. “No one blames you; you had to take his life to survive.” “You’re strong, but most of all you’re a fighter.” Ricardo says.

**Chapter 8**

**“Insights”**

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart”

-Helen Keller

Alba had begun to work out more and more; with Ricardo by her side. Alba was trying her very best to get that dream out of her head. Alba and Ricardo worked out at the fitness center four days out of the week. They always worked out around the same time. Stacey and Bridget always came along, but they were more into the aerobics classes especially Zumba.

“Alba this aint no joke, I’m gonna get on the weights.” Ricardo smiled wiping the sweat off Alba’s nose. Alba smiled and said, “I’ll be over there in about five minutes.” “Ok.” After Alba fixed the earphones in her ear she started back on the Stairmaster. While Ricardo lifts weights he noticed a few females giving him the eye. Ricardo was always eye candy in the gym and would smile at the ladies but that’s as far as he took it. He did enjoy the attention but he didn’t want to do anything to jeopardize his chance with Alba. He wanted the attention to come from Alba.

Two of the females noticed Ricardo wasn’t going to come to them so they decided to come to him until they were blocked when Alba walked up to Ricardo. Ricardo’s attention went directly to Alba and off the females. Ricardo sat up on the weight bench and said, “That was longer than five minutes.” Alba smiled and sat on the bench in front of him and said, “These women love you in here.” Ricardo kind of frowned and asks, “Why do you say that?” “All of this eye candy.” Alba smiled. “So you think I’m eye candy?” “Not to me to them.” Alba said. “I’m not thinking about those ladies; I’m here to work out with my favorite girl.” Alba blushed and said, “So are you ready to leave?” “Yes, we’ve been here a couple hours.

A few days later; “You seem back to normal.” Stacey said. “I am; how’s London and Giselle?” Alba asks. “They’re good; they miss you.” “I miss them too.” “Alba; how do you really feel?” “Stacey I’m fine, stop worrying.” “Alba you went through a lot on your birthday, it’s ok to be scared.” “You can talk to me.” Stacey said. Alba wiped her tears and said, “It’s hard for me to sleep at night, I’m scared.” Alba admitted. Stacey put her arms around Alba and comforted her. “I’m sorry that happened to you.” “You’re so strong Alba; you’re stronger than anybody I know.”

After Alba had calmed down Stacey pulled out some bottles of wine and the two of them sat out back watching the girls swing. “Ricardo’s texting you.” Stacey said. “I see I don’t want to talk to him right now.” Alba responded. “Why not?” “I just don’t want to.” “I bet that’s how you do me when you’re with him.” Stacey said. “No I don’t; there’s a reason I’m avoiding Ricardo.” Stacey sat her wine glass down and asks, “What is it?” “Stacey I think I’m falling in love with him.” Stacey smiled and said, “That’s good, it’s about time you get over Juan.” “Stace this is not good, he and I are friends.” “I shouldn’t be looking at him that way.” “It’s just; he’s been staying with me nonstop taking care of me, sleeping in the same bed as me.” “I start looking at him as mine, when he’s just my friend.” Alba explained.

“Alba just tell him how you feel.” “I can’t.” “He liked you before and I’m sure he likes you now.” Stacey said. “I don’t want to complicate things; he knows a lot about me.” “I’m sure he’s not even attracted to me now.” Alba says. “Does he know some things I don’t know?” “Stace let’s not go there.” “I thought I knew everything about you; what don’t I know?” “Stacey please not today.” “Not today because you’re going through something’s.” Stacey said pouring wine into Alba’s glass. “Thank you.” Alba said picking up her glass.

Around six o’clock Alba was walking out of Stacey’s house. Stacey and the girls walked her to her car, that’s when Ricardo pulled up on the side of the road. “He’s looking for you.” Stacey pointed. Alba turned around to see it was Ricardo. “I’ll call you.” Alba said. “Be safe.” Stacey smiled. “Bye girls.” Alba waved then she walked towards Ricardo. Ricardo waved at Stacey and the girls then they went inside.

“Are you avoiding me?” Ricardo asks. “No, I’ve just been busy.” Alba responded. “With Stacey.” “I haven’t talked to you in two days; that’s odd we talk every day.” “Are you ok?” Ricardo asks. “I’m fine.” “I’ve been calling, texting; did I do something wrong?” “You didn’t do anything wrong, it’s me.” “I’m sorry I didn’t return your calls or your texts.” Alba said. Ricardo hugged her and said, “I know you’re still going through a lot and I’m sorry.” Alba smiled and then she pulled away. “Are you going home?” Ricardo asks. “Yeah.” “Could I come over?” “Sure I’ll follow you.” Alba said. “Ok.”

A week later; Alba, Ricardo and the twins were at Jayden’s basketball game cheering him on. “He’s good.” Ricardo smiled. “Don’t tell him that.” Alba smiled. After the game they sat on the bench and waited on Jayden. The twins were running around the gym. “Someone’s been blowing up your cell all-night.” Alba said. “My ex.” Ricardo responded. “Gloria.” Alba responded. “Yes.” Alba took her eyes off the twins and said, “What does she want?” “To get back together.” “Oh.”

After Ricardo left Alba’s house, Alba was on the phone with Stacey. “I think he’s going to take her back.” “Not if you tell him how you feel.” “I can’t, I think he still loves her.” “I can’t compete with that.” Alba says. “Alba you don’t know that; would you like for me to tell him how you feel.” “Stace we’re not teenagers; I’m a grown woman how is that going to look?” “My sister telling a man I’m in love with him.” “That would look childish of me.” Alba says. “He won’t think that.” “No Stace forget I even called, forget what I said.” “I’ll talk to you later.” Alba said. “Ok, bye.” “Bye.”

Alba laid on her bed and stared at the ceiling. “He’s taking her back I just know it.” Alba said holding her pillow. Then the doorbell rang; Alba heard Jayden running to answer the door so she just laid there. “Hey come on in.” Jayden smiled. “Is your Mom home?” Ricardo asks. “Yeah she’s somewhere around here?” Jayden said. “Where are the twins?” “Gone with Juan.” “Oh.” Ricardo walked on inside and Jayden headed back upstairs. “Alba where are you?” Ricardo called out.

Alba sat up and got herself together then walked out of her bedroom. “Hey.” Ricardo turned around and said, “Hey.” “I thought you were working late?” “I did, I just got off.” Ricardo smiled. “Oh.” “How’s school going?” “It’s going like any other day.” Alba responded. “What’s wrong?” Ricardo asks. Alba sat down and said, “Nothing.” Ricardo sat beside her and left space between them. Alba noticed that and Ricardo said, “Do you think I’m stupid if I take Gloria back.” Alba thought, “There it is.” “I don’t think you’re stupid, the heart wants what the heart wants.” Alba responded.

A few weeks later; Alba was inside her bathroom taking a shower when Ricardo used his key to come into her house. “Alba.” Ricardo called. Alba didn’t answer him so he took the bags to the kitchen and sat them on the bar. Ricardo walked through the house looking for Alba, but still didn’t see her. So he walked into the master bedroom and then the bathroom. Alba was inside the shower. Ricardo saw her naked in the shower, washing her hair. Her eyes were closed and her head was back. She looked so sexy; Ricardo couldn’t move he just stood there staring at her.

After Alba finished showering she towel dried her hair and put on her Victoria’s Secret pajamas. Alba stepped out of her bedroom and headed towards the kitchen to see Ricardo sitting inside the family room. “Hey I didn’t hear you come in.” Alba smiled. “I just got here.” Ricardo said standing up. “How about we stay inside; I’m kind of tired.” Alba said. “I thought you could make me the bacon wrapped jalapeno pepper and shrimp today.” “That’s what you want.” Alba smiled. “Yes.” “Well we have to go to the market.” “I have everything inside your kitchen ready to go.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.”

Once Alba finished the two of them sat inside her family room stuffing their faces and watching television. Ricardo caught Alba off guard when he touched her face. Alba turned to him and he didn’t say anything, it seemed as if he was coming in for a kiss. Their foreheads touched and Alba blushed. “How do you feel about me?” Ricardo asks. Alba was speechless; this was her time to speak her peace. To tell him what was in her heart and she froze. Ricardo sat up and said, “I’m sorry, I know this is a friendship not a courtship.” “I’m sorry.” Alba said. “No it’s me not you; I’m sorry.” Ricardo said feeling stupid. Alba thought to herself, “I have got to be the dumbest female on the face of this Earth.

Two months had passed by and Alba began to notice that she was seeing less and less of Ricardo. It hurt because she knew he was with Gloria. The woman that had broken his heart and chose another man over him. Alba laid in bed and cried. Alba began to focus more on school and her family. As long as her family was happy she pretended to be happy.

Saturday; Alba and the twin’s spent the day at Stacey’s because it was Giselle’s birthday. She was turning four years old and that was a beautiful age. “Giselle there are more gifts over here.” Stacey smiled. “Stace you didn’t tell me Juan would be here.” Alba whispered. “I didn’t know he was coming.” Stacey said. The twins ran up to Juan and hugged him and then they ran off to play some more.

“Alba you look beautiful today.” Juan smiled. “Thank you.” Alba responded. “Hey Stacey.” “Hey Juan; Luis is inside.” Stacey said. “Oh.” Juan sat on the bench beside Alba and said, “I like your hair hanging down; it’s beautiful like you.” Stacey walked off and Alba said, “You don’t have to suck up to me.” “I’m not you are beautiful; Alba I miss you.” “Take me back and I promise that I won’t ever hurt you ever again.” Juan says. “We’re better apart.” Alba said getting up. Juan grabbed her wrist and said, “Don’t go.” “Juan we can’t go there.” “Alba I love you.” “You love to hurt me.” “I’m sorry ok; just sit here with me please.” Juan said. Alba sat back down that’s when Stacey and Luis walked outside.

Stacey and Luis sat at the picnic table and Luis said, “Juan there’s food inside the house.” “Ok.” “Alba is Ricardo coming over today?” Stacey asks. “He said he was.” Alba said. “I spoke too soon.” Stacey smiled. “There he goes.” Stacey smiled pointing. Alba turned around and Ricardo was walking over looking so handsome; it looked like he had just gotten a fresh haircut. He was wearing blue jeans, a dark purple button down shirt, and sunglasses. He was carrying two gift bags and he had a smile on his face.

“Hi everyone.” Ricardo smiled. Everyone spoke except for Juan. “So where’s the birthday girl.” Ricardo smiled. “Giselle.” Luis called. Giselle came running and Ricardo gave her a hug. “Happy Birthday; Aunt Alba and I picked you out something’s, we hope you like them.” Ricardo said and winked at Alba. Alba smiled at him and Juan didn’t like that at all. “Juan I have something to show you.” Luis said getting up, so Juan got up too.

After Giselle opened her presents Stacey went to put them with the others. Ricardo sat beside Alba and said, “What’s up with you and Juan being all close?” “I’m being cordial.” “I see.” Ricardo said taking off his sunglasses. “So where’s Gloria?” Alba asks. Ricardo smiled and said, “I’m not sure, I haven’t talked to her today.” “You two are back together and you haven’t talked to her that’s strange.” “Alba I don’t have to talk to her every day.” Ricardo responded. “Well excuse me.” Alba frowned. “What’s wrong?” “Nothing.” Alba said getting up. “Where are you going?” “That’s my business.”

Ricardo followed Alba out to the front of the house. “What did I do?” Ricardo asks. “Nothing.” Alba frowned. “I did something you normally don’t act like this with me.” “Ricardo don’t worry about me, you have enough to worry about.” “Alba what does that supposed to mean; I’m confused.” “Worry about Gloria not me I’m a big girl I don’t need you.” Alba said. “This is about Gloria?” “No.” Alba frowned. “Yes, you care that I’m involved with Gloria again.” “Ricardo I don’t care who you’re involved with; maybe I should get back with my ex.”

“Alba that’s crazy.” “Why is it crazy; you’re with Gloria?” “Alba you were the one who said, the heart wants who the heart wants.” “I know what I said, maybe it was a mistake me divorcing Juan.” Alba said. “You sound crazy.” Ricardo said. “How is that crazy; Gloria did to you what Juan did to me, but I’m crazy.” Alba said raising her voice. “I guess I’ll go and let you cool off.” “You do that.” Alba frowned. “Why are you so hot tempered, lately everything I say you get so angry?” “You make me angry?” “Why Alba?” Ricardo asks. “I don’t have time for this; I’m going back to the party.” “I’ll just call you later.” “Don’t bother.” Alba frowned and walked off.

“Alba.” Ricardo called. Alba turned around and put her hands on her hip. “What happened between us; we’re best friends and we’re fighting like we hate each other.” “Gloria’s not gonna come between our friendship if that’s what you’re worried about.” “I’m not worried about fucking Gloria!” Alba yelled. “Then what is it; is there something you wanna tell me?” Ricardo asks. In Alba’s head she could hear Stacey saying, “Just tell him you’re in love with him.” “He probably feels the same way.” “I don’t have anything to tell you.” Alba said. “How long will you be here?” Ricardo asks. “Another hour.” “Could I come over later; we could watch some movies or finish that game on the Xbox.” “I have the twins this weekend.” Alba responded. “The twins have never been a problem, the more the merrier.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.” Alba smiled. “I’ll see you later then.” “Ok.” Alba waved.

Alba walked inside Stacey’s house and found Stacey inside the kitchen. “What was all that drama outside?” Stacey asks. “Nothing.” Alba smiled. “What happened you’re smiling.” “Nothing.” “What were you two talking about?” “Nothing really.” “FYI, Juan was being nosey looking out the window at the two of you.” “Are you serious?” Alba frowned. “Yes, he didn’t walk away until he saw you walk away.” “Damn he’s so nosey.” “That’s your ex.” Stacey said. “I need a drink.” Alba said opening the refrigerator.

**Chapter 9**

**“Gloria”**

“The more you hide your feelings for someone.” “The more you fall for them.” –Unknown

“Ricardo someone’s at your door.” Gloria said. Ricardo got out of bed and said, “Stay here.” “Is someone at the door you don’t want me to see?” “No.” Ricardo said putting on his shirt. Ricardo answered the door and Alba said, “You had the dead bolt locked; what’s wrong?” “I’m kind of busy.” Ricardo said. “Gloria’s here huh.” Alba said staring into his eyes. “Yeah.” Gloria walked inside the living room wearing nothing but lingerie and she asks, “Whose at the door?” Alba frowned at Ricardo and Gloria said, “You must be Alba.” “And you’re Gloria.” Alba said.

“Gloria get dressed.” Ricardo said. Gloria grabbed her robe off the chair and Ricardo closed the door. Alba stood next to the sofa and Gloria said, “It’s nice to finally meet the girl whose picture is sitting on my boyfriend’s nightstand.” Alba smiled and said, “Ricardo we can go another time, I’m just going to leave.” “Alba you don’t have to leave; I’ve wanted to meet you for months now.” Gloria smiled. Alba looked at Ricardo and Ricardo said, “Yeah you should stay.” “Ok.” Alba said and took a seat. “I’m gonna run outside and grab my cell; you two will be alright right?” “Of course we will silly.” Gloria smiled.

Once Ricardo stepped out, Gloria said, “Ricardo tells me you go to school and you have three boys.” “I do and Ricardo tells me you two were in a two year relationship three years ago.” “We were.” Gloria smiled. “So what brings you back into his life; I’m curious.” Alba smiled. “Are you into Ricardo?” “No, we’re friends, nothing more, nothing less.” Gloria smiled and said, “Well I’m glad he found a nice friend.” Alba heard her cellphone and took it out of her purse. She saw that Ricardo had texted her, it read, “Are you two playing nice?” Alba responded, “Yes for now.” “Alba do you think Ricardo’s still in love with me?” “Ah I’m not sure.” Gloria stood up and said, “Alba you’re his best friend, I know you two talk about every single thing.” “You can tell me.” “I know he cares for you, but I think he’s afraid you’ll just break his heart again.”

Then Ricardo walked inside and Alba stood up and said, “I better get going, I have to pick my son up at soccer practice.” Alba lied. “I’ll see you later.” Ricardo said. “Bye Alba, I enjoyed chatting with you.” Gloria smiled. “Like wise.” Alba smiled. Ricardo opened the door for Alba and said, “I’ll see you later.” “Sure.”

Monday; Alba met up with Ricardo at the hospital. “Who is that?” Dr. Gibson asks. “That’s Dr. Cruz’s friend; Alba.” “Friend or girlfriend?” “Friend.” “Ok.” Dr. Gibson said then walked towards the door. Dr. Gibson walked up to Alba and said, “I’m Dr. Gibson, I work with Dr. Cruz.” He shook Alba’s hand and Alba said, “I’m Alba a friend of his.” Dr. Gibson smiled and said, “Call me Chad.” “Ok.” Chad sat down beside Alba and said, “So how long have you known Dr. Cruz?” “About a year.” “And he’s kept you a secret from me.”

“So you dating anyone?” Chad asks. “No.” Alba blushed. “Do you think Dr. Cruz would be angry if you went out with me?” “I doubt it he’s back with Gloria.” Alba responded. “Really.” Alba didn’t say anything and Chad asks, “Could I call you sometimes?” “Sure.” Chad took his IPhone off his clip and said, “I’m ready.” So Alba gave him her number and he said, “I’ll call you later, nice meeting you.”

Chad was walking through the hall when he passed by Ricardo. “Why are you so cheerful?” Ricardo asks. “I met someone.” Chad smiled. “I see.” Ricardo said and continued to walk away. Ricardo made it to the waiting room and signaled for Alba to walk on back. “Sorry it took me so long.” “That’s ok; I had company.” Alba said. “Ok.” The two of them walked inside a vacant patient room and Ricardo said, “I wanted to see if you wanted to go out just the two of us?” “When?” Alba asks. “Tonight, I miss you; we hadn’t done anything together since Gloria came back.” “Ok.” Alba smiled.

Alba was on her way home when she received a call from her ex-husband. “I forgot about that, I’ll bring it by are you home?” Alba asks. “Yeah I’ll be here another hour.” “I’ll be there in ten minutes.” Alba responded. As soon as she answered she received a call from Stacey. “Hello.” “How are you liking your new job?” Stacey asks. “It’s fun, every day is a new adventure.” Alba smiled. “You want to go out for drinks tonight?” “I can’t; Ricardo wants to go out to a dinner and movie at the movie grill tonight.” “Just chose him over me then.” “Stace don’t be like that; I think I’m gonna just tell Ricardo how I feel.” “I need him in my life permanently.” Alba says. Stacey smiled and said, “Well go for it; you deserve your happily ever after.” “Thank you.” Alba smiled.

After Alba ran all her errands she got home. She was ready to see Ricardo. She knew tonight would either have Ricardo as her man or she’d lose him. Alba was positive that he felt the same so she had no worries. Ricardo had texted Alba about three times, but Alba was busy listening to music, dancing and getting ready. Alba looked at the clock it was seven. Alba thought, “Ricardo should be here, the movie starts in thirty minutes.”

Ricardo was on his way to Alba’s house. “This is going to be fun, you, me and Alba.” Gloria smiled. Ricardo didn’t say a word and Gloria asks, “Why do you seem nervous?” “I’m not nervous; Alba hasn’t responded to any of my messages.” “Why is that such a problem?” Gloria asks. “It’s not; she just normally answers my texts.

Alba looked out the window, she saw Ricardo’s Audi pull into the driveway. Alba was confused when she saw Gloria get out of his car. “Gloria get back inside the car; we’ll be right out.” Ricardo said. “Excuse me then.” Gloria said. Alba answered the door and Ricardo said, “I’ve texted you like three or four times why didn’t you respond?” “Because I’ve been getting dressed; what’s wrong?” Alba asks. “Would you be disappointed if I told you that Gloria’s coming with us?” “You couldn’t make her stay home?” Alba asks. “She wants to spend time with the both of us.” “I bet she does.” Alba thought.

“Ok the more the merrier.” Alba said. They finally got the movie grill and Alba just felt like the third wheel. Alba felt like Gloria was throwing up their relationship in her face and she was getting sick of it. "Why in the hell did I agree to this?” Alba thought. “Alba lets go.” Ricardo said taking her hand. Once they got into the theater Gloria began to complain and Alba just rolled her eyes. “Could we trade seats?” Ricardo asks. “Just sit in the middle of us; I’m sure people think that both of us are your girlfriends.” Alba smarted off. “That wouldn’t be so bad.” Ricardo smiled. “Whatever jerk.” Alba smiled.

Gloria began to feel jealous because Ricardo spent most of the movie leaning over talking to Alba and she was smiling. “Gloria’s trying to get your attention.” Alba said. “Hey.” Ricardo said leaning over to Gloria. “This is a date and you’re over there with her.” “Gloria; Alba and I have been planning to see this movie for months.” “You came unexpectedly begging to go so I let you and you’re complaining the whole way.” Ricardo said. “I’m not use to sharing you.” Gloria frowned. “You’re not sharing me with anyone; Alba’s my friend.” “She likes you.” “That’s crazy; Alba’s still in love with her ex-husband.” Ricardo responded.

After the movie Ricardo dropped Alba home. “I’ll see you two later.” Alba said getting out of the back seat. Ricardo got out of the car and followed her to her front door. “You don’t have to walk me to the door.” Alba said. “I want to.” Ricardo smiled. Alba took her key out of her purse and said, “Next time if your girlfriend has to go out with us, don’t come get me.” “You’re jealous?” Ricardo smiled. “Of course not, she irritates me.” Alba responded. “Next time I will leave her because she irritated me the entire night.” Ricardo gave Alba a hug and she hugged him tight and longer than usual Ricardo noticed but he didn’t say a word. He held her as long as she needed to be held.

A week later; Alba ran into Gloria at the gym she was working out in. Alba thought, “Is she following me?” “Alba I didn’t know you worked out here.” “Hey Gloria.” Alba smiled continuing to walk away. “Could we talk?” Gloria smiled. “Sure.” “Are you in love with my boyfriend?” “Are we really having this conversation?” Alba asks. “We are, answer the question?” “Gloria what does it matter?” “It matters to me.” “I’m not the person you should be worried about.” “Alba said. Well I know that I just wanted to know if you were into my man or not.” Alba smiled and said, “Ask Ricardo.” “Alba it would be wise for you to stay away from Ricardo.” “He doesn’t need you as a friend.” Gloria says.

Alba smiled and said, “That’s funny coming from someone whose broken his heart over and over again.” “Ricardo would never be into you.” “You’re a woman with too many kids.” “Ricardo doesn’t have time for all that baggage.” Gloria says. “My children are not baggage so leave them out of this.” “I don’t think you want me as an enemy.” “If you ever bring my children into an argument again be ready for a fight.” “And Gloria, I never once came onto Ricardo.” “He’s always wanted me, I turned him down ok.” Alba smiles then walks away.

After Alba left the gym she was on the phone with Stacey. “I’m surprised you didn’t kick her ass.” Stacey said. “I am too; my words hurt her more than anything.” Alba smiled. “I’m proud of you, you used your words not your fist.” “I don’t have time for petty women to bring me down to that level.” “I have a lot to be thankful for and Ricardo will soon realize that Gloria should have been left in the past.” Alba says.

Once Alba got home Chad was calling her, she talked to him for about five minutes then showered. Alba began to think about the things that Gloria had said to her. Did Ricardo really not like women with children or was she just trying to scare her off. Either way parts of the conversation got to Alba. Once Alba got dressed she went upstairs to get her children’s dirty laundry to wash. Once she began to wash clothes Chad called her again. Alba thought, “He’s being very aggressive.

Friday night; Alba agreed to let Chad come over since all the children would be gone. “Come on inside.” Alba smiled. Chad walked inside and said, “These are for you.” “Thank you Chad.” Alba smiled. Chad sat down and Ava put in a movie. While the movie played the two of them sat and talked until Alba said, “Chad I don’t think this is going to work.” “Why not?” Chad asks surprised. “I don’t think Ricardo would appreciate me seeing someone he works with.” “I don’t think that would be a problem unless you and Ricardo have feelings for one another.” Chad said.

“I, I have feelings for Ricardo and I don’t want you being here to interfere with that.” “I don’t want him to be angry with me seeing someone he works with.” Chad stood up and said, “I understand; I wish we had met under different circumstances.” Alba stood up and said, “I’m really sorry.” “You should tell Ricardo how you feel even if he is with Gloria.” “I just don’t think he’s all that into her.” Chad says. “Thanks for the advice.” Alba said walking him to the door.

Tuesday; Ricardo had just walked inside his townhouse when he saw Gloria calling. He was tired and all he wanted to do was get inside and shower. After Ricardo showered he ate the leftovers that Alba had cooked. Ricardo sat on the couch and flipped through the channels when he heard a knock at the door. “Hey.” Ricardo said. “Hey.” Gloria smiled walking inside. “You don’t look like you’re happy to see me.” Gloria said taking a seat. “I had a hard day that’s all.” Ricardo said sitting beside her. The two of them sat in silence for about a minute and out of nowhere Gloria asks, “Ricardo what is it that you like about me?” “Everything.” Ricardo answered. “That’s not true.” “How do you know you can’t read my mind?”

“Well what is it that you like about Alba?” “Gloria what is this?” Ricardo asks. “I’m just curious; she’s your friend I’d just like to know.” “Alba’s really honest, she doesn’t hold anything back if she feels a certain way she tells me.” “She’s great with her three boys; they love her and she loves them.” “She takes pride in everything she does and she likes cooking.” Ricardo smiled. “Wow.” Gloria said. Ricardo put the remote control down and said, “Wow; what is wow?” “Nothing it sounds like you really like Alba.” “I do she’s cool.” “Just cool.” Gloria said. “She’s a good person and I like good people.”

“How did you and Alba meet?” “Gloria we’ve already talked about that.” “You never told me.” “Angel, Chad and I decided to go to The Cheesecake Factory for drinks.” “We sat at the bar and these two females walked in; it was Alba and her friend; Stacey.” “I was immediately attracted to Alba because she’s beautiful.” “The first thing I noticed about her was her smile and her hair; how thick and curly it was.” “The two of them stood in the lobby until there was an available table and I watched her. Once the two of them had been seated I watched and I had their server to take the two of them a drink.” “Long story, short I tried to take her out she turned me down.” Ricardo explained.

“If she turned you down how are you even in her life now?” Gloria asks. “Gloria why the curiosity?” “I’d just like to know what you were up to while I was gone.” “Not much; Alba left her cellphone and I got it from the server to take it to her outside.” “Alba had already left and later that night she realized her cell was missing and face timed it.” “I answered and we’ve been close ever since.” Ricardo explained. “So why didn’t you two date?” “Alba and her ex-husband were separated and she was still in love with him.” “She said she didn’t need a man in her life, she only needed friends, so I took on that role.”

Gloria stood up and Ricardo asks, “What’s wrong?” “Ricardo why am I here; why are we together?” “We’re together because you came back to me.” “You’re in love with her aren’t you?” Gloria asks. “Alba and I are friend’s that’s all she wants is my friendship.” “What happened to the man that wouldn’t even look at a woman with kids?” Gloria asks. “I’m almost forty years old and I was stupid to ever turn any woman away because she had children.” “I’ve grown up a lot.” Ricardo says. “Are you still in love with me?” Gloria asks. Ricardo stood up and said, “I’m sorry Gloria.” “I’m sorry too; why didn’t you just tell me that you were in love with someone else?” “Because I thought I still had those feelings for you Gloria.”

“I’m gonna go now.” Gloria said. “I’m sorry Gloria.” “It’s not your fault it’s my fault I was foolish to ever think that you’d still be here.” “Alba’s right I hurt you a lot.” “When did you talk to Alba?” “It’s not important; I gotta get outta here.” Gloria said opening the door. After she left Ricardo put on his shoes and headed to Alba’s house.

“Juan I’m not in the mood I have a lot to do.” Alba said walking him to the door. “My life is nothing without you in it.” Juan said. Alba opened the door and said, “I can’t do this; we’re not getting back together ok.” “I’m not in love with you anymore.” Ricardo had just pulled in front of her house not pulling in the driveway. He could see Juan and Alba because her outside light was on and her door was open. Ricardo sat there and watched. When Juan realized Ricardo was outside he grabbed Alba and kissed her.

Alba pulled away and Ricardo had already pulled off without Alba seeing his car. “Why did you do that?” Alba frowned. “I wanted to kiss you.” Juan smiled. “Don’t ever do that, we’ll never get back together.” “Why not Alba I love you and you love me.” “Juan I’m in love with Ricardo ok; that’s who I love that’s who I want.” Alba said mistakenly. “I thought he was your friend.” “He is my friend.” “Does he know you love him?” Juan asks. “I’m not discussing this with you please go.” Alba frowned.

**Chapter 10**

**“Confusion”**

“Never take someone for granted.” “Hold every person close to your heart because you might wake up one day and realize that you’ve lost a diamond while you were too busy collecting stones.” -Unknown

Wednesday; Ricardo was off work today so he decided to drive over to the hospital Alba was working at to see how she was doing. Ricardo made it there around one o’clock and Alba wasn’t busy. “What are you doing here?” Alba smiled. “I came to check on you for a change.” Ricardo smiled. “Well as you can see I’m not busy, today’s been slow which is great.” Alba smiled. Ricardo took a seat on the hospital bed and Alba asks, “Do you need a sonogram?” Ricardo smiled and said, “No I think I’m good.” “So how was your appointment with the dentist?” Alba asks. “Better than I expected.” “Well that’s always good.”

The next day Ricardo got to work ready to start his day. Around lunch time Ricardo sat inside the cafeteria when Chad sat down at the same table. “How are things today?” Chad asks. “Things couldn’t be better.” Ricardo smiled. “I asks your friend; Alba on a date.” “You did.” “Yeah, she invited me to her house and put me out within ten minutes.” Ricardo scratched his head and asks, “Why?” “She’s afraid to date me because of you.” “What?” Ricardo smiled. “I don’t know what’s going on I thought I could work my magic and get this girl but she’s hung up on you man.” “She felt guilty by having me at her house.” “All I’m saying is, if you’re not really serious about Gloria and Alba’s who you want, you should just go for it because the feeling is mutual.” “Thanks Dr. Gibson.” Ricardo said sitting his drink down. “You’re welcome.” Chad said then left the table.

A month later; Ricardo was over to Alba’s playing basketball with Jayden when Alba pulled into the driveway. “I guess that’s game since my Mom pulled up.” Jayden smiled. “No I’m gonna finish the game.” Ricardo said staring at the garage. “So why aren’t you and my Mom together?” “What?” Ricardo smiled. “You heard me.” Jayden smiled. “I don’t know; things between us are difficult.” “Adults make everything difficult I don’t think I want to become one.” “I think your Mom likes me better as a friend.” Ricardo said. “You’re wrong.” Jayden said shooting a three point shot making it. “Game over.” Ricardo smiled. “Good game.” Jayden smiled.

Jayden walked off with some friends and Ricardo walked inside the house, meeting Alba in the garage. “Let me take those.” Ricardo said grabbing the bags out of her hand. “Thank you.” Alba said. “So Jayden tells me he’s up for a scholarship for basketball and soccer.” Ricardo said. “The coach called me; Jayden has to make up his mind which sport he’s going to go for.” Alba smiled. “He’s a great basketball player.” Ricardo smiled. “He is.” Alba agreed.

“Ricardo get off me you stink.” Alba said. “I can’t hug my friend I miss you.” “Take a shower then you can hug me.” Alba said backing up. While Ricardo showered Alba fixed the two of them sandwiches. “I hope one of those is mine.” Ricardo said sitting at the bar. “Of course.” Alba smiled pouring them a glass of juice. “So how was work today?” Ricardo asks. “Work is always good.” Alba said sitting beside him. “You ex-husband has been over here a lot lately.” “Leonardo’s been sick and crying for him, so I’ve been letting him come over.” “Are you sure that’s all.” “Ricardo he’s an ex and he’ll stay an ex I’m not you.” Alba said. “I was just curious.” “So you’ve been coming by here seeing Juan’s truck and you don’t bother to stop by.” “I thought you two were rekindling the romance.” “You two stood in the door making out.”

Alba frowned and asks, “When?” “About a month ago.” Ricardo responded. “I never kiss Juan are you sure it was me?” “Alba I know you, it was you there was no other woman at your house.” “You saw that, I know what you’re talking about.” “He kissed me out of nowhere; I had no idea he was going to do that.” “He pissed me off so bad that night.” Alba explains. “Oh.”

Around ten Alba and Ricardo were lying in her bed watching television. Ricardo wondered was it a good time to tell her that he wanted more than her friendship. “So where’s Gloria these days?” Alba asks. “We broke up.” Ricardo responded. “Broke up when did this happen?” “About a month ago you were right there’s no need in living in the past and ex is just an ex.” Ricardo said. “True.” “Besides I’d rather spend all my time with you.” Ricardo smiled. “Right back at cha.” Alba smiled.

“Sorry that’s my cell.” Alba said grabbing it off her nightstand. “Tell Stacey I said, Go to bed.” Ricardo smiled. “I will.” Alba smiled texting Stacey back. Alba was so into her text messaging Ricardo had fallen asleep. Alba put her phone on silent and then turned off the television. Alba laid beside Ricardo and closed her eyes. She began to think about if the two of them were a real couple how would it be just lying in bed with him. Alba missed being loved and she knew Ricardo would always hold her. She wanted him to love her and she wanted to admit her feelings so badly, but she feared he wouldn’t feel the same. Alba felt because he knew all her deep dark secrets and past he didn’t feel the way he used to feel for her.

Saturday night; Alba and Ricardo double dated with Stacey and Luis since they all hadn’t been out together in a while. They went to Nylo and dined in the Terrace Bistro. “This is nice.” Stacey said. “It is.” Alba agreed. Once they were seated everyone sat quietly studying the menu. “The menu’s pretty small not a lot of choices.” Alba said. “I didn’t bring you here for the food, I brought you here for the scenery and once we get outside on the rooftop you’ll be blown away.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.” Alba smiled. “Have you decided on your drink?” “I think I’m going to have the cherry lemonade.” Alba smiled. “I’ll have that too.” Ricardo smiled.

After the four of them dined they headed out of the rooftop. Stacey could tell that Alba was enjoying herself and she had drunk two of the cherry lemonades, so she knew she was feeling great. The four of them sat together, talked and laughed. Later Stacey and Luis went off and sat alone. Ricardo and Alba sat minutes just looking at everyone else making out, it was kind of awkward. The atmosphere was great; it was couples night and the two of them were just friends.

Ricardo and Alba sat close then he put his arm around her waist. “What are you thinking about?” Ricardo asks. “How much fun you and I have when we’re together.” “Alba I was thinking that I want more than this friendship with you.” “I’ll always want your friendship but I think it’s time for you and me.” And just as he was about to complete his sentence Luis and Stacey walked up asking, “Did you two want anything else to drink?” “Ah sure; I’ll have what Alba’s drinking.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.” Luis and Stacey said then walked off. Alba leaned her head on Ricardo’s shoulder and said, “I want more than your friendship too.”

“Alba, Alba are you listening?” Ricardo asks. “Ah yeah; what did you say?” Alba asks. “I said, we came on the wrong night, it looks like couples night up here.” “Oh.” Alba said feeling silly over the day dream she had just had. The two of them sat five more minutes and Alba said, “Let’s just go I feel outta place up here.” “Everyone’s kissing let’s just kiss.” Ricardo smiled. Alba smiled and said, “Friends don’t kiss.” “Friends do what they want to do; I know you’ve always imagined how it would be to kiss me.” “I’ve never thought about it.” Alba blushed turning her face away from his.

“Come on turn around.” Ricardo smiled. Alba turned her face back around staring at him and he said, “You never thought about kissing me; I’d be lying if I said I hadn’t.” “I’ve always thought about kissing you and making love to you.” “You have.” Alba said. “Why wouldn’t I, I liked you the first moment I laid eyes on you, but you were in love with another man then.” “I think things have changed.” “You really don’t wanna kiss me?” Ricardo asks. “I didn’t say that.” Alba smiled. Then he went in for the kiss and she kissed him back and she loved it.

Alba pulled away and blushed and Ricardo went in for another kiss. He held the back of her head with his left hand and touched her cheek with his right hand. At that very moment Ricardo actually felt like he was hers and Alba wanted that more than anything. After that hot steamy kiss the both of them blushed. “You kiss really well.” Ricardo smiled. “You too.” Then Luis and Stacey walked up and said, “It’s getting late we have to get back to the girls.” “Yeah we better get going too.” Ricardo said standing up. “Let’s do this again soon, I really enjoyed myself.” Luis said.

Sunday; Ricardo was off riding bikes with Luis. So Alba ran to the grocery store to pick up a few things to fix Ricardo a spinach omelet and sausage at his house. “I’m inside the house now.” Alba said talking on her cellphone. “I’m gonna talk with Luis for about twenty or thirty minutes and I’ll be home.” “Ok and I’ll get to cooking.” Alba smiled. “Thank you.” “You’re welcome.” After Alba finished cooking she cleaned the kitchen then headed to Ricardo’s bedroom to make his bed to find a woman lying half naked.

“Excuse me.” Alba said. The woman removed the covers from her face and asks, “Who are you?” “Who the hell are you?” Alba asks. “Ricardo didn’t tell you I was over.” “No he did not, now who the hell are you!” Alba asks raising her voice. “Have you finished my breakfast, he said the maid would be here to make us omelets.” Alba got so angry, she felt herself wanting to choke the life out of this female, but what would that have accomplished. “I am not the maid and I’ll ask again who the hell are you?” “I’m Lydia; I met Ricardo six months ago at one of those Brazilian restaurants.” “He didn’t tell you about me?” Lydia smiled. Alba walked out of the room back into the kitchen. Alba got the food that she had paid for and prepared and dumped it inside the trash can and she left not realizing her purse was on the couch. Right after Alba had left; Lydia did a disappearing act of her own.

Ricardo finally made it home, once he walked inside he said, “Alba don’t be mad I know I’m late.” Ricardo locked the door and walked through the house. “No food in the microwave.” Ricardo said sitting his car keys on the table. “Alba baby where are you?” Ricardo asks walking to the back of the house. “My bed is still a mess.” Ricardo grabbed his cellphone to call Alba but it went to her voice mail. After Ricardo showered and got dressed he headed to Alba’s house to only find the house empty. Then he headed to Stacey’s house.

As soon as Ricardo was pulling up Stacey and the girls were walking out the front door. “Hi Ricardo.” “Hey Stace, hey girls.” Ricardo smiled. “You were just over this way; Luis just left.” “Alba’s not over here?” Ricardo asks. “No, I talked to her earlier when she was at the grocery store.” “If you talk to her would you tell her to call me?” “Sure.” Stacey said. “Thank you I’ll see you later.” As soon as Stacey got inside her SUV she called Alba to only get her voice mail so she left a message.

Alba was busy at her ex-husbands with her twin boys when Luis came over. Luis was surprised to see her there. Luis was there for less than five minutes grabbing a bike part from Juan then he left. Once Luis got inside his truck he called his wife. “Hey.” Stacey smiled. “Why is Alba at Juan’s house?” “I’m shocked to see her there when she’s into Ricardo.” “Luis are you serious?” Stacey asks. “Yeah I’m serious; Ricardo and I had a long talk about Alba.” “He admitted that he wanted a relationship with her, that she was the one he loved.” “I talked to Alba this morning, she was so happy about last night.” “She was in the grocery store; she said she was going to fix him breakfast and tell him that she loves him.” Stacey explained.

Juan and Alba sat on his sofa cozy on his couch just talking. He had his arms around her waist kissing the back of her neck. “I’m glad that you wanna give us another chance.” Juan smiled. “I didn’t say we were back together I said, “Let’s work out our issues.” Alba said. “Same thing.” Juan smiled. “It’s not.” “Alba I want you back and I’ll do whatever to get you to trust me again.” “I’m not seeing anyone, that woman is long gone.” “She was a mistake and I was a fool to ever make the mistake of cheating on you.” “Juan I don’t wanna talk about that.” Juan smiled and said, “Then let’s talk about you and I our future.”

Stacey pulled up at Juan’s house, the girls were sound asleep. Stacey left her vehicle running and went to knock at the door. “Hey Stacey.” “Hey; is Alba here?” “She is, but we’re busy.” Juan said blocking the door. “Come on let me talk to her.” “For you to talk her out of being here, you must be crazy.” Juan said. “Alba, Alba!” Stacey yelled. Alba stood up because she thought she heard her name so she walked towards the door to see Juan talking to Stacey.

“Stace.” Alba smiled. “We need to talk.” Stacey said. “Alba don’t leave with her.” Juan said. “I’m not going anywhere, she just wants to talk.” “You know why she’s here, she’s against me, she always has been.” Juan frowned. “I wasn’t against you until you cheated on my best friend; living a double life with that slut, and fathered another child.” Stacey said. “Stace the child’s not his.” Alba said looking at Juan. “Juan I’m going to step outside I’ll be back in a few minutes, I promise.”

“Stacey was that all called for; talking to him like that?” Alba asks. “What in the hell are you doing over here?” Stacey asks. “Just visiting.” “You don’t visit Juan, you hate him.” “Stace I don’t hate him; he’s the father of my boys.” “You sound like a robot right now.” Stacey frowned. “What do you want and how did you even find out where I was?” Stacey didn’t respond and Alba said, “Oh Luis.” “I thought by now you and Ricardo would be together, making love, out and about together as a couple.” “Could we not talk about Ricardo please?” Alba said raising her voice.

“Alba I don’t know why you’re here with Juan are you scared to get in a relationship with Ricardo.” “He’s a good guy; you know he’s in love with you.” “Stacey if he was in love with me he wouldn’t keep jumping into bed with other woman.” “Alba what are you talking about?” “Look I don’t wanna talk about it ok, I don’t wanna be with Ricardo ok.” “I think Ricardo is better off being my friend, I like him better as my friend.” Alba says. “Alba if you keep going backwards you’re going to lose him; you better be careful.” Stacey said. “Why don’t you go home and live your happy little life with your family and stop worrying about me.” “I’m a big girl.” Alba smiled.

“Ok.” Stacey frowned and walked away. Then Stacey turned around and said, “Just so you know Ricardo’s looking for you; would you like for me to tell him that you’re here with Juan?” “Do what you wanna do I don’t care.” Alba frowned. “Alba seriously what is your problem; do you not wanna be happy?” “I am happy Stacey, not everyone can live your life.” “I didn’t say you had to have a life like mine!” Stacey said raising her voice. “Just leave me the hell alone ok; if I wanted your advice I’d ask for it.” “Alba you’re such a bitch, that’s why you’re alone.” Stacey said. Then Alba walked back inside Juan’s house.

**Chapter 11**

**“More Confusion”**

“When you don't know where to start, just go to a place you miss so much.” –Toba Beta

“Ricardo I’m sorry I haven’t talked to Alba in three weeks.” Stacey said. “Three weeks, you too.” Ricardo said shocked. “Yes, me too.” “So when’s the last time you talked to her?” “The day she was supposed to fix you breakfast; I found her and we got into this huge argument and I called her a bitch.” “Stacey what the hell?” “She pissed me off when I saw where she was.” Stacey said. “Where was she?” Ricardo asks. Stacey didn’t respond and Ricardo said, “She wasn’t at Juan’s house was she?” “I can’t betray my friend.” “Stacey she can’t get back with that cheating bastard.” “She’s supposed to be with me.” “Where does Juan live?” Ricardo asks. “Alba’s going to be pissed at me if I tell you.” “Ok I’ll ask Luis I know he’ll tell me.” Ricardo said standing up. “Ok, ok I’ll write the address down.”

Juan, Alba, and the twins were getting out of his truck when Ricardo pulled on side of the road parking. Neither of them noticed him until he called her name. “What is he doing here?” Juan asks. “I have no idea.” Alba said. “What the hell man.” Juan said throwing up his arms. “Juan go inside I’ll get rid of him.” Alba said. Once Juan and the twins walked inside the house Alba asks, “What are you doing here?” “You’re avoiding me; we have unfinished business.” Ricardo said. “The kiss was a mistake Ricardo.” Alba said. “Why would you say that; we were working on our happily ever after and you’re scared that’s why you’re here.” “I’m not scared Ricardo you are.” “I’m confused Alba.” Ricardo said.

“I’m not the one scared to commit it’s you.” “I was at your town house; cooking your breakfast, ready to see you.” “I cleaned your living room and headed to your bedroom and what do you know there’s a woman lying half naked in your bed.” Alba explained. “What?” “Don’t act like you didn’t know she was there.” “You told her I was the maid, that I was fixing you two omelets.” “I got so angry I threw the food in the trash and I left.” “Alba you weren’t at my house.” “Ricardo are you serious?” Alba said frowning. “Was it Gloria in my bed?” Ricardo asks. “Ricardo you are hilarious you know damn well it wasn’t Gloria.”

“I’m confused; I don’t know who could have been in my house.” “Gloria is the only other woman with a key to my house.” “Ricardo you have so many women you can’t even keep up with them and I’m not going to be added to your list.” “Alba I’m sorry I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Ricardo said touching her shoulders. “I can’t date you Ricardo.” “I’m taking Juan back.” “You’re making a mistake.” “Says the man that has strange women in his bed.” Alba said folding her arms. “Alba don’t take Juan back because you’re mad at me.” “Don’t push me out of your life because if you take him back he’s going to force you to choose.” “Don’t choose him over me Alba please.” Ricardo begs. “I gotta go.” Alba said then walked away.

Alba got to work Monday to find out that her last day would be Friday, since the lady she was filling in for would be coming back. Alba put on a smile but she was devastated. She knew she had a fifty-fifty chance of getting the job permanently, but things didn’t work out in her favor this time. After Alba got off work she sat inside her bedroom and cried. She needed someone to talk to but she couldn’t reach out to Stacey because they were still fighting and she couldn’t reach out to Ricardo because they were fighting.

Ricardo pulled up to his townhouse to see the door open. He didn’t see Alba’s car outside, so he walked inside to see it was his sister; Cassandra. “What are you doing here?” Ricardo asks. “I came to see how you were doing?” Cassandra smiled. “You have a key to my house.” “Yes, you gave it to me a long time ago.” “I thought only Gloria and Alba had a key.” “Whose Alba?” “My friend.” “Oh; so where’s Gloria?” Cassandra asks. “Long gone from here.” Ricardo said walking towards the kitchen.

“Ah when’s the last time you saw Gloria?” Cassandra asks. “Months and months ago.” Ricardo answered. “Oh.” Cassandra said sitting at the bar. “Why are you so worried about Gloria?” “You don’t even like her.” “Ricardo, why would you say that, you never let me meet her.” Cassandra smiled. Ricardo grabbed a beer out the refrigerator and sat beside his sister. “Why are you so down; is it Gloria?” “No it’s not Gloria, it’s Alba I think I’ve lost her.” Ricardo said. “I thought Alba was the friend.” “She is but I’m in love with her and she’s angry with me.” “Why?” “Something about a girl in my bed I’m still wondering what the hell she was talking about.”

Cassandra turned her head and stared at the wall. “Ricardo, the photo of the girl on your nightstand; that’s not Gloria?” “No that’s Alba.” “Oh boy.” Cassandra said. “Oh boy; what?” “I think I know why Alba’s angry with you.” Ricardo sat his beer down on the bar and Cassandra said, “I kind of pretended to be your lover.” “I thought she was Gloria.” Cassandra confessed. “The half-naked girl was you.” Ricardo said shocked. “Yeah I’m sorry.” “Why the hell didn’t I realize the female had to be you; Cassandra if I lose her it’s all your fault.”

A couple days later; Alba drove to Stacey’s house to apologize and Stacey apologized too. “I didn’t take Juan back I was so angry with Ricardo for having a half-naked girl in his bed and that’s why I ran to Juan.” “I don’t want Juan I want Ricardo.” Alba says. “Maybe it was just a misunderstanding.” “Stace I wish; what kind of misunderstanding could it be?” “You’re right I can’t make an excuse for him.” Stacey said.

Stacey and Alba had a long talk, it was like old times. “Now I’ve just got to find a job.” Alba said. “You’ll find a job.” “Do you think you’ll forgive Ricardo, he is an amazing guy?” Stacey smiled. “I just wish he’d make his mind up; what he really wants to do.” Alba said. “Alba just talk to him give him a chance, he really wants to be with you.” “I wanna be with him too, but I don’t wanna share him.” Alba said. “I know you don’t, no woman ever wants to share a man.”

After Alba left Stacey’s house she went straight to Ricardo’s house. She didn’t use her key instead she rang the doorbell to come face to face with the woman that was half naked in his bed. “You have got to be kidding me.” Alba frowned. “Hey we need to talk.” Cassandra said. “Forget about it.” Alba said and stormed off.

As soon as Alba drove off Ricardo pulled up and Cassandra was outside. “Why are you out here?” Ricardo asks. “I was trying to stop Alba, but she wouldn’t listen to me.” “Alba was here?” Ricardo asks surprised. “Yes.” “Damn it, I’ll be back.” Ricardo said getting back into his car.

Ricardo pulled up in Alba’s driveway and Jayden came to the door. “It’s been a minute since I saw you.” Jayden smiled. “Yeah it’s been a minute; how are you?” Ricardo asks. “I’m fine and you?” “Miserable actually; is your Mom home?” “No she’s not here I’m not sure where she went.” Jayden said. “Do you mind if I sit over her and wait on her?” “No, but I’m about to leave.” “Alright I’ll lock up.” Ricardo said. “Alright see you later.” Jayden smiled. “Later.”

Ricardo sat inside the family room waiting on Alba, to fall asleep on the couch. Ricardo awakened around five in the morning. He walked inside Alba’s bedroom and there was no sign of her. Her car wasn’t even in the garage. Alba had awakened and she was in Juan’s bed. Alba thought, “What am I doing?” She looked over Juan was still sleeping. Alba grabbed her clothes and got dressed immediately and left in a hurry.

Alba spent the rest of her day applying for jobs. Then afterwards she ran into a guy she went to college with. “I can’t believe I’m looking at Ms. Alba Malveaux.” “Jayson.” Alba smiled. “You look so pretty.” Jayson smiled. “Stop.” Alba blushed. “Alba I had such a huge crush on you in college.” “What?” Alba smiled. “I’m serious I was so afraid to approach you; all those black guys stayed in your face.” “You could have approached me I wouldn’t have turned you down.” Alba smiled. “Would you turn me down now?” Jayson asks. “Of course not.” “Could I call you sometimes and take you out?” “Sure.” After they exchanged numbers they went their separate ways.

Alba and Stacey sat at Alba’s house inside the kitchen talking while Alba cooked. “You did always like white boys.” “Stacey why do you say it like that?” “Nothing’s wrong with white men they’re just not my type.” Stacey smiled. “Your husband is Venezuelan.” “That’s closer to black.” “His skin color is closer to white peoples.” Alba said. “So you still hadn’t reached out to Ricardo?” “I tried, but his play thing is still at his house.” “I don’t know what to say about that.” “Say nothing let’s leave Ricardo in the past.” “If he wants my friendship back I’ll welcome it back but as far as a relationship I can’t.” Alba says. “That I understand.”

Friday night; Alba went out to the movies with Jayson. Alba loved how attentive Jayson was. He was really trying to do and say everything right. Sometimes he’d get tongue tied and began to stutter, but it was cute; he was actually nervous. Alba smiled and said, “You don’t have to be nervous.” “I’m enjoying this really; you’re very sweet.” “I’ve always liked you Alba.” Jayson smiled putting his arms around her neck. Alba and Jayson were finally leaving the movies when Alba spotted Ricardo and a female getting inside his car. “Hey are you alright?” Jayson asks. “Yeah I’m fine; I thought I saw someone I knew.” Alba said getting inside his car.

Alba had been seeing Jayson for a couple of months and she still hadn’t found a job. Alba was still searching for a job, but there were just no openings at any hospitals and clinics. Alba was grateful that she had been saving her money. Her savings account was getting low and she knew she only had a couple of months of money left to pay her bills.

“Alba, Ricardo’s a doctor talk to him I’m sure he could help you get a job.” “Stacey I don’t want to run to him.” Alba said. “You just said your money is running low.” “Swallow your pride and just ask for help.” “He calls me every day checking on you.” Stacey said by mistake. “What?” Alba said irritated. “I wasn’t supposed to tell you that.” “What are you telling him about me Stace?” “I didn’t tell him about the job or Jayson ok.” “Why are you just now telling me this?” “We’re supposed to be best friends and you’re keeping things from me.” Alba complained. “Ricardo’s worried about you; just reach out to him.” “He says if you don’t want a relationship he’ll be happy to have his friend back.” “He said that?” Alba asks. “Yes Alba just call him.” Stacey said handing her the cordless phone.

Ricardo was in his car headed home when his cell rang. “Hey Stacey.” Ricardo smiled. “It’s not Stacey, it’s Alba.” “Alba.” “Yes.” “Alba how are you?” Ricardo asks. “I’m fine, Ricardo I miss you, and I miss our friendship.” “Me too; could I see you.” “I could explain everything.” “Ricardo you don’t have to explain anything, I understand.” “I just really miss my friend.” Alba says. “Could I come see you?” Ricardo asks. “I’ll come to you.” Alba said. “Ok, I’ll be home.” “Ok, I’m on my way.”

Once Alba got to Ricardo’s he greeted her at the door with a long hug. Alba missed his arms being around her and he missed her arms being around him. It felt so good to be in his arms it was such an incredible feeling. The two of them sat down and talked like old times. Ricardo was happy to see a smile on Alba’s face. He wanted to make her happy and keep her smiling. “I need to explain the misunderstanding; the girl that was in my bed.” Ricardo said. “You don’t have to, Ricardo you’re free to be with whomever you want to be with.” “I understand I’m seeing someone now and he makes me happy.”

Ricardo smiled and said, “Oh who is he?” “His name is Jayson; we went to college together back when I lived in Louisiana.” Alba explained. “Oh, I still want to explain the girl in my bed.” “You don’t have to.” “Alba that was my sister, she thought you were Gloria, that’s why she did that.” “She’s sorry for misleading you.” Ricardo says. “Oh.” “Alba I want us to start over, be happy together again.” “Me too as friends.” “I understand; so how’s work?” Ricardo asks.

“Works great.” Alba lied. “Alba I don’t want us keeping secrets from one another.” “I miss our friendship, my friendship with you has been the best relationship I’ve ever had and I don’t want it to start with lies.” “So just tell me the truth because I know you’re lying to me about something’s.” Ricardo says. “I’m not working, I’ve been looking for a job, but it’s been kind of challenging with no sonogram jobs available.” “I’d have to move to Austin to get a job.” Alba explained. “Why didn’t you just come to me?” “You know I’d help you with anything.” Ricardo says. “I didn’t want to be a burden to you.” “You’re not, Alba you’re my friend.” Ricardo smiled.

**Chapter 12**

**“Special Friends”**

“Love is a verb.” “Love is doing, saying, showing.” “Never think just saying you love someone is enough.” -Unknown

Ricardo helped Alba get on at a hospital in McKinney, Texas and Alba was very grateful. Ricardo wanted Alba to be happy more than anything. Their friendship was back to normal but Ricardo wanted more and he felt Alba did too. She was just scared of getting her heart broken again. Alba was still dating Jayson; Ricardo hadn’t met him yet and Ricardo knew he wouldn’t like him.

Ricardo and Alba sat inside the Olive Garden in Frisco having pasta and salad just talking. “So when can I meet Jackson?” Ricardo asks. “His name is Jayson.” Alba corrected. “Oh Jayson.” Ricardo smiled. “You can meet him we’ll come over this weekend.” Alba smiled. “Ok.” “I’m curious; what does he look like?” “Like a guy.” “He’s Latin?” Ricardo asks. “No.” Alba answered. “African American.” “No Ricardo.” “Oh God don’t tell me he’s white.” “Caucasian is the term.” Alba smiled. “He’s white for real; I didn’t know you were into white guys.” Ricardo frowned. “I’ve dated a few in my younger days.”

“Wow you learn new things about people every day.” Ricardo smiled. “Eat your food.” Alba smiled. “So what does he look like; what’s your type of white guy?” Ricardo asks. “Come on stop.” Alba said. “There’s a white guy walking in; I’m guessing your type would be dark brown hair, blue eyes, quiet.” Alba thought, “Is he really reading my mind.” “Yes that would be my type Ricardo.” “I know you so well.” Ricardo smiled. “Whatever.” “He’s not one of those white boys that wears a chain on his pants is he?” “Of course not; that’s tacky.” Alba frowned. “I bet he drives a Nissan sports car huh.” “He actually does.” Alba said sitting up. Ricardo smiled and said, “That guy at the table dining alone; I’ve been describing him.” “I guess he’s your type.” Ricardo says.

Alba turned around and said, “That’s Jayson.” “You’re joking.” Ricardo frowned. “I’m actually not.” Alba got up from the table and walked over to Jayson, his head was down. Once he saw it was Alba he smiled. “Hey, I’m not following you; I just saw you sitting here.” “I’m dining with Ricardo.” Alba smiles. “Oh really, you can sit down.” Jayson invited. “Thank you; why are you dining alone?” “Because you had other plans and I didn’t want to eat microwave food tonight.” Ricardo finally got up and invited Jayson to their table. The three of them sat and had a pretty long conversation. Alba didn’t feel awkward everything was great both of them were complete gentlemen and they got alone. Alba loved this.

Ricardo pulled into Alba’s driveway and asks, “Could I come in?” “Of course you can.” Alba smiled. After Alba got comfy the two of them sat inside the family room watching television. Alba sat in front of him and he sat behind her holding her. “If someone saw us they’d swear we were an item.” Ricardo said holding Alba in his arms. Alba laid back and said, “I don’t care what others would say.” “Me either.” “So how are things at the hospital?” “Things are so great, thank you for getting me this job I owe you big.” Alba smiled.

Later the two of them drifted off to sleep. Alba laid on top of Ricardo with her head on his chest and he held onto her. Jayden walked inside the house around two in the morning. Jayden stood over them smiling and shaking his head. He went inside his Mom’s room and grabbed her blanket and covered them then he went upstairs. Ricardo opened his eyes around seven-thirty. “Alba.” Ricardo called. “Huh?” Alba said with her eyes still closed. “Alba wake up.” Alba opened her eyes then she sat up. “We fell asleep.” Ricardo said. “What time is it?” Alba asks. Ricardo looked at his watch and said, “Around seven-thirty.” “I better get home.” Ricardo said grabbing his shoes.

“You don’t have to go; we could have breakfast together, I’ll cook.” Alba smiled. “I need to brush my teeth, shower.” “You have all that stuff here; you can do that while I cook.” Alba smiled. “Ok.” While Ricardo enjoyed his meal Alba showered. Ricardo stood up when he heard the doorbell ring; it was Jayson at the door. Ricardo wondered should he answer the door. “Hey Alba’s in the shower.” Ricardo said. “Did you stay here?” Jayson asks. “Did you want to wait for Alba?” “No, I was in the area and I wanted to take her out for breakfast.” “I’ll just call her later.” Jayson said. “Ok.” Ricardo said then closed the door.

Alba walked out of her bedroom and asks, “Who was at the door?” “Your boyfriend.” “Jayson; this early?” “Yep, he wanted to take you out for breakfast.” Ricardo said. Alba stepped outside and called Jayson’s name. He turned around and walked up to her. “Hi I didn’t expect you this early.” “I wanted to surprise you that’s all.” Jayson said not looking at her. “What’s wrong?” “Why is Ricardo here; did he stay the night?” Jayson asks looking sad. “Yeah, it’s nothing like you’re thinking; we’re just friends.” “I know, I just wish I was the guy staying all-night with you that’s all.” “Would you like to come inside?” Alba asks. “I’d rather not, I’ll call you later.” Jayson said then gave her a hug. “Bye.”

Alba walked back inside and sat at the kitchen table with Ricardo. “This breakfast is delicious.” “Thank you.” “So where’s white boy?” Ricardo asks. “He didn’t want to come inside so I’m guessing he went home.” Alba responded. “Oh; so are you still coming over later?” “Yes, you’re cooking a Puerto Rican meal right?” “Of course I am.” “Stacey and Luis are joining us.” “I’ll be there and I’ll bring dessert.” Alba smiled. “Ok.”

Alba went over to Jayson’s house around two o’clock. He didn’t seem to be in the best mood. He was very distant and quiet. “What’s wrong?” Alba asks. Jayson didn’t say a word so Alba sat on the sofa beside him as he played a video game. “You never play video games when I’m over so I know something’s bothering you; would you tell me what’s wrong?” Alba asks. “It’s nothing.” Jayson frowned. Alba ran her fingers through his hair and that made him smile. “You like that don’t you.” Alba smiled. Jayson sat the controller on the table and began to kiss Alba.

Alba laid back on the couch and he laid on top of her still kissing her. “Alba I love you so much.” Jayson said. Alba stop kissing him and said, “What?” Jayson sat up and Alba sat up and Jayson said, “I’m in love with you Alba; I want all of you.” Alba was speechless she didn’t know what to say. “Say something, anything.” Jayson said staring at her. “I’m shocked right now.” Alba said with her head down. “I know that you’re kind of shocked Alba, it’s just I want more.” “I want you to be my girl; I don’t wanna have to share you anymore.” Jayson says. “You don’t share me now.” “I don’t mean like that; Ricardo gets most of your time and I want all your time.” “Jayson my children get most of my time.” Alba reminded.

“Well I know that, I want more time with you than Ricardo.” “Jayson he’s my best friend.” “I thought Stacey was.” “She is too.” “I feel like I’m competing with Ricardo; the pretty Latino guy.” “He’s not pretty.” “What’s so great about him?” “He’s my friend that’s what’s great about him.” Alba responded. “Are we going to start seeing each other more; I want a committed relationship.” “Jayson what’s wrong with what we’re doing right now?”

Jayson stood up and walked out of the living room. Alba didn’t move, she grabbed her cell out of her purse and saw Ricardo had texted her. By the time Alba was smiling Jayson was walking back inside the living room. “Is Ricardo the reason you don’t want to be involved in a serious relationship?” Jayson asks. “Ah no.” “You sound unsure of yourself.” “Jayson my life is complicated right now.” “I think dating is best for me right now.” Jayson sat beside Alba and said, “You’re breaking my heart now; we can take things slow.” “I promise you’ll be happy with me.” “I won’t take no for an answer.” “Jayson.” “Alba please give me a chance to make you happy.” “Ok.” Jayson smiled then he hugged her.

Alba finally got home and got dressed; once she walked out of her house Jayson was walking up with flowers and a gift bag. “Hey I didn’t expect you tonight.” “You look gorgeous; where are you headed?” Jayson asks. “Ricardo is cooking tonight.” “Cooking for you.” “For some friends too.” “You didn’t want to invite me?” Jayson asks. “It’s just mutual friends I’m sorry.” “You look so sexy going to his house.” “Oh I brought you something.” Jayson said handing her the flowers and gift bag. Alba smiled and said, “Thank you.”

Alba and Jayson walked inside her house. Alba put the flowers inside one of her vases and Jayson said, “Open the gift.” Alba opened the gift to reveal a diamond heart pendent necklace. “Jayson this is gorgeous, thank you.” Alba said giving him a hug. “Alba I’m serious I want you and only you.” “Each day I’ll prove it to you.” Jayson says. “I believe you; I have to go I haven’t picked up the dessert.” Alba smiled. “I understand.”

Alba stopped at the Cheesecake Factory and picked up dessert and then headed to Ricardo’s. “Alba where are you?” Ricardo asks. “I’m pulling in now.” Alba smiled. “I’ll meet you outside.” Ricardo said. “Ok.” Alba got out of the car not realizing that Jayson was watching from a distance. Ricardo walked up to her and gave her a hug. “You look beautiful Alba.” Alba smiled and said, “Thank you; you look handsome.” “I love to see you in purple.” “Thank you.” Ricardo smiled.

Ricardo took her hand and Alba said, “The dessert.” “I forgot about that; what did you get anyway?” “Your favorite.” Alba smiled opening the passenger door. “Red velvet.” Ricardo smiled. “Yes.” “You sure know how to make me happy Alba.” “You make me happy to Ricardo.” Ricardo reached and grabbed the bag then they headed inside holding hands. Shortly Stacey and Luis arrived and a few people that Ricardo worked with. Everyone were having a great time; Ricardo had appetizers sitting out for everyone to enjoy.

Alba stood inside the kitchen watching Ricardo finish cooking. “So what is this?” Alba asks. “Monfongo.” Ricardo explained. “Well I see the shrimp poking out.” Alba smiled. “Yes you can use any type of meat or seafood with this.” “I prefer seafood.” “This looks delicious.” “This is Pasteles; it’s like a tamale filled with green banana mass and pork.” Ricardo picked up one and said, “Taste it you’ll like it.” Alba took it out of his hand and tasted it. “Wow this is good.” Ricardo smiled and said, “I told you.”

Everyone were having a great time drinking and eating. Ricardo played lots of music and he was really enjoying everyone. Everyone began leaving around eleven. Luis and Stacey were the last to leave at eleven-twenty. Alba sat on the couch and took off her shoes. “Relax I’m putting the rest of the dishes inside the dish washer then we can watch that movie with Tyrese.” Ricardo said. “Ok; Ricardo do you have a shirt I can put on?” “I forgot my overnight bag.” “Sure, you know where they are.”

Alba hadn’t searched through Ricardo’s things in a while. He had so much new stuff. Alba loved his style, he was the perfect man for her but right now she was in denial she didn’t know what she wanted. Deep down she did but she was afraid. Alba saw that Ricardo still had pictures of her inside his bedroom that made her smile. After she finished snooping she got undress that’s when Ricardo walked inside. “I’m sorry I thought you were already dressed.” Ricardo said backing out of his room. “Sorry.” Alba said grabbing the pajama shirt. After Alba button up the shirt she said, “You can come back inside.” “I’m sorry I didn’t see anything.” Ricardo said. “I’ll let you get comfy I’ll be up front.” Alba said.

Once the movie started, Ricardo asks, “I thought you were bringing popcorn and candy.” “I did, the bags inside my trunk I’ll go grab it.” Alba said getting up. “I’ll get it you just have on a shirt.” “You’re shirtless.” Alba pointed. Ricardo smiled and said, “That’s because you have on my shirt.” “You never wear them.” “I’ll be back.” Ricardo said putting on his house shoes. Ricardo walked outside to Alba’s car and he saw a car parked with their park lights on and then they immediately turned them off. Ricardo grabbed what he came to get and went back inside. “Why doesn’t he have a shirt on?” Jayson asks himself.

An hour into the move Alba had fallen asleep. “Alba wake up.” “I’m not sleep.” Alba yawned. “You’re sleep, let’s just go to bed.” Ricardo said. “Ok, I’ll be in there in a minute.” Alba said not opening her eyes. Ricardo got up and put up the popcorn bowl and drinks and then he carried Alba to his bedroom. Jayson was still outside, once he saw the rest of the lights go out in Ricardo’s townhouse he drove off.

The next morning after Alba and Ricardo had gotten dressed and had breakfast, they were leaving his house together. “You should keep that it looks better on you.” Ricardo smiled. “I hope Cassandra doesn’t mind me wearing her clothes.” “She’ll never know.” Ricardo smiled. Alba and Ricardo met up with one of his friends that were throwing their teenage son a birthday party at Main Event.

**Chapter 13**

**“My Way or No Way”**

“Isn't it kind of silly to think that tearing someone else down builds you up?” -Sean Covey

Alba had just gotten off work and had the twins with her. Once she unlocked the door she saw Jayson pulling into her drive way. “Go inside and turn on the television, I’ll be inside in a little.” Alba said sitting her purse on the floor. Alba closed the door to her house and walked back outside. “Hi.” Alba smiled. “Hey, how are you?” Jayson asks. “I’m fine.” Jayson gave Alba a kiss and asks, “So could I come inside?” “Not right now, I just got off work.” Alba said. “You wouldn’t say that to Ricardo would you?” “Did I do something wrong?” Alba asks. “No, I haven’t met any of your children.” “I’m sure they love Ricardo don’t they?”

Then Ricardo pulled into Alba’s drive way right beside Jayson’s car. “I spoke too soon.” “Jayson please.” Alba said. “I’m leaving and I’m not coming back Alba.” “Jayson stop.” Alba said walking towards his car. Ricardo was getting out as soon as Jayson got to his car. Jayson backed out and Ricardo asks, “What’s wrong?” “Nothing.”

Two weeks later; Alba was packing the twins suitcase they were going out of the country with their Dad for an entire month. “Are you two going to miss me?” Alba asks. “Of course we’re going to miss you.” Leonardo smiled. “I’m going to miss both of you and make sure you call me ok.” “We’ll call every day.” Leanardo said. “Good.” Alba smiled. Then Alba heard the phone ring and said, “Finish gathering your toys I’ll be right back.” “Hello.” “Unlock the door.” Stacey said. Alba hung up the phone and headed to the door. “Hi girls.” Alba smiled. “Where’s Leonardo and Leanardo?” Giselle asks. “Inside their bedroom go on up.” Alba smiled. “Stay with me London.” Stacey said still holding her hand.

The next day; Alba went to the airport to see her boys off. “Call me as soon as you get there.” Alba said. “I’ll make sure I call you Alba.” Juan said. “Take care of them; I have all their medicine inside the carryon bag.” Alba reminded. “Alba I got it.” Juan said getting irritated. “And Juan make sure you use hand sanitizer when they touch stuff; I have like five bottles inside the bag.” “Alba stop, I got this.” “Ok.” Alba kissed her two boys again then she left the airport.

Alba got inside Ricardo’s car and Ricardo could tell she was about to cry. “Hey they’re in good hands.” Ricardo said holding her. “I know they’ll be gone away from me the entire month.” “Life’s’ going to be so boring.” “It will be but we just have to find something to do.” Alba wiped her eyes and said, “Sorry I’m ok.” “You sure?” “Yeah I’m ok.” “Your cells been ringing a lot since you got out of the car.” “Oh.” Alba got her phone out of her purse to see it was Jayson who was blowing up her phone. “It’s just Jayson.” “What’s with him?” Ricardo asks. “I don’t wanna talk about Jayson.” Ricardo touched Alba’s chin and he said, “Hey I’m gonna make you happy each day the twins are gone and even when they get back.” “Stop being sad ok.” Alba into Ricardo’s eyes and she said, “Ok.”

Once Ricardo pulled up at Alba’s he said, “I can stay if you need me to.” “No go out with the guys and have fun.” Alba said. “I’ll come over once I leave the bar; we can have movie night like we have every Friday and Saturday night.” “You don’t get tired of me?” Alba asks. “No, do you get tired of me?” “No I feel like I don’t see you enough.” Ricardo smiled. Alba smiled and said, “I’ll see you at ten or eleven; have fun.”

As soon as Alba walked inside Stacey called wanting to do some shopping since Luis had the girls. Stacey picked Alba up twenty minutes later. “Stacey this is what I needed.” Alba smiled putting her bags in the trunk of Stacey’s SUV.” “Retail therapy is the best therapy and people spend thousands paying therapist.” Stacey smiled. “Exactly.” Alba smiled.

Stacey sat at Alba’s house for an hour drinking wine and just talking. Alba looked at her cell and said, “He just keeps calling and texting.” “Who; Jayson.” “Yes, he’s irritating me; I think I’m gonna break up with him.” “You should have never even let him convince you into a relationship.” Stacey said. “You’re right; I do stupid things when I’m trying to get over a guy.” Alba admitted. Stacey laughed and said, “You sure do.” “Cheers to that.” Alba smiled.

Alba walked Stacey out, once Stacey was backing out, Jayson was pulling in. “Could I come inside?” Jayson asks. “Ah sure.” Alba said. Once the two of them got inside Jayson began kissing Alba. The kiss was nice but he was doing too much and it irritated Alba. “Jayson stop.” Alba frowned. “What did I do wrong?” “Nothing Jayson, this isn’t working.” “Alba are you serious?” Jayson asks surprised. “I just think things with us are going too fast and I just don’t need the stress of a relationship.” Alba admitted. “A relationship with me is stressful?” “Jayson I didn’t mean it like that.” Alba said. “If you’d just stay away from Ricardo you wouldn’t feel like this about me.” “We like each other so much and you’re giving up because of him.” “Ricardo has nothing to do with this.” “Jayson I’m sorry.”

Jayson walked out of the house pissed and Alba didn’t go after him, it was best to let him just leave and Alba closed and locked her door. Ricardo pulled into Alba’s drive way and Jayson was still sitting inside his car. Ricardo got out of his car and Jayson got out of his car. “Hey I didn’t see you there.” Ricardo smiled. “Are you sleeping with Alba?” Jayson asks. “Are you talking to me?” Ricardo asks. “You’re the only one out here.” Ricardo smiled and said, “No I’m not.”

Ricardo walked up to Alba’s door about to knock when Jayson said something else to Ricardo. “What did you say to me?” Ricardo asks. “I told you to go back to your country we don’t need you here.” Jayson said. “I’m from Puerto Rico; same damn country.” Ricardo frowned. “Go back there.” Jayson smarted off again. Ricardo starts walking towards Jayson and he said, “Look I don’t know what you’re smoking.” “Tonight is not the night to screw with me.” “Go home and sleep it off.” Jayson walked up to Ricardo and said, “What the hell are you gonna do?” “Are you serious; you got two seconds to back the hell up.” Ricardo threatened.

Jayson didn’t move that’s when the fight began. Alba was turning off the lights in her house downstairs when she heard some noise. “What is that?” Alba said out loud. Alba opened the door to see Jayson and Ricardo fighting. “Ricardo, Jayson stop!” Alba yelled. Alba finally broke the two of them up, Jayson was holding his nose. “I told you to back the hell up!” Ricardo yelled. “What is going on out here; why are you two fighting?” Alba asks. “This idiot’s on something I don’t know, he came at me and I kicked his lil racist ass.” Ricardo said. “Jayson could you leave.” Alba said. “You haven’t even heard my part of the story.” “You were supposed to be gone a long time ago.” Alba said and followed Ricardo inside her house.

“Ricardo I’m sorry.” Alba said cleaning the blood off his face. “I’m fine Alba, I’m just pissed.” “I don’t like to get pissed off like that.” Ricardo stood up. Alba stood up and said, “Do you want something to drink?” “No, I just want to kick his fucking ass again.” “I swear if you hadn’t come out when you had I was going to stomp his ass into the ground.” Alba had never seen Ricardo so angry and she didn’t like seeing that part of him. He was so angry he couldn’t sit down. “I’m sorry that happened.” Alba said touching his arm. “I’m sorry you had to see me this way.” Ricardo said sitting on the floor. Alba went inside the kitchen and grabbed him a bottle of water. He drank the water and said, “I could use one more.” Alba smiled and said, “Ok whatever you want.”

Summer had come and gone; Alba and Ricardo were in North Carolina with Jayden he was attending Duke University. “This is a great university I’m jealous.” Ricardo smiled. “I know.” Jayden smiled. Once they got Jayden settled Alba and Ricardo went back to their hotel room to rest. “There is another bed to sleep in.” Alba pointed. “We sleep better together.” Ricardo smiled. “True but stay on your side of the bed.” Alba smiled.

Alba had fallen asleep, but Ricardo was lying next to her staring at the ceiling. Alba suddenly awakened and Ricardo asks, “What’s wrong?” Alba wiped her eyes and said, “Nothing.” “You look like you saw a ghost.” “It’s just that dream I keep having.” “About the robbery?” Ricardo asks. “Yeah.” “I thought the dreams had stopped.” “I lied every other night I have this dream; he’s coming at me.” “Alba he’s dead he can’t hurt you.” “What about the guy that was with him, he’s not dead.” “He didn’t get a long sentence.” Ricardo touched the side of her face and said, “No one’s going to hurt you ok; I want let them.”

**Chapter 14**

**“Our Bond”**

“They say when a man loves a woman, she becomes his weakness and when a woman loves a man, he becomes her strength.” “This is called an exchange of power.” “Remember that.” -Unknown

“Alba loves the holidays; I have to do something special for her.” Ricardo said. “What do you have in mind?” Stacey asks. “Remember how her birthday went last year; she’s still dreaming about that day and I want her to have better memories of that day.” Ricardo says. “Poor Alba, I didn’t think the dreams were still haunting her.” “Alba’s strong, she just really needs me and I need her.” Stacey smiled and asks, “So what are you trying to tell me?” “I’m gonna pop the question on her birthday.” “I don’t want her to always think about the robbery I want her to be more focused on the beginning of our life together.” Ricardo says. “That’s so sweet.”

Ricardo had been looking for the perfect diamond ring for Alba. He knew that the ring didn’t matter to her it was the commitment, but he wanted her to have the perfect ring because she’d have to wear it for the rest of her life. Ricardo made it home and Alba was inside the kitchen fixing her a sandwich. “Where have you been; I’ve been here over an hour.” “Doing a little shopping.” Ricardo smiled. Alba and Ricardo walked out of the kitchen and Alba said, “Something better be in those bags for me.” “There’s nothing for you.” Ricardo smiled. “Oh your gifts are already gift wrapped; how fancy.” “I don’t wrap presents; I buy them and I pay someone to wrap them.” Ricardo said. “I could have wrapped them for you.” Alba winked. “Then you’d know what I brought you.”

This weekend if you’re not busy I wanted to see would you like to help out at the homeless shelter; fixing plates for the homeless.” “You don’t have to ask, I would love to do that.” Alba smiled. “See that’s why you’re my girl; what man wouldn’t want you as his wife.” Ricardo says. Alba was speechless, she just smiled at him. Then Ricardo changed the subject talking about ice skating.

“I’ve never been ice skating and I don’t think I ever will.” “Alba it’s fun.” “I can barely skate on wheels.” “What are we doing tonight?” Ricardo asks. “It’s cold out let’s stay inside.” “We always go out in the winter.” “To parties not outside.” Alba reminded. “Yeah Dr. Anderson is having a party at his house next weekend and then Dr. Minoi is having a party the next weekend.” “Friday or Saturday?” Alba asks. “Both Friday night, formal wear.” “Are we wearing the same colors?” “I’d like if we color coordinated.” Ricardo smiled.

Friday after work Alba met Stacey at Stacey’s house. The two of them sat inside the kitchen while Stacey fixed them a pizza. “I wish Ricardo was mine.” Alba said. Stacey turned around and asks, “Why can’t he be yours?” “I don’t know maybe because he’s my friend and a relationship will mess up the friendship.” “Not necessary; Ricardo seems to be an honorable guy.” “He probably loves you just as much as you love him.” “You two do look good together.” Stacey smiled. “I love him Stacey; sometimes I sit next to him and imagine him kissing me over and over again.” “He’s such a great kisser.” Alba smiled.

Friday night; Ricardo and Alba were having a great time at Dr. Anderson’s Christmas party that was at his home. “This house is so fabulous; I could live in a house like this.” Alba smiled. “I bet you could.” Ricardo said taking her hand. “Everyone thinks we’re a couple.” Alba whispered. “Tonight we are and tomorrow we’ll go back to being friends again.” “I better not catch that lady in red flirting with you again if we’re a couple tonight.” Alba teased. “I’ll run her off next time she comes around.” Ricardo smiled.

Around midnight; Ricardo and Alba were leaving. “I think I drank too much.” “You did.” Ricardo smiled. They finally made it to Ricardo’s house and Alba was in a cheery mood. Ricardo liked seeing her happy, but he had never seen her so drunk. Alba took off her clothes down to her panties and came on to him. Ricardo was so turned on. He wanted to take her and make love to her but he knew tonight wasn’t the time for that; she’d regret it in the morning.

“What’s wrong you don’t want me?” Alba asks. “Alba you’re drunk.” “I know what I want Ricardo, I want you.” “I need you.” Ricardo had to admit he liked this Alba but he loved the sober Alba more. “We can’t have sex; you gotta sleep this off.” Ricardo smiled. Once Ricardo made her calm down, he helped her put on the pajama shirt and made her drink some coffee. “This is so gross.” Alba frowned. “I know but it’ll help you sober up, so drink it.” Ricardo said holding the coffee mug.

The rest of the night Ricardo and Alba laid on the couch and cuddled. “I love you Ricardo.” “I love you too.” Ricardo smiled and gave her a kiss on the back of her neck. Later the two of them drifted off to sleep.

The next morning Alba had awakened she was lying in Ricardo’s bed alone. She sat up that’s when Ricardo walked in with breakfast on a tray. “I have a horrible headache.” Ricardo smiled and said, “Good morning.” “What happened last night?” “You got a little drunk off of the punch.” “I got you some Tylenol and food.” “Thank you.” Alba smiled. Ricardo sat on the bed as she ate her breakfast. “I look horrible don’t I?” Alba asks. “No, you’re perfect.” “I bet you tell all the girls that.” “No just you.” Ricardo smiled. Alba blushed and continued to eat.

After Alba ate her breakfast she showered and washed her hair. She still felt a little sick and she wasn’t in the mood to go anywhere. “Would you be upset if I stayed inside today?” “I still feel sick.” “I understand; I have a few errands I have to run.” “Will you be ok alone?” Ricardo asks. “Of course I will, I’m going back to sleep.” “Ok, I shouldn’t be gone no longer than two or three hours.” “Ok, have fun.”

A week later; Alba got up early to finish her Christmas shopping. Alba heard her cell ringing so she picked it up on the passenger seat. “Hello.” “What are you doing?” Stacey asks. “Headed to the golf store to find Ricardo a Taylor Made golf club, iron whatever they call this thing.” Alba said. “I’m out and by myself; where is the store?” “The PGA Tour Store it’s over on Preston, in Frisco, over by World Market.” “I know exactly where you’re talking about, I’ll meet you there.” “Ok great, I’ll probably already be inside when you get here because I’m turning in right now.” Alba says. “Ok.”

Alba walked inside the store, they had everything. “May I help you?” A guy in the store asks. “Yes, I’m looking for some Taylor Made irons for an advanced golf player.” Alba smiled. “Well you came to the right place, let’s walk over here.” The guy pointed. Alba followed. She was so surprised how many options they had. “Wow I never knew that golf irons were so expensive.” “But it’s money worth spending.” The guy smiled. “That’s true Ricardo’s worth it.” Alba smiled. “Ah could I see some complete sets?” “Of course you can.”

Once Alba was leaving out of the store Stacey was walking inside. “You’re finished I don’t see any golf clubs.” “I had to get them special ordered.” Alba said. “Ok; so let’s go have some lunch?” Stacey suggested. “Gloria’s.” Alba smiled. “Gloria’s.” Stacey and Alba were finally seated; it was kind of crowded inside. “Ricardo isn’t that your girl over there.” Maurice pointed. “Yeah that’s her.” Ricardo smiled. “You’re not going to go over and speak?” “I have my way of speaking to her without walking to her table.” “Oh.”

After Alba and Stacey ordered their food; Ricardo signaled their server. “The ladies at the table you were just waiting on, when their finish dining could you bring the ticket to me so I can pay for whatever their having.” “Then you can take the ticket over to them.” Ricardo smiled. “I sure will.” “Thank you and don’t tell them.” “You’re slick.” Maurice smiled. “Alba will know it’s me I’m the only man who does this to her.”

Alba and Stacey were enjoying themselves eating and drinking Margaritas. “I needed this.” Alba smiled. “Me too; it’s so nice to get away from the girls.” Stacey smiled. “You can say that again.” Alba pulled out her cell and said, “No missed calls or texts; I can’t believe Ricardo hasn’t called me back.” “Call him.” “I called him earlier but he didn’t pick up.” “He’s probably busy; you know Ricardo doesn’t avoid you.” Stacey said. “I know, I just get worried that I’m gonna lose him because.” “Because what?” “Nothing.” Alba said. “You can tell me.” Stacey said.

Once the waiter passed by them, Stacey stopped him and said, “Could we get our ticket?” “Sure, I’ll bring it right back.” The waiter walked back over to their table a couple minutes later and handed Alba the ticket. Alba opened the ticket holder then she began to smile. “What is it?” Stacey asks. “Someone paid our entire ticket.” “Who?” “Ricardo, he’s here somewhere.” Alba smiled getting up. After Alba spoke with the server he pointed Ricardo out and Alba went to him.

Alba sat at the bar next to him and said, “Thank you.” Then she gave him a quick kiss on the lips and Ricardo smiled then said, “I’m always thinking about you.” “Thank you for paying for our food and drinks.” “You’re welcome beautiful.” “Ah who are you here with?” Alba asks. “Maurice, he’s in the restroom.” “Ok.” “Would you like to ride somewhere with me?” Ricardo asks. “My car is parked outside.” “We can always come back to get it.” “Sure.”

Once they all were outside they all went their separate ways. “Stacey we’ll see you later.” Alba said. “You two enjoy the rest of the day.” Stacey smiled. “You too and tell Luis to be ready at five in the morning.” Ricardo said. “He’ll be ready.” “Take care.” Ricardo said then closed Stacey’s car door.

Alba sat at Stacey’s house on Christmas Eve helping her finish wrapping Christmas presents. “I can’t believe Ricardo’s gift isn’t here.” “I was so pissed when they said they were on back order and will be shipped out on the 26th.” Alba frowned. “That sucks.” “Exactly, I tried everywhere no one has the irons in stock.” “At least you tried.” “So what did you get Luis?” Alba asks. “Clothes and cologne.” “That’s always a great gift.” “Since Ricardo’s gift didn’t come I brought him Dolce & Gabbana The One and a sweater.” “That was sweet of you.” “I dished out over a thousand dollars for those golf clubs.” “You really love him don’t you?” Stacey asks. “I do; I’m gonna tell him the truth, I don’t want any other man in my life just him.” “We make sense together.” Alba smiles. “That’s true.”

Christmas had come and gone; Ricardo had finally found the ring that he was giving Alba on her birthday and Alba had no idea. Every day since Christmas Alba had planned on confessing her true feelings but she always chickened out. Alba rehearsed the words in her head every single day more even in her sleep. She was positive everything would work out then there was this one doubt she had if he said, “Let’s just be friends.” She knew those words would break her heart into and that would hurt more than being dumped.

December 27th; Alba was home taking down the Christmas decorations inside the house and once she finished she went outside to get the lights off the house when she slipped off the ladder hitting the ground. Alba didn’t wake up, she just laid there on the wet ground. Ricardo pulled up a couple minutes later. He searched the house for Alba not seeing her, so he stepped outside and that’s when he spotted her on the side of the house unconscious. He put her inside his car and took her to the emergency room.

Ricardo finally got Alba back home inside her bedroom relaxing. “At least you didn’t break any bones.” Ricardo said. “I’m hurting so bad.” Alba said. “Lie on your stomach and I’ll massage your back and after you eat you can have another pain pill.” Ricardo said. “Ok.” Ricardo enjoyed massaging Alba’s back because she made these moaning sounds that turned him on. Ricardo had to control his excitement and Alba had to do the same.

Jayden had made it home with a few of his friends. “What’s that man?” Jayden’s friend wearing the black coat asks. “Sounds like my Mom.” Jayden smiled. Jayden knocked on his Mom’s bedroom door and said, “What’s going on in here; could I come inside?” “Come in.” Ricardo smiled. “Yawl have a seat I’ll be right back.” Jayden smiled. Jayden walked inside to see Ricardo massaging his Mom’s back.

“Ah do you know what my Mom sounds like?” Jayden asks. Ricardo sat on the bed and asks, “What does she sound like?” “It sounds like you two are having sex.” Jayden smiled. “Your Mom fell off the ladder and hurt her back.” Ricardo explained. “Oh, hope you feel better.” “Thank you Jayden.” Alba said still not moving. “Do you feel better?” “No.” Alba said. “Mom could I drive your car.” “Jayden you have a car.” “Come on you never let me drive the Mercedes.” “Drive your Maxima.” Alba responded. “Mom; Stacey let me drive her Infiniti a few times, but you never let me in your car.” “I’m not Stacey.” Alba said.

“I’ll make a deal with you.” Ricardo said. “I’m listening.” Jayden smiled. “How about you take my car for an hour, but you have to pick up our food at The Cheesecake Factory and bring it back here.” “Ricardo that’s cutting in on my driving time.” Jayden said. “Two hours and have my car back.” Ricardo said handing him his credit card and car keys. “Cool.” Jayden said then walked out of the bedroom.

“Ricardo I need my meds this is not working.” Alba complained. “Come on get on the floor.” Ricardo said. Alba sat up slowly and said, “The floor.” “Yes the floor.” Ricardo smiled. So Alba did what he said. “You’re sitting on me.” Alba frowned. “Alba relax I know what I’m doing; close your eyes.” “You’re bossy.” “I want you to feel better.” Alba closed her eyes and relaxed and she began to feel a whole lot better. It felt so good having Ricardo’s hands all over her body and he was sitting on her butt. Alba just knew he enjoyed that.

December 31st; Alba received a call from the store that the golf clubs were in, but she missed the call. They left a message on her answering machine at home since her cells voice mail box was full. “Ricardo I know you’re probably planning some extra special for me tonight, let’s just stay inside.” Alba suggested. “No, today is a special day and I want you to feel special.” Ricardo smiled. “I’d rather stay in and watch movies.” “We do that all the time; Decembers our month.” Ricardo reminded. “I know.” “Next year we’ll stay in ok.” “Ok; what time?” Alba asks. “Around ten o’clock.” “I’ll see you then.” Alba smiled.

Once Alba got home she checked her answering machine to find out Ricardo’s gift was in. She left back out to go pick it up. Once Alba pulled into her driveway she saw Jayson’s car. “Is he really at my house?” Alba asks herself. Alba pulled into her garage then walked out of it to see what he wanted. “Hey it’s been awhile.” Jayson smiled. “Hi; I’m surprised to see you here.” “Alba I came to see you one last time I’m moving back to Louisiana.” “Oh, I hope you’re not moving because of me.” Alba said. Jayson smiled and said, “You’re part of the reason and the other part is I found a better job in Louisiana so I think it would be better for me to be where most of my family and friends are.” “Well that’s good news, congratulations.” Alba smiled. Jayson gave her a hug then he left.

Alba took a nap and awakened around eight-thirty and began getting dressed. After she had done her makeup and hair she began getting dressed. Alba wore a black leather studded band dress from Bebe and a silver cuff bracelet. Alba grabbed her cream colored wool Michael Kors trench coat and walked out of the house. Alba finally made it to Ricardo’s house and rang the doorbell, realizing she forgot his gift inside her trunk.

Ricardo opened the door; he had a big smile on his face. “I forgot your gift in my car, sorry.” Alba smiled. Ricardo grabbed her hand and said, “Your hairs straight.” “Just doing something different.” “I like it; it looks beautiful on you.” Ricardo smiled. “Thank you.” Alba blushed and then she walked away. Ricardo grabbed her hand again and said, “You didn’t have to buy me anything for New Year’s.” “It’s your Christmas gift.” “But you brought me a Christmas gift.” “I did, but what I wanted to get you didn’t come in on time.” “I’ll be right back so turn around; I want you to be surprised.” “Ok.” Alba finally popped her trunk, grabbed the set of irons, and walked back to the house.

“You can turn around now.” Alba smiled. Ricardo turned around to be stunned. “Alba you brought me the Taylor Made Tour set; you spent a lot of money on this.” “Because you’re special to me.” Alba smiled. “You know you didn’t have to do this.” “I know.” “Thank you.” Ricardo said hugging her and then Alba handed him the irons. Ricardo sat them on the floor and hugged her again and tighter. Alba knew he loved the gift by his reaction.

Alba pulled away and said, “You’re welcome you deserve them.” “Let’s get inside it’s cold out here.” Ricardo closed and locked the door then Alba said, “Wow it’s so romantic inside, candles everywhere, it smells so amazing in here.” I thought we were going out.” Alba says. “We can do whatever you want to do; the ball is in your court, but before we do whatever it is that you want I have to say something to you.” Ricardo says. “Ok.”

Ricardo pressed play on his IPod that was sitting on the IPod dock. Alba began to smile because he was playing Leona Lewis. Ricardo stood in front of Alba and got on one knee. Alba felt kind of confused; she wondered why he was on one knee. “You don’t have to get on one knee to tell me something.” Alba said. “I do Alba.” “Get up.” Alba said trying to pull him up. “Alba please, let me do this.” “I have to do this now.” Ricardo said. “I’m sorry.” “I’m going to make this quick and simple ok.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.”

Ricardo reached inside his pocket, he opened the ring box and held it up to her and said, “Happy Birthday Alba.” “I love you so much and you’ve always been the woman for me.” “Alba will you be my wife forever?” Alba could feel herself getting emotional, her eyes filled with tears, but they were happy tears. Alba stared into Ricardo’s eyes and she smiled at him, he smiles back. “We’re friends Ricardo; we’ve never dated.” “Why would you want me to be your wife?” Alba asks. “My Mama’ told me a long time ago the best loves are friends first and plus I love you with all my heart.” “Alba I’m in love with you; what do you say?” Ricardo smiled. “I’ll marry you Ricardo where ever and whenever.” Alba smiled.

Ricardo stood up and put the ring on her finger. Ricardo touched her hair and Alba said, “I love you so much Ricardo.” Ricardo held the sides of her face and looked into her green eyes and said, “I know you do; I love you too baby.” “I’m always going to make you happy.” Ricardo smiled. “I’m going to make you happy too forever.” Alba smiled.

**Chapter 15**

**“The Offer”**

“When I saw you, I fell in love, and you smiled because you knew.” -Arrigo Boito

“My sister is buying my townhouse so that’s something we don’t have to deal with.” “We just have to get your house sold and our house built.” “I’ll meet with the builders around noon; will you join me?” Ricardo asks. “Of course.” Alba said putting clothes inside a box. “What time does Cassandra’s flight arrive?” Alba asks. “Five are you still riding with me to the airport?” “Of course.” “Come sit down, you’ve been doing a lot this morning.” Ricardo said.

Alba sat beside Ricardo and he said, “I’m glad that you don’t want a long engagement. “We’ll be married tomorrow and began our happy life together.” Alba smiled and said, “Valentine’s Day, it’s going to be great.” Ricardo grabbed Alba’s hand and said, “I’m glad we’re waiting until marriage to have sex.” “I never thought I’d say that.” Ricardo smiled. Alba blushed and said, “I wouldn’t make you wait too long, I love you.” Ricardo leaned over and kissed her on the lips and said, “I can’t wait until the wedding night.” “It’s going to be a magical moment.” Alba blushed.

Alba and Cassandra finally came face to face, this time it was nothing but smiles and hugs. “Allie I’m so sorry for deceiving you I thought you were Gloria.” Cassandra smiled. “It’s Alba, Cassandra.” Ricardo said. “All is forgiven.” Alba smiled. “Thank you Allie, I mean Alba.” “I don’t know why I continue to call you that.” “Allie’s a pretty name too.” Cassandra smiled. “Let’s get your bags and get home.” Ricardo smiled grabbing Alba’s hand.

Valentine’s Day morning Ricardo left early morning to pick up more family members from the airport. “Mama’ you’re going to love Alba.” “When can I see her?” “Not until the wedding, I’m sorry.” Ricardo smiled. “I should meet her before the vows.” Flavia said. “Mama’ she’s everything that you’re going to want in a daughter in law trust me.” “She’s an amazing, strong woman; like you.” Ricardo smiles. “I trust your judgment hija (son).

Later on that day; Stacey was over to Alba’s while she was getting dressed. “Are you nervous?” Stacey asks. “It’s just butterflies.” Alba smiled. “Your dress is beautiful.” “Thank you; I always wanted to get married in pink.” “I found this dress by mistake in a Brides Magazine.” “Ricardo has a friend that has a friend that tracked this dress down for me.” “This dress came out in 2014 so I got it really cheap.” Alba smiled. “It’s going to look so beautiful on you.” “Thank you Stacey; I hope my hair stays tamed today.” “Ricardo really wants my hair in its curly state; I just hope the wind behaves itself while I step outside.” Alba smiled. “Everything will be perfect.” Stacey smiled.

Alba’s hair, makeup, and nails were finally done; so she and Stacey left her house to head to the wedding venue. “Turn left the house is right there.” Alba pointed. “Damn.” Stacey said. “I told you his house was huge, it’s a mansion.” Alba smiled. “It sure is.” “Pull on inside the garage; they’re expecting us.” “Ok.” “What’s this doctor’s name?” “Dr. Anderson, I forgot his first name.” Alba said.

Alba finally got dressed; she put on a light pink mermaid gown with a sweet heart neckline that had a silver detail sparkle around the waist. Her hair hung down in its curly state, hanging past her shoulders. She wore a silver necklace and platinum diamond studs in her ears. Stacey smiled and said, “You look amazing Alba; you look like a princess.” “I feel like one.” Alba smiled. Stacey looked out the door and said, “Looks like all the guest are finally here.” “Good.” Alba smiled. “So are you ready for the wedding night?” Bridget asks. “Of course I am; we’re not going out of town but anywhere in this world making love to him is going to be incredible.” Alba smiled. “I can’t believe you two really waited I’m proud Ricardo.” “I knew you could hold out.” Stacey smiled. “I know huh.” Alba smiled. “I couldn’t have done it.” Bridget smiles. “

The wedding began at six o’clock; Ricardo looked handsome standing at the alter waiting on his bride. Ricardo wore a dark grey tux by Calvin Klein with a grey tie and vest. When Alba stepped out Ricardo was so taken by how beautiful she looked, tears began falling from his eyes. Alba stood in front of him with a smile on her face and he smiled back. “This is the best day of my life Alba.” “Mine too.” Alba smiled.

After the wedding; everyone mingled and enjoyed the catered food until eleven o’clock. Ricardo and Alba changed clothes and then the two of them left. Inside the limo Ricardo couldn’t keep his hands off of Alba. He wanted to make love to her now and she could tell. “Are you ok?” Alba asks. “I’m ok, just a little too excited.” Ricardo smiled. “We’ll be at the hotel in about thirty minutes.” Alba smiled. Ricardo thought, “More like fourteen hours.” “Alba I promise you our life together is going to be every great thing that you have imagined.” “I’m going to be the man that you always fight for.” “The man you will always love even when you’re angry with me.” Ricardo smiles. “I believe you.” Alba said taking his hand. “Before I forget I have a present for you.” Ricardo said. Alba smiled and said, “I have a present for you.”

Ricardo handed Alba the gift it was wrapped in pink paper with a huge purple ribbon. “It’s so beautifully wrapped I don’t want to rip it open.” “You better; that’s part of the honeymoon celebration.” Ricardo smiled. Alba opened the present to see Ricardo had brought her three pieces of lingerie and Candy perfume by Prada. “Thank you so much baby.” Alba said then she kissed him.

“So are you ready for my present?” Alba asks. Ricardo smiled and said, “Of course I am.” Alba passed Ricardo a gift wrapped in black paper with a grey ribbon. “This is fancy.” Ricardo smiled. “I’m a fancy girl.” Alba smiled. Ricardo opened the gift and he said, “A book.” One of his eyebrows moved up and Alba said, Open it, I promise it will be the best book you’ve ever looked inside.” Ricardo opened the first page and said, “This is my wife?” “Yes that’s me.” “Alba you look so sexy in that lingerie.” “This book is for your eyes only.” Alba smiled. “The person who took these pictures was it male or female?” Alba began to laugh and she said, “Female.” Ricardo enjoyed his twenty page spread of pics of Alba wearing nothing but lingerie. “Alba this is a gift I will cherish for the rest of my life.” “I’m glad.”

Alba began to notice the chauffer was going the wrong way. “Hey stop staring out the window and pay attention to me.” Ricardo smiled. “I’m sorry.” “Don’t be sorry.” Ricardo said touching her cheek. “I could stare at you forever; I get so lost in your eyes.” “Ricardo I never thought I could feel this way again.” “You are so very special to me.” Alba says. Ricardo smiles at her and he said, “I’ve never loved a woman the way I love you.” “You and your children who are mine now make me so happy.” “You all make me a better man Alba.” “Thanks for coming into my life and telling me how it is.” Ricardo says. “You’re welcome baby.”

The limo pulled up at the airport and Alba asks, “What is this; we’re at the airport.” “Vacation time.” Ricardo smiled. “Vacation; I didn’t tell my job I was vacationing.” “I told your job; we are spending ten days of unbelievable fun in Fiji.” Alba kissed Ricardo and hugged him tight. “You’re my prince charming.” “And you’re my princess and when I give you our daughter you’ll be my queen.” Ricardo smiled rubbing her cheek. “And you’ll be my king.” Alba smiled.

The long flight was getting to Ricardo; he continued to think about the book Alba had given him. He wanted Alba like right now. Alba could tell her husband was sort of frustrated. “What’s wrong?” Alba whispered. “You don’t wanna know.” Ricardo smiled. “I’m your wife now and I do wanna know.” “I wish we were having sex now; I’m hard as a rock.” Alba blushed and felt his man hood through his jeans and she said, “You are.” “I’ll be fine.” Ricardo smiled. Alba took her covers and covered their laps; it was dark on the plane so no one would even notice what they were up to. “Hey you have to promise to be quiet when I do this.” Alba smiled. “You’re really gonna do that on the plane?” “If you’ll be quiet, just relax.” “Ok.”

When Ricardo and Alba finally made it to Fiji the two had so much pined up sexual tension. They wanted each other so badly. Ricardo showered in one bathroom and Alba showered in the other. Alba put on the white lace number that Ricardo had brought her and when he saw her in the lingerie he was so mesmerized. “You are worth the wait Alba.” Alba smiled at her husband and moved closer putting her arms around his neck. “All-night long Alba, I want you all-night long.”

Then the two of them began to kiss and Alba began touch his chest; his abs were amazing. Ricardo smiled and asks, “Are you ready?” “Yes.” Ricardo began rubbing on Alba’s back working his hands down to her butt. “You feel like silk.” Ricardo whispered in her ear. Ricardo began to undress Alba slowly he wanted to savory every moment. Once he got her completely naked he stared at her. Her body was a master piece that he wanted to be a part of. Ricardo smiled touching her stomach then he said, “You’re so sexy.”

Ricardo guided her to the bed and Alba laid on her back. Ricardo began to touch her some more and he could feel Alba about to lose control and he too was about to explode. “Stay calm.” Ricardo whispered. “I’m trying to.” Alba smiled nervously. Once Ricardo entered her vagina Alba felt her body explode and it was such an amazing feeling. It had been so long since she had been with a man. Ricardo could tell and she felt so amazing and Ricardo was going to be greedy tonight. He wanted to tease her, spoil her and make her want every bit of him. Ricardo continued to whisper in Alba’s ear. His warm breathe against her neck turned her on even more. Ricardo touched her hair and ran his fingers through it. “I’m gonna enjoy you all-night Alba.” Alba blushed and said nothing. Alba and Ricardo had a magical night the two of them made love to one another and it was incredible.”

Two years later; things were going great between Ricardo and Alba. Their life was perfect and the two of them hoped it would stay that way. Alba walked inside the kitchen with mail in her hand. Ricardo was already inside the kitchen fixing himself a sandwich. “I put your packages in your office.” Alba said sitting at the bar.” “Thank you baby; want some?” Ricardo asks. “No thank you.” Alba said opening a credit card bill. “Did you spend five hundred dollars at the golf store?” Ricardo sat beside Alba and said, “Yeah; something wrong?” “No just checking.” “Honey I work Saturday so I won’t be able to have breakfast with you.” Alba said. “You too; we’ll be at one of those malls doing breast screenings and answering questions.” Ricardo explained. “I think we’ll be at the same event.” Alba smiled. “If we are don’t forget to stop by and kiss your husband.” “I won’t.”

Saturday; since Ricardo and Alba were at the same mall in McKinney, they decided to ride together. Ricardo liked being able to see his wife all day. Every time she looked his way he’d wink his eye at her and she’d blow him a kiss. Alba’s group finished up early so Alba decided to go give her husband a hand. “Thank you for coming over to help.” Ricardo said. “No problem Dr. Cruz.” Alba smiled.

For the next three Saturdays Ricardo and Alba were doing volunteer work for the hospital. Ricardo was happy that he got to work with his wife. He was really enjoying being around her all the time and he wondered how she felt about it. Ricardo and Alba laid on the couch watching television. “I enjoyed working with you today.” Ricardo said then kissed the back of her neck.” Alba smiled and said, “Me too.” “I wish we could work together every day; what do you think about that?” “That would be great.” Alba responded. “Baby I’m serious; I have an opening at my clinic and I was hoping that you’d come join the team.” Ricardo said sitting up.

Alba sat up and asks, “Are you serious?” “Yes, I’d pay you more than what your job is paying you.” “Ricardo I don’t want you to get tired of seeing me.” “Alba I know this is going to sound like I’m trying to smoother you but I’m not.” “I enjoy being around you every second of the day; I can’t help how I feel.” “We work well together and I wish you’d think about my offer before you just turn me down.” “Ricardo I’ll think about your offer, I just don’t want us getting tired of one another.” “I want you to always look at me the way you look at me after you haven’t seen me for ten hours.” Alba says. “I’ll always look at you like that.” “I never get tired of seeing you baby; honestly.” “I need a week to think this through and if I agree, I have to give my job a two week notice.” Alba says. “Exactly, I understand.” Ricardo smiled then gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Saturday night; Stacey was over, she and Alba were inside the kitchen eating chips and guacamole and drinking wine. “I think it’s sweet.” Stacey smiled. “And I knew you’d say that.” “I just don’t want Ricardo to regret hiring me.” “What if we don’t get alone?” “Alba you two are best friends; I don’t see why it wouldn’t work.” “You two love each other and he wants this; at least give it a try and if it doesn’t work you can always find another job.” Stacey says. “I hate job hunting and interviews.” Alba said picking up her glass of wine.

Monday morning Ricardo and Alba were out the door headed their separate ways to work. “Hey I won’t be home until around seven; I have a surgery.” Ricardo said. “Ok, hey you forgot your latte.” Alba said handing him his travel mug. Ricardo took it out of her hand and said, “Extra whip cream?” Alba smiled and said, “Of course.” Then he gave her a kiss. “I love you.” Ricardo smiled. “I love you too; I’ll have dinner ready when you get home.” Alba smiled. “Thank you.” “Bye now.” Alba said walking to her car.

On the way home after work, Alba picked up the twins cupcakes for school and dropped them off at their Dad’s house. “Hi Isobel.” Alba said walking inside the housbghve. “Hi; how are you?” Isobel smiled. “I’m fine; is Juan home?” “No he just ran to the store.” “Well I brought the twins cupcakes for tomorrow.” “Are they here?” Alba asks. “No they went with him.” Isobel responded. “Well I better get home.” Alba said walking to the door. “See you later.” Isobel smiled. “Bye.” Alba said opening the door.

After Alba finished cooking, she fell asleep on the couch to awaken to a kiss from her husband. Alba sat up and asks, “When did you get home?” “I’ve been here awhile, you wouldn’t wake up.” Ricardo said sitting beside her. “Sorry.” “Long day at work?” “You can say that.” Ricardo put his hands around her neck, rubbing the back of her head with his fingers. “The lasagna was great; I think I’ll take some to work tomorrow.” Ricardo said. Alba began to yawn and she said, “I don’t know what’s with me, I’m so tired.” “Go to bed I’ll take care of the dishes.” Ricardo smiled getting up. “Thank you.”

Six months later; Alba was enjoying working at her husband’s cancer clinic. Alba had to admit it was great seeing Ricardo every single day; the two of them worked great together; it seemed their relationship was better. Alba could feel herself falling even deeper in love with her husband and she loved the feeling. Working with Ricardo was always fun and she never knew what her husband had in store for her. Some days he’d make time to pull her in his office for a make out scene or he’d sneak inside the ultrasound room and they’d do things they never saw themselves doing on hospital equipment. Living was finally worth it for the two of them.

Ricardo was on top of the world he had everything he ever wanted; things were fantastic. Ricardo never thought he’d ever be this happy. Alba and her boys made his life better and that was all that he needed. Ricardo also wished one day that Alba would give him a child. He knew right now was too soon and he also knew with Alba in his future anything could happen.

**Chapter 16**

**“Fernando”**

“Silence becomes cowardice when occasion demands speaking out the whole truth and acting accordingly.” -Mahatma Gandhi

Alba finished up the laundry and putting the twins to bed. Alba headed downstairs and passed by her bedroom door which had a crack in it. She heard her husband on the phone and the conversation caught her ear. Alba stood there and wondered what he was talking about.

“So you caught part of the conversation.” Bridget said. “Yes I’m curious to what he was talking about.” Alba said. “If Ricardo had a brother I think you’d be one of the first to know.” “I wonder who was he talking about.” “Alba asks him, you caught the middle of the conversation.” “I can’t ask him he’ll know I was ease dropping.” “I’m sure the conversation was about someone else.” Alba says. “Your husband has sisters not brothers.” Bridget said.

A couple weeks later Alba had begun to see a change in her husband. He wasn’t as confident as he usually was and Alba wondered what brought on this change. The questions he’d ask her she wondered why he would ask her things like that. “Ricardo what’s wrong; talk to me.” Alba said rubbing his hair to the back of his head. “Nothing’s wrong Alba.” “Did I do something wrong?” Ricardo sat up on the couch and guided Alba on his lap facing him and he said, “Of course you didn’t do anything wrong, you never do.” “You always do the right thing no matter what.” “Then tell me what’s wrong; you’re worried about something.” “Alba it’s nothing.”

Ricardo took a deep breath and said, “I’m worried about losing you.” “Why?” “I just am.” “I’m not going anywhere, trust me.” Alba said. “My life has never been this good.” Ricardo said. “Your life is always going to be like this; I’m not going anywhere ever unless you force me out.” Ricardo held both of her shoulders and said, “I’d never force you to leave; you’ll leave me because you’ve found someone better.” “Baby trust our love, no other man will ever have me.” “You’re all that I want forever.” “That’s what you say.” Ricardo said.

Alba touched both sides of Ricardo’s face and she said, “Ricardo you and I were friends before we were lovers, nothing can break that.” “No other man can give me that just you.” “You are the only man that I want.” “I don’t want any man touching me, holding me, kissing me.” “Just trust me; you trust me right?” Alba asks. “Of course I do.” Ricardo answered. “Well you’ve got to stop second guessing our relationship; these two years and a half have been amazing and I know we’ll have so many more happy years.” “We said till death do us part and I meant it when I said it.” Alba says. “Me too.” Ricardo said then hugged Alba.

Later on Ricardo was lying in bed on his back staring at the ceiling fan. Alba was inside the bathroom taking a shower when her cell began to ring. Alba stepped out grabbing her towel. “Hi Cassandra.” “What are you and my brother up to tonight?” Cassandra asks. “Not much of anything.” Alba responded. “So that means I can come over.” “Ah sure.” Then the doorbell rang and Alba said, “That’s you?” “It is.” Cassandra smiled.

Ricardo jumped off the bed to answer the door. “I’ll see you once I get dressed.” Alba said then hung up the phone. Ricardo opened the door and Cassandra asks, “So are you going to invite me inside?” “Tonight’s not a good night.” “But Alba said.” “I know what Alba said; tonight’s not a good night to be here.” Ricardo repeated. “Are you still worried about Fernando?” “No he’s the least of my worries.” Ricardo frowned. “Did you tell Alba about him?” “No and I’m not.” “You should.” Cassandra said. “I’m not and I don’t want to talk about him; he’s a miserable bastard and I just hope he stays in his lane because if he doesn’t I’ll hurt him.”

Ricardo finally closed and locked the door that’s when Alba stepped out of the bedroom. “Where’s your sister?” “She’s gone.” Ricardo responded. “That was quick.” Ricardo took Alba’s hand and said, “I love you baby so much, sometimes I just feel like I don’t deserve you and one day I’m gonna lose you.” “You deserve me; just like I deserve you.” “The only way you’ll lose me is unfaithfulness and secrets.” “Is there something you wanna tell me?” Alba asks. “No, I thought it would be nice for you and me to go outside and relax by the pool.” “Ok.”

The two of them sat outside and Alba said, “Margarita’s would be nice right about now.” “I can make you your favorite.” Ricardo said. “Are you sure?” “Yeah give me five minutes.” “Ok, I’ll sit here.” While Ricardo began fixing the drinks one of the twins came downstairs wanting a drink of water. “Do you need anything else?” Ricardo asks. “No; I’m going back to sleep.” Leonardo said. “Ok goodnight buddy.” Ricardo smiled.

Once Ricardo opened the door Alba turned around. “Wow you fixed an entire pitcher.” “Of course I did.” Ricardo smiled. “Thank you.” “Let me go inside and grab the glasses; we still have leftover salsa and chips; do you want some?” “Sure.” Alba enjoyed relaxing outside with her husband being in his arms. “I always feel safe and protected in your arms.” Alba smiled. “I’ll always protect you.” Ricardo smiled then he kissed her on the back of the neck. Alba turned around to face Ricardo then he began to kiss her. The kiss was so intense Alba could feel her husband getting so excited.

“I want you so badly.” Ricardo whispered. “Right now?” Alba asks. “Right now, right here.” Ricardo said pulling up Alba’s gown. “Not outside.” Alba whispered. “Right here baby, no one can see us.” “We don’t have any protection.” “I don’t care.” “Ricardo; what about our plan?” Alba reminded. Ricardo sat back and rubbed the sweat off his forehead and said, “Our plan I’m sorry.” “That’s ok; let’s just go inside and continue where we left off.” Alba said taking his hand. “Sounds good to me.” Ricardo smiled taking her hand.

Wednesday; Ricardo and Alba took separate cars to work. Alba knew her husband had to be in surgery today and she wasn’t about to stay at the hospital and wait. Alba ran a few errands before she went home. Once Alba got home she sat inside the family room and looked through her bags; happy about her purchases. After Alba put her things away she took her shower. By the time she was out Ricardo was inside the house. “I thought you were in surgery.” Alba asks. Ricardo turned around and something was different, but Alba couldn’t figure out what. He didn’t respond quickly and when he did respond it was strange. Alba walked away and when she came back out of the bedroom fifteen minutes later he was gone.

Friday night Alba was hanging out with Stacey and Bridget at Gloria’s Mexican Cuisine at the bar. “What’s strange about your husband coming home and not talking to you?” “He probably had a hard time in surgery.” Bridget said. “It wasn’t that; it’s when he came home the second time he hugged and kissed me like he hadn’t been home.” “He had on his hospital shrubs it was weird. “Alba talk to Ricardo.” Stacey said. “I have talked to him and he won’t open up to me.” “Maybe I’m crazy.” Alba said dipping her chip into the salsa bowl.”

Alba walked into her house at midnight. Ricardo was sitting on the couch and he looked kind of angry. “Where have you been?” Ricardo asks standing up. “Out having drinks with the girls.” Alba responded. “I called Stacey around ten she was home.” “Yeah she left early, Bridget and I hung out.” Alba said walking towards the bedroom. Ricardo stood in front of her and said, “You never checked in, something could have happened.” “I’m tired I’m going to bed.”

Ricardo grabbed both of Alba’s arms and held on to her. Alba looked at his hands on her and asks, “Could you let me go?” “Not until you tell me why you had to stay out so late; why didn’t you check in with me?” “Because I didn’t want to that’s why.” Alba said with an attitude. Ricardo let her go and asks, “What did I do to deserve this?” “I don’t wanna talk about this; I just want to go to sleep ok.” Alba said. “Ok go to bed.” Alba went inside the master bedroom and Ricardo sat back inside the family room.

Alba awakened the next morning and Ricardo wasn’t next to her. Alba sat up and said, “I drank too much last night.” Alba stood up and went inside the rest room to brush her teeth and wash her face. After she removed the towel away from her face Ricardo was standing behind her. “I hope you slept well.” Ricardo said. Alba didn’t respond and Ricardo put his arms around her waist and said, “I don’t wanna fight Alba, whatever I did I’m sorry.” “I’m sorry for caring too much and for being worried about you.” Ricardo says. Alba stared at her husband in the mirror and she said, “I’m sorry for being mean and coming home late just to piss you off.”

Alba and Ricardo spent the entire weekend together and it was fun. It was Monday back to work day and everyone dreaded Mondays, but the two of them didn’t because they knew they’d be working together and it would be fun. Ricardo noticed that his wife was a lot busier today he didn’t get any moment to steal her away. While Alba was in the middle of a sonogram there was a knock at her door. “Ms. Wilmer I’ll be right back; will you be alright?” Alba asks. “Of course Mrs. Cruz.”

Alba opened the door to see it was her husband. Alba closed the door and asks, “What are you doing here?” “I miss you; you’re so busy today.” “You’re busy too; how did you get a chance to come over here?” Alba asks. Ricardo wrapped his arms around Alba’s waist and said, “I miss you.” Alba smiled then gave him a kiss. “I have to finish up with Ms. Wilmer and I’ll have ten minutes; I’ll meet you inside your office.” “Ok ten minutes.” “Yeah I’m almost done.” Alba smiled. “Ok.” Ricardo left with a smile.

Thursday night Ricardo and Alba were making love inside their bedroom when they heard someone inside their home. “Stay here.” Ricardo whispered. “Who could be here; the alarm didn’t sound.” “Not so loud, get dressed and stay right here.” “Lock the door when I’m out of here.” Ricardo said grabbing his pistol out of the nightstand. “Be careful.” Alba said trying not to panic. “I love you ok; I’ll be fine.” Ricardo said.

Ricardo walked out of the bedroom; he searched the house from top to bottom not finding anyone. Ricardo walked back downstairs into the master bedroom. Ricardo sat on the bed and said, “Maybe a limb or something fell outside, I didn’t find anyone in here or out on the back.” “You searched thoroughly?” Alba asks. “Of course I did; no one’s inside the house just you and me.” Ricardo smiled. Ricardo moved closer to Alba and said, “Let’s finish up what we started.” “Ok.” Alba smiled lying back on the bed. Little did Ricardo and Alba know someone was inside their house watching them as the two of them made love and he creped out without either of them knowing.

Friday Alba was at lunch inside the cafeteria with a few co-workers. They were enjoying their lunch that’s when Alba saw Cassandra. “Hey that’s my sister in law I’ll see you all back in the department.” Alba said then stood up. “Ok.” “Cassandra hey; what are you doing here?” Alba asks. “Looking for my brother he was supposed to meet me in here.” Cassandra said. “He’s actually in the middle of an emergency surgery.” “Ok; could you tell him I stopped by?” “I sure will.”

Saturday morning Ricardo left to go play golf with a few buddies. Alba stayed home doing some cleaning. After Alba finished with the kitchen she heard someone walk inside the house. “Hey I thought you were playing golf with the guys.” “I missed you so I came home.” Ricardo smiled. “Oh did you.” Alba smiled. “I did.” Ricardo said moving closer to her. “Your golf clubs; where are they?” “Oh I left those inside the car.” “Oh.”

Ricardo put his arms around Alba and began kissing her. Alba loved his signature kiss because no one ever kissed her the way he had kissed her. Ricardo always put his hand on her chin and began to kiss her, but this time was different. He kissed her and he had never kissed her that way. Alba pulled away and Alba asks, “Who the hell are you?” “Your husband; what’s wrong?” Ricardo asks. Alba continued to back away. “You’ve never kissed me that way; why did you do that?” “What’s wrong with you?” Ricardo asks walking closer to her. “Don’t come near me!” Alba said raising her voice. “What the hell is wrong with you; it’s me who else could I be?” “That’s what I’m trying to figure out.” Alba said.

Ricardo rushed out of the house pissed and Alba didn’t go near him. Alba packed her suitcase and put it inside her car about to leave when she realized that she left her cellphone. Alba walked in from the garage walking near the bedroom when Ricardo walked inside the house with his golf clubs. Alba was confused. “Hey.” Ricardo smiled. “Hey.” Alba said. “I wish you had been with me today; I was unstoppable.” Ricardo smiled. Ricardo noticed that Alba wasn’t much in conversation.

“What’s wrong?” Ricardo asks. “Do you have an identical twin brother?” Alba asks. Ricardo got quiet and Alba said, “He just left, I’m surprised you didn’t run into him.” “He was here, he kissed me, and I knew something was up because he didn’t kiss me the way you kiss me.” “I want you to tell me right now; what the hell is going on or I’m leaving and I’m never coming back?” Alba was pissed and Ricardo could see it in her eyes.

Ricardo sat the golf clubs on the floor and said, “I was going to tell you about him.” Alba folded her arms and said, “We’ve known each other for over five years and you never uttered the word brother or twin.” “I want to know why the hell am I just meeting him and why did he pretend to be you?” “Start talking now and you better not leave anything out.” Alba says pissed.

After Ricardo explained Alba said, “So all through middle school, high school, and college you two slept with each other’s girlfriends.” “Yes.” “It’s funny you never mentioned any of this when we were friends.” “You were just who I said you were when we first met.” “Alba I wasn’t that guy; I stopped all of that once I entered medical school.” “I wanted to have real relationships, but Fernando wanted to continue to mess with my women.”

“Is he the reason why you’ve been so insecure?” Alba asks. “Yes.” “You think I want your brother?” “No.” Ricardo responded. “Then what is this; why was he here and why was it so hard to tell me about him?” Alba asks. Ricardo didn’t say anything and Alba said, “This has to do with Gloria; this has to do with her doesn’t it; don’t lie to me Ricardo.” “Yeah this has to do with Gloria; she left me for my brother.” “She said he was the best lover she ever had and she walked out of my life with no regret.” Ricardo says. “Well there must have been regret because she came back to you.” “She did but I realized that I was in love with you.”

“So what if I hadn’t realized that Fernando wasn’t you; what if I had slept with him; you would have left me right?” “You didn’t sleep with him.” Ricardo said. “I didn’t sleep with him because I know you.” “I’m not Gloria I never have been and I never will be.” “You should have trusted me when you realized he was in town but you didn’t.” Alba says and walks out the front door.

That night Ricardo realized that Alba wasn’t coming home so he decided to drive by Stacey’s to not see her car. Ricardo pulled on the side of the road and then went to knock at the door. Stacey answered the door with London in her arms. “Hey come on inside.” Stacey smiled. “Ah I actually came by to talk to Alba.” Ricardo said. “Alba’s not here.” “Stace don’t lie to me.” “Hey you can come inside and look if you want.” “I haven’t seen or heard from her all day; did something happen?” Stacey asks. “A lot happened but I can’t talk about it right now.” “Thank you Stacey.”

Sunday evening; Ricardo went to search for his wife still not finding her until he went back home walked in the front door and she was about to walk out. “Alba don’t leave; please talk to me.” Ricardo said. “There’s nothing to talk about I’m a game to you and your brother and I want be ever again.” Alba said. “Alba you’re not a game to me.” “I told you I was done with all that; he’s still living in the past.” “I’m sorry Alba.” “I’ll never trust you again Ricardo; I’m moving back into my house.” “Alba how; someone’s living there.” “The Swanson’s moved out last month.” “I told you but since you’ve been pulling tricks with your brother you haven’t listened to a word I’ve said lately.” “Alba don’t leave, please I can’t live without you baby.”

**Chapter 17**

**“The Rough Patch”**

“Storms make trees take deeper roots.” -Dolly Parton

Winter had come and Alba was back home with her husband. The two of them laid on the couch making out. “I never want you to leave home ever again, three months was way too long Alba.” “Don’t lie to me again and don’t keep secrets from me.” Alba said touching the sides of his face. “I promise that will never happen again.”

“Fernando you can’t stay here, Ricardo drops by all the time.” Cassandra said. “One more night, I’ll hide out if he comes over.” Fernando said. “If you keep playing games with Ricardo’s wife he’s going to hurt you.” “I’m not worried about our brother he started this.” “Ricardo has stopped playing those games a long time ago.” “He’s happy with how his life is, maybe you should settle down.” Cassandra said. “When I meet the right woman I’ll settle down ok.” Fernando smiled. “I seriously doubt that.”

Ricardo and Alba just didn’t know Ricardo’s identical twin brother; Fernando was watching them every chance he got. He wanted to be able to mimic his brother to get to his wife. Fernando suspected, after him and Alba’s first encounter that he had to be on his p’s and q’s and he was going to get to her one way or another.

“I’m surprised to see you here.” Cassandra said. “Is Fernando still here?” Ricardo asks walking inside. “Fernando’s here in Dallas?” Cassandra said closing the door. “Don’t play dumb you know he’s here, I saw him walking inside the townhouse the other night I sat out here waiting for hours.” “So you’re stalking me now?” Cassandra asks. “I have to be a few steps ahead of Fernando you know that.” “He’s steady playing this game; we’re too old for this childish shit and I wish he’d stop.” Ricardo said grabbing a beer out the fridge. “Sit let’s chat.” Cassandra said. “Where is Fernando?” Ricardo asks sitting at the table. “I haven’t seen him in days; maybe he has given up.” “I doubt it; he wants to make my life a living hell.”

Later on that night; Alba and Ricardo laid in bed. Ricardo held onto Alba and the two just talked. “So you think he’s gone?” Alba asks. “I don’t know, I sure hope he is.” Ricardo said. “What does he do for a living?” “He’s a doctor.” “He’s a grown man and a doctor and he still wants to go around playing these high school games.” “Alba I know it’s crazy, but I have no idea why he even thinks I’m still into that stuff.” “He and I lost contact years ago; I went my way and he went his.” Ricardo explains. “And he shows back up wanting to play this twisted game; maybe he needs to be evaluated or something the guys obviously crazy.”

“We have two weeks until our wedding anniversary; what are we doing?” Alba asks rolling onto her back. “It’s a surprise.” Ricardo smiled. “I wanna know what we’re doing.” “We’re going to an island that’s all I’m going to say.” “We’re going to Puerto Rico.” Alba smiled. “We’ve been there five times; I’m taking you somewhere you’ve always talked about.” “Hawaii, Bahamas, Cayman’s; which one?” “It’s a surprise; just know that you and I are going to have the time of our lives, with no interruptions.” “Ok.”

Ricardo and Alba were back in Dallas. “It feels strange to be back home.” Alba said. “The Cayman Island was nice wasn’t it?” “It was I wanna go back like now.” “Maybe next year; we have a lot of work to do at the clinic this week.” Ricardo reminded. “I know.” Alba said leaning on Ricardo.

Two weeks later; Alba began to see that she and Ricardo weren’t getting alone at work and plus they were taking separate vehicles to work. Alba was trying her very best to get back into their routine, but it didn’t help. Ricardo was getting more and more frustrated and he wouldn’t talk with his wife about his problems. Alba assumed it was his brother; what else could it be?

“I don’t know we’ve kind of hit a rough patch in our relationship.” “Since the day I started working at his clinic we’ve gotten along so well and now things aren’t working.” Alba says. “Well maybe it’s time to leave and work at another clinic.” Stacey said. “I’ve been giving that a lot of thought I don’t want to upset Ricardo.” “Alba maybe his irritation has to do with you two working together.” “Maybe he wants you to realize it and you make the first move.” “Ricardo’s never been like that.” “Men change, Alba you know first-hand.” “Look how Juan did you; it all came as a total shock.” Stacey reminded.

“You’re right; I guess I’ll start job hunting.” Alba said looking sad. “Hey you’ll be ok.” “You’re strong, you always have been.” Stacey says. “I know that, but I was really enjoying seeing Ricardo every day.” “I know that doesn’t work for everyone but it worked for us.” “I guess I thought it would be forever.” Alba says looking sad. “Alba don’t be sad, the sun will shine again.” “I know; I know I’ve been through worst and plus it could be worst.” Alba frowned.

Alba made it home and Ricardo was just getting out the shower. “Hey.” Alba said sticking her head in the door. Ricardo sat on the bed and spoke. “What’s wrong?” Alba asks. “Nothing, baby I don’t feel like talking.” “I’m kind of having a bad day.” Ricardo says. “What can I do to make you happy?” “Nothing.” Ricardo said. Alba sat on the bed beside him and said, “Is it because we’re not getting alone at work?” “Everything’s not about you Alba.” Ricardo said then stood up. Alba stormed out of the room walking into the family room.

A week later; Alba had a job interview so she called into work. Ricardo was too busy to realize his wife wasn’t in today and a temporary worker was working in her place. Ricardo knocked on the door to the sonogram room and Alba didn’t answer the door. “You are?” Ricardo asks. “I’m Leona Richards working as prn for Mrs. Cruz.” “Ok, thank you.” Ricardo said feeling awkward. “Was there anything you needed?” Leona asks. “No I just wanted to welcome you.” Ricardo smiled then he walked off.

Ricardo walked up to the front to talk with Pilar. “How can I help you Dr. Cruz?” Pilar asks. “Ah why didn’t Alba show up this morning?” Ricardo asks. “I’m not sure, I didn’t answer the call this morning, but I believe Dana did.” “Thank you Ms. Pilar.” Then Ricardo walked towards the back. Once he talked to Dana he left the hospital and went straight home.

Alba sat at home on the couch reading a magazine when she thought she heard something. Alba walked to the window and looked outside. “What is he doing here?” Alba thought. Alba ran to her bedroom and jumped in bed pretending to be asleep. She could hear when Ricardo stepped inside the house and sat the keys on the table. She could hear Ricardo take steps towards their bedroom and then he walked inside. Ricardo stared at the bed and he could see Alba lying down. Ricardo walked inside the bathroom to wash his hands and then he walked back inside the bedroom.

Ricardo sat on the bed beside Alba and touched her forehead. “Alba.” Ricardo called. Alba didn’t move she just laid there pretending to be sleep. “Alba baby wake up, I know you’re not sick.” Alba opened her eyes but she wouldn’t turn around. “I’m sorry for ignoring you and hurting your feelings ok.” “Just talk to me.” Ricardo says. “I don’t have anything to say to you.” Alba responded. Ricardo began to smile and he said, “You just said something to me.” Ricardo laid beside her and held her. “I don’t want you touching me.” “Alba you know I’m sorry, you know I love you.” “I missed you at work, so I came to you.” Ricardo says.

A month later; things were back to normal. Alba had begun to feel bad about the decision to work at another hospital or clinic. She had been missing work and leaving early for job interviews, her husband never suspected a thing. Alba felt like it was time for a change. She didn’t want to lose her husband so the job change was a must.

Ricardo was walking through making his rounds when he heard a few secretaries discussing his wife. Ricardo stopped and asks, “What do you mean Texas Oncology of Plano called asking questions about my wife?” Ricardo asks. “Ah they just wanted to know did she work here; I transferred her over to HR.” Terri said. “Ok.” Ricardo said then walked off. Ricardo headed to HR to speak with someone. Alba was getting her things together it was time to go home. Then she went searching for her husband but she couldn’t find him. “Terri have you seen Dr. Cruz?” Alba asks. “He went to HR.” Terri responded. “Ok, thank you.” Alba said then walked off. Once Alba walked off Terri asks one of the secretaries beside her, “Do you think I should have told her he’s in HR asking about her?” “I think you’ve said enough today Terri.”

Alba sat in a chair outside of HR waiting on Ricardo when her cellphone began to ring. Alba was shocked that it was a second interview with Texas Oncology in Plano. “Next Thursday at one o’clock sounds great.” Alba smiled. “We’ll see you then.” “Thank you so much.” Alba smiled then she hung up her cell. Alba had no idea that her husband was standing behind her. He had caught part of the conversation and said, “Who will you see next Thursday at one o’clock?” Alba turned around and asks, “What were you doing in HR; it’s been time to go home.” “Answer my question.” Ricardo said.

Alba stood up and said, “It was nothing.” “Because we’re at work I’m not going to say anything, but as soon as we get inside the car I want to know what that phone conversation was all about.” “Ricardo what’s wrong?” Alba asks. Ricardo took the keys out of his pocket and handed them to Alba. “Go to the car; I have to go to the office and grab a few things.” Ricardo said. “Ok.”

Once Alba got inside the car she called Stacey. “What’s up girl?” “Hey; I have a weird feeling that Ricardo knows I plan on leaving the clinic.” “You and your feelings.” Stacey smiled. “I’m serious, he’s mad at me and I can’t think of anything I’ve done.” “I think he may have over heard my phone conversation with Texas Oncology in Plano.” “Oh they called you for a second interview?” Stacey asks. “Yes, it’s next Thursday and I’m so excited.” Alba smiled. “Good for you I hope you get it.” “Gotta go, Ricardo is walking up.” “Ok call me later.”

Ricardo got inside the car and said, “Hand me the keys.” “Here.” Alba said. “You wanna tell me why Texas Oncology of Plano called here for you today?” “Ah I applied for a job there.” Alba admitted. “Why in the hell would you apply for another job; you have a job here with me.” “That’s the problem we don’t work well together anymore.” “Since when?” Ricardo asks backing out. “I thought it would be a relief that I was searching for another job.” Alba said. “Was that them on the phone when you were sitting outside of HR’s office?” “Ricardo let’s talk about this when we get home.” Alba said. Ricardo didn’t say anything else and Alba knew she had no way of lying her way out of it.

“We’re home talk.” Ricardo said. “Yes that was them on the phone asking for a second interview.” Alba confessed. “A second interview so that means there was a first one; when was that?” Ricardo asks. “It doesn’t matter.” “It matters to me, now talk.” “The interview was the day we made up.” Alba admitted. “You lied to me Alba.” “I didn’t lie.” “You lied.” Ricardo said then walked off. Alba went after him and he closed the door in her face.

Alba beat at the door and said, “Let me inside please.” “No I’m taking a shower I’m not in the mood to talk to you.” “Talk to Stacey or Bridget I’m sure one of them knew this before me.” “We’re not friends anymore when it comes to you stabbing me in the back.” “Ricardo I didn’t stab you in the back.” “You did when you went to that first interview!” Ricardo yelled. “The only reason I even applied for other jobs is because I thought I was smothering you at work.”

Ricardo walked out of the guest bathroom and asks, “Why would you think you’re smothering me?” “Because lately we haven’t been getting alone.” Alba said. “That doesn’t mean to go out and find another job.” “I do my best work with you around, you know that.” “I don’t want you to leave; I like you at the clinic.” Ricardo says. “You really do?” Alba asks. “Of course I do.” “I’d never ask you to work with me if I knew I’d get tired of you.” “I love you and I love seeing you every single day even when I’m mad at you Alba.” Ricardo says touching her face. “Oh.” “You wanna come shower with me?” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.” Alba smiled.

**Chapter 18**

**“Up To His Old Tricks Again”**

“One may outwit another, but not all the others.”

-Francois La Rochefoucauld

Alba turned the job down with Texas Oncology in Plano to continue to be by her husband’s side. Alba felt like it was the right decision to make. “I’m so bored Ricardo’s out of town for that medical conference in Austin and I’m home alone.” Alba said. “Oh this is Juan’s week with the twins huh.” Stacey said. “Yes, I talked to Ricardo earlier and he said, “He may be coming home early.” “I sure hope so.” “So have you and Ricardo thought about adding a new addition to your family?” Stacey asks. “Yes and no, right now’s not a good time.” “I think in a couple years we both will be ready, plus I’d like the twins to be older.” “I don’t blame you, that’s what Luis and I said.”

After Alba stopped by DSW shoes she headed home to be surprised by Ricardo’s presence. She immediately gave him a big hug and kiss. The kiss didn’t last very long because Alba pulled away. “You again; why the hell are you in my house?” “Calm down.” Fernando smiled. “What do you want?” Alba asks raising her voice. “You kissed me, I didn’t kiss you.” “Because I thought you were my husband.” “How the hell are you getting into our house?” “How do you even get by security?” Alba asks. “Where’s my brother?” “Get out before I call the cops.” Alba said with her hands on her hips.

After Fernando left Alba checked all the locks and deadbolts then called Ricardo. “Are you serious?” Ricardo said. “Yes, why is he doing this?” “How is he able to get inside our house?” Alba asks. “I’m coming home.” Ricardo said sitting his suitcase on the bed. “I don’t want you to have to do that.” “I need to be there with you expect me in an a couple hours.” Ricardo said then he hung up the phone.

As soon as Ricardo made it to Dallas he headed over to his sister’s townhouse. “Where the hell is he?” Ricardo asks raising his voice. “In the shower.” Cassandra answered. Ricardo didn’t say anything else he headed towards the guest bathroom. Cassandra followed him and asks, “What did our brother do this time?” Ricardo didn’t answer he just bust into the bathroom. Fernando was dressed, drying his face with a towel. Ricardo punched Fernando in the face that’s when the two of them began to fight.

“Stop you two you’re brothers.” Cassandra said trying to break up the fight. Once Cassandra finally talked Ricardo into getting off of him. Ricardo said, “If you ever come into my house again I will.” Fernando cut him off and said, “You’ll what kill me; I seriously doubt it.” “Stay out of my house and away from my wife.” “She’ll never want you and you’ll never trick her.” “She knows me better than anyone you got that.” Then Ricardo left. “Why are you trying to piss him off?” Cassandra asks. “He took everything away from me and I’m going to take everything away from him.” “Fernando this is stupid, Ricardo’s happy and you just want to take him down.” “When did you get so evil?” Cassandra asks.

Alba’s cellphone beeped it was a text message from Ricardo that read, “Open the door I’m home.” Alba opened the door to see him pulling into the drive way. Alba ran outside and gave her husband a big hug and he hugged her back. “I missed you too; are you ok?” Ricardo asks. “I’m fine, I’m so happy you’re home.” Alba smiled. “Let me grab my suitcase out the trunk and you can come shower with me.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.”

After the two of them showered; Alba went inside the kitchen to get her husband something to eat.

“Get your things and get out of my house.” “Cassandra don’t be like that I’m your brother.” Fernando said. “Get your things and get the hell out.” “I’m not about to be at war with my brothers and I sure as hell don’t want to be caught in the middle of it.” “I know where your loyalties lie.” Fernando said. Cassandra sat down looking at the messages on her cellphone.

A week later; Ricardo was finishing up with his last patient before he and his wife head home. The two of them were finally walking out and Alba asks, “Why are you so happy?” “I got good news.” Ricardo smiled. “What is it?” “You know we don’t talk our personal business until we’re inside the car.” Ricardo reminded. “Ok.” Alba smiled grabbing his hand. They finally got inside the car, once Ricardo pulled out he said, “So I’ve been having a private investigator follow my brother every day.” “Why didn’t I know this?” Alba asks. “Just in case he pretended to be me and you brought it up then he’d know.” “Your brother will never fool me.” Alba smiled. “I know baby.” Ricardo said touching the back of her head.

“Anyway he left this afternoon heading back to Puerto Rico.” Ricardo smiled. “Really.” “Yes, I’m so happy the jerk is finally gone.” “Look in my brief case there are pictures.” “Ok.” Alba said looking in the back. Alba opened the suitcase and finally got the pictures. “Let’s go celebrate tonight.” Ricardo suggested. “On a work night.” Alba smiled. “Why not; where would my beautiful wife like to go?” “How about Yao Fuzi?” Alba suggested. “Where ever my beautiful wife wants to dine is fine with me; as long as they have lobster.” Ricardo smiled. “They do.” Alba smiled.

Saturday; Alba and Ricardo were out doing some shopping. “It is so cold out.” Alba said getting closer to Ricardo. Ricardo put his arm around her neck and said, “I’m glad we finally have a weekend together, I’ve been so busy lately.” Ricardo opened the door and Alba walked inside. “What do you need out of Nordstrom?” Ricardo asks. “Makeup.” Alba smiled. “Makeup, you always need makeup when your face is so pretty without it.”

The two of them shopped for about four hours then stopped to pick up some food at The Cheesecake Factory. Alba began sneezing nonstop and Ricardo asks, “Are you ok?” “Yes.” Alba answered. “Don’t be getting sick on me.” Ricardo said touching her cheek. “I’m ok just ready to get home.” Once the two of them finally got home Alba took a shower and put on her pj’s. Ricardo was sitting at the table eating his food when he realized it was taking Alba longer than usual, so he got up from the table.

“Alba baby time to eat.” Ricardo walked inside the bedroom and Alba was lying down. “Alba the food is on the table, let’s eat.” Ricardo said walking towards the bed. Ricardo sat on the bed beside her, Alba seemed to be sleeping. Ricardo moved her hair out of her face to feel the heat coming from her body. “You’re burning up.” “Alba sit up.” Ricardo said touching her. “I need to lie down.” Alba whispered. Ricardo stood up and went to get a cold towel and the thermometer. After Ricardo gave Alba some Advil, he sat beside her waiting for her temperature to break.

Once Alba was back sleeping Ricardo went to put the food up and decided to take her to the ER. “I don’t need to go to the doctor.” Alba whispered. “Your fever hasn’t broke and it’s been three hours.” “You’ll feel better once you get checked out.” Ricardo said picking her up. Alba was too weak to argue.

After the doctor had examined Alba, Ricardo walked back inside. “How is my wife?” Ricardo asks. “She has the flu and it’s very severe; we’re going to have to admit her Dr. Cruz.” “Thank you.” Ricardo said. “I’ll let you know as soon as we get a room for her.” “Thank you.” Ricardo walked over to the bed and touched Alba’s forehead. “How do you feel?” “Miserable, I wanna go home.” “You have to stay here; I’ll be here every night unless I’m in surgery ok.” Ricardo said. “Ok.” Alba yawned.

Alba was finally inside her room, she began feeling better was once she got the drugs she needed. Alba finally had fallen asleep and she was comfortable. Ricardo decided to go home to get Alba some clothes and other things she’d need while away from home. Once Ricardo walked inside his home he heard the phone ringing but he didn’t have time to get it. He was more into getting the things his wife needed. After he finished packing he grabbed the gift that he had brought for his wife, which he planned on giving to her tonight and then left.

Four days later; Ricardo was bringing his wife back home. She was much better but the doctor wanted her to stay home another week because she still had some symptoms. “Get in bed and I’ll bring you some hot soup.” Ricardo said. “You’ll get in bed with me?” Alba asks. “Of course.” Ricardo smiled. Alba laid in bed.

Alba had been home for two days and she was miserable alone. She felt better but she could tell she was still weak. Ricardo had just left to go pick up something’s at Whole Foods. Alba laid in bed fast asleep. Alba began to hear someone entering the room. “Hey.” Ricardo smiled. Alba thought, “There’s no way Ricardo is back from the market.” “I thought you were going to the market.” Alba said. “I am, I just wanted to look in on you again.” “Ok.”

Ricardo sat on the bed with Alba and began to kiss her. That surprised Alba; Ricardo never kissed her on the lips when she was sick. Alba had already figured out it was his brother. She continued to kiss him and then she laid on her back. He laid on top of her and kissed her some more. “What are you doing?” Fernando asks. “I wanna show you something.” Alba said putting her knees into his chest. “Ok.” Alba used all the strength she had to kick him off the bed. He hit the floor and then Alba sat up out of breath.

“What the hell Alba?” “You bastard, Fernando I know you’re not my husband.” “Then why did you kiss me?” “To get you sick, I have the flu you idiot.” Alba said. Fernando stood up and smiled at her. Alba said, “Your kisses always give you away.” “How so?” Fernando asks. “A man in love doesn’t kiss sloppy; the sad thing is you don’t know how to love a woman.” “How to be gentle with her.” “Alba you know nothing about me.” “I know you’re jealous of your brother.” “I know you’ll never trick me; I’ll never fall for you so you can stop with the games.” Alba says. “For your info Alba, I have been in love.” “Your husband took her away from me.” “What are you talking about?” “Gloria was mine first; your sweet husband took her.” “He took everything away from me.” “Get out!” Alba said raising her voice.

“The truth hurts.” Fernando said. “Fernando what you had with Gloria was a fling.” “I don’t even think she knows what love really is.” “When you love someone you don’t hurt them and you don’t play stupid games.” “You’re incapable of love and I don’t see a woman like me ever giving a man like you a chance.” “You have my husband’s face but you’ll never have his heart and I’ll never give you mine.” Alba began to get out of breath so she laid down.

“What’s wrong?” Fernando asks. “I’m tired, get out please.” Alba said closing her eyes. Fernando walked closer to her and said, “I’ll trick you, one day you’ll lie in this bed next to my brother and you’ll only be thinking of me.” Fernando smiled. “I doubt it.” Alba said without opening her eyes. As soon as Fernando left Ricardo came in through the side door bringing in the groceries. When he finished he went inside the bedroom and laid beside Alba. Alba jumped and said, “Fernando get away from me.” “Baby it’s me.” Ricardo said. Alba opened her eyes and said, “I’m sorry I was dreaming.” Ricardo touched her face and said, “Your skins clammy are you sure you’re ok?” “I just need some water.” Alba said getting up. “Lie back down I’ll get it.” “Thank you.”

Later on Alba sat at home; she had some visitors which was great. Ricardo left shortly to go workout at the gym since his wife was occupied. “Girl you should have told your husband.” Bridget said. “I don’t want Ricardo to worry about his evil twin.” “I’m sure after I finished with him he won’t be coming around here anymore.” Alba smiled. “You broke the poor man’s heart.” Bridget laughed. “He deserved it.” Stacey smiled.

As soon as Stacey and Bridget were walking out of the front door Ricardo was pulling in the driveway. “Bye Ricardo.” “Bye ladies.” Ricardo walked inside and Alba said, “You didn’t shower at the gym.” “No I thought you wanted to take one with me.” “I’m up for it.” “Do you feel like having sex?” Ricardo asks. “We’ll just have to see.” Alba smiled. Ricardo dropped his Nike bag on the floor, took his wife’s hand and followed her into the master bathroom.

The two of them got inside the shower and Ricardo wasn’t thinking about showering he was thinking about making love to his wife. “You’re sweaty you have to shower first.” “Alba it’s been two weeks we’ve never went that long; I can’t wait any longer.” Ricardo said getting closer to Alba. “Ok.” Alba smiled. After the two of them made love in the shower and showered Ricardo was still horny. Alba laid in bed naked on her back. “What’s gotten into you?” Alba asks. “I’m making up for lost time.” Ricardo smiled. “Not so rough like you were in the shower.” “I’m sorry you know how I get when it’s been longer than a week.” “Go slow first ok.” “Anything you want baby.”

For the next couple weeks Ricardo and Alba were making love almost every night. Ricardo loved making love to Alba she was the best he had ever had and he hope she felt the same way. “What are you day dreaming about?” Alba asks sitting on the couch next to Ricardo. Ricardo turned to his wife and said, “I have something to ask you.” “Ok ask away.” “Am I the best lover you’ve ever had?” “Of course you are.” Alba smiled getting up to straddle him on the couch. “I can’t believe you had to ask me that you know you are.”

**Chapter 19**

**“Let The Games Begin”**

“At first it was all about the chase, but now I want her to love me the way I love her.” -Chantanell Santos

Spring time had come and Alba started her flower garden out back. The twins were outside playing on their swing while Alba planted flowers. They all stayed outside for a couple hours then Alba took them inside to eat and bath. “I’m sleepy.” Leonardo said. “Me too Mommy.” Leanardo said. After you two bath then you can take a nap. “Ok.” Leanardo said yawning.

Alba finished up everything around five o’clock, so she decided to shower and then she laid in bed to take a nap. Alba awakened in her sleep because Ricardo was kissing her stomach. Alba opened her eyes then he came up to kiss her lips. “I miss you too.” Alba smiled. The two of them made out more and more until Alba stopped him. “What’s wrong?” Ricardo asks. “I’m on my period.” Alba smiled. “Oh sorry.” Ricardo smiled. “That’s ok; we can still kiss and touch.

“Cassandra I haven’t seen you at the house lately.” Ricardo said taking a seat. “I’ve been so busy with work.” “So when’s the last time you talked to Fernando?” “Since I kicked him out of here.” Cassandra said. “Ok.” Ricardo said then stood up. “Leaving so soon.” “Yeah I just got off work I haven’t seen my wife all day.” “Tell Alba I said, “Hi.” “I sure will, stop by sometimes.” Ricardo smiled walking out the door.

Alba awakened because she heard someone at the door. Ricardo walked inside the room Alba was sitting up. “Hey gorgeous I missed you all day.” Ricardo smiled. “I missed you too.” Alba said. “Let me take a shower then we can talk some more.” Alba stood up and saw a white card on the floor so she picked it up. Alba opened the card and it read, “So I guess you can be fooled.” “Oh my God that was him.” Alba said shocked.

For the next couple weeks Alba was on pins and needles, she wasn’t sure if it was her husband she was kissing and making love to. She was starting to feel like Fernando was more like Ricardo than she imagined. Little did Alba and Ricardo know that Fernando had cameras all over their house. He was learning all Ricardo’s moves and phrases.

Ricardo and Alba went to North Carolina to see Jayden for three days. They were so happy to see him and he was happy to see them. He was doing great in school and also basketball. “We watch you all the time on television.” Alba smiled. “I record every game man.” Ricardo smiled. “Good looking out.” Jayden smiled.

Monday morning Ricardo had seen a couple patients when Chad walked into one of the empty patient rooms that Ricardo was sitting inside. “You hiding out?” Dr. Gibson asks. “No, I was thinking about Alba.” “Your wife’s right down the hall go see her.” “Chad what’s the main reason women cheat on their husbands?” “Ricardo you can’t believe Alba’s cheating on you.” “I didn’t say that; I ask you a question that doesn’t mean it’s about my wife.” “The main reason woman cheat on their husbands, hum let me see because their hoers.” “My ex-wife was a big one or their money hungry.” “My ex-wife is one of those too.” Dr. Gibson says. Ricardo laughed and said, “Forget I asks.”

Alba was home putting new linens on the bed when Ricardo came behind her and put his arms around her waist. Alba jumped and Ricardo said, “I didn’t mean to scare you.” Alba turned around and said, “I thought you were staying out longer with Chad and the others.” “I missed you that’s why I came back.” “I miss you too Ricardo.” “What’s wrong; talk to me.” Alba sat on the bed and said, “I know lately I haven’t let you touch me, I have a good reason.” “I don’t want you to freak out.”

“Please don’t tell me this has to do with my brother.” “It does.” Alba said. “What did he do?” “About a month ago he was here, but I didn’t know.” “I thought he was you.” Alba admitted. “What did he do to you?” Ricardo asks sitting down on the bed. “He and I made out, he touched me, but that’s all that happened I swear.” “That bastard I thought he was still in Puerto Rico.” Ricardo said raising his voice. “I’m sorry.” Ricardo stood up his back was turned to Alba. He began to smile and Alba stood up behind him and wrapped her arms around his waist. “Baby I’m sorry, he’s more like you than I ever imagined.” “He’s nothing like me.” Fernando smiled.

Fernando turned around and Alba still hadn’t realized it wasn’t her husband. “Alba I miss you so much.” “I miss you too; I’m sorry I’ve been distant.” Fernando began to kiss Alba and it was just how Ricardo kissed her. He began to take off her clothes and she didn’t stop him. “Alba I want us to make our baby tonight.” Fernando said. “Ricardo are you sure?” Alba asks. “I’ve never been sure of anything else.” Fernando smiled. “Whatever you want baby.”

The two of them laid naked and began to make love. Alba did realize one thing that Ricardo had gotten to be an even better lover the way he kissed her private parts and the way he felt when he went inside of her. Alba didn’t want him to stop and he could tell that she was enjoying every bit of him being inside of her. After the two of them had made love Alba had fallen asleep. Fernando got out of bed, got dressed, and left the house.

Alba awakened an hour later to shower and once she got out the shower she couldn’t find Ricardo. “It’s eleven o’clock where could he have gone?” Alba thought. Alba walked outside; she didn’t see him out there so she came back inside. She heard someone in the front of the house so she walked up that way. Ricardo was walking inside and he smiled at her and said, “I didn’t think you’d be up.” “Why not; you awakened me.” Alba smiled. “You seem wide awake.” Ricardo said. Alba didn’t say anything and Ricardo walked inside the bedroom.

Alba walked inside the bedroom Ricardo sat on the ottoman taking off his shoes. “I think I’ve lost my touch when it comes to pool.” “I lost every game.” Ricardo says. “That’s where you’ve been?” Alba asks. “Yes, I told you I was playing pool with the guys I’d be home around eleven something.” “I called you around nine something you didn’t answer.” Ricardo says. “You did.” Alba said thinking hard. “Give me ten minutes I gotta shower.” Ricardo said getting up. “Ok.”

Alba ran searching for her cell; she found it inside the family room sitting on the magazine she was reading earlier. Alba unlocked her cell to see Ricardo had called her. “Oh my God that wasn’t Ricardo.” Alba began to pace the floor back and forth biting her fingernails. “What have I done?” Alba said about to cry. “We didn’t use protection; what if he’s gotten me pregnant?” “What am I gonna do?” Alba asks. “Who are you talking to?” Ricardo asks. “Ah no one.” Alba lied. “You were talking to someone.” Alba turned around and said, “I was just thinking out loud that’s all.” “You look nervous; really what’s wrong?” Ricardo asks. “Nothing honest.” Ricardo took her hands and asks, “Does this have something to do with us not making love; why have you been so distant?” “I don’t wanna talk about this.” Alba said letting his hands go then she ran to their bedroom.

Fernando went out to a bar to have some drinks with some friends of his. “You look happy; what changed?” John asks. “I met a girl.” Fernando smiled. “A girl really?” “Yeah she’s quiet the catch.” “After the last girl I didn’t think another girl stood a chance but this one she’s better.” “She’s feisty, beautiful, educated, and great in bed.” “I found my match I just have to find a way to win her over.” Fernando says. “Win her over.” “She’s married.” “A married woman man you better stay away.” John said. “I can’t the girls caught my heart.”

The next night; Ricardo and Alba made love and Alba began to think about when she made love to his brother thinking it was her husband. Alba hated to admit it but Fernando was better in bed. Alba tried her very best to get the love making scene out of her head. She didn’t want anything to do with Fernando. She wanted her husband, she loved her husband. What was she going to do if she was carrying her husband’s brother’s child?

Alba had become stressed because her period was a month late. Alba feared she was pregnant for her husband’s brother. Alba was so afraid to take a pregnancy test; what if it showed what she feared the most. On Alba’s lunch break Alba decided to go get a pregnancy test. “Dr. Cruz you needed something?” Pilar asks. “I was just looking for Alba; have you seen her?” Ricardo asks. “I did, she left out of the department.” “Maybe she went to the cafeteria, thank you Ms. Pilar.” Ricardo smiled. “You’re welcome.”

Ricardo got to the cafeteria not seeing his wife. “Where the hell is she?” Ricardo thought looking at his pager. “Dr. Cruz you’re having lunch early.” “No, I was looking for someone I’m headed back.” Ricardo smiled. Once Ricardo got out of the cafeteria he called Alba to get her voicemail. “Alba, why aren’t you picking up.” “Baby I don’t know what’s wrong, we need to talk.” “I heard some of the girls talking about you were crying in the restroom.” “When you get back to work call me and meet me inside my office.” Then Ricardo hung up the phone.

Alba made it back to the hospital and looked at her cell. “Ricardo called me twice.” Alba frowned. Once Alba got inside the clinic through the doors, Pilar said, “Dr. Cruz wants to see you inside his office.” “Ok; ah is my one o’clock here yet?” “No sweetheart it’s only twelve-thirty.” Pilar smiled. “Thank you.” Alba said then she walked off. Alba walked inside her husband’s office but he wasn’t inside as soon as she was about to walk out he walked inside. Her purse hit the floor and that’s when the pregnancy test fell out her purse. Alba grabbed it quickly and put it back inside her purse hoping that Ricardo didn’t see it.

“Was that a pregnancy test?” Ricardo asks. “No of course not.” Alba said nervously. “That was a pregnancy test; Alba you’re not pregnant are you?” “Ricardo I have patients.” “What are you keeping from me?” Ricardo asks. “I thought we didn’t discuss our private business at the job.” “We don’t, I just called you inside to see what was wrong; I heard you were crying I’m concerned.” “I don’t want my wife sad; did I do something wrong?” Ricardo asks. “No; could I go now?” “Of course, I love you Alba ok.” “Ok.” Alba said and got out as fast as she could.

Ricardo sat down at his desk and wondered why his wife had a pregnancy test. Ricardo knew that contraception wasn’t a hundred percent, but why wouldn’t she just admit to the pregnancy test. Did she have something to hide? Had she been unfaithful that’s why she didn’t admit to it? Ricardo had so many scenarios’ running through his mind his head began to hurt. Then he got up to see if his other patient had made it.

**Chapter 20**

**“Consequences”**

“Every choice has a consequence.” -Unknown

A week later; Alba was visiting with Bridget. “Thank you so much for lying for me.” Alba said. “Girl when he came to my house and asks me did you buy a pregnancy test for me, I almost said, “Hell no, but I thought about it and I was like yeah; I was embarrassed to get one.” “Thank you so much Bridget I didn’t mean to get you involved in my mess.” “So who’s the Daddy of this baby?” Bridget asks. “What?” Alba asks surprised by her question. “My husband and I’m not pregnant.” Alba lied. “Oh sorry I thought maybe you were stepping out.” “Bridget you know I love my husband, I’d never intentionally cheat on him.” “Intentionally cheat on him; honey it’s either cheating or not cheating.” “I’m not cheating on Ricardo I never have and I never will.” Alba said trying to stay calm.

Alba was home inside the bathroom crying when Ricardo tried to walk inside but the door was locked. Ricardo knocked on the door twice and said, “Alba are you in here; open the door.” Alba stood up and wiped her face then opened the door. “You never lock the door what’s wrong?” Ricardo asks. “Nothing.” Alba said with an attitude. Ricardo walked out of the bathroom and went after her. Once he caught up with her she was almost inside the kitchen. Ricardo grabbed her by her arm and said, “I’m sick of the attitudes, the disappearing; tell me right now what’s wrong?” “Something’s wrong and you need to tell me right now Alba.” Alba was about to say something when her cell rang.

Alba walked away from her husband to answer the phone. She didn’t recognize the number but she picked it up anyway so she could avoid her husband. “Hello.” Alba said walking outside. “How are you?” Fernando asks. Alba turned around to make sure Ricardo wasn’t behind her and then she asks, “Who is this?” “Your baby’s father.” Fernando smiled. “I’m not pregnant.” Alba said. Fernando laughed and said, “You are, I can hear the fluttering in your voice.” “Please leave me alone.” Alba said. “Alba I can’t leave you alone do you wanna know why?” “Why?” “Because the night that you and I made love I fell in love with you.” “I’ll do whatever I have to do to get you away from my brother.” Fernando says. “I’ll never be with you never; I’m not Gloria.” Alba said getting upset. “I know you’re not Gloria; you’re better than her.” “I’d never compare you to her like my brother does.” “Ricardo has never compared us.” Alba defended.

Ricardo walked from outside and said, “How long are you going to be on the phone.” “Alba we need to talk.” Alba turned around and Fernando said, “I hear my brother what’s he upset about.” “None of your business.” Alba said. “Who are you on the phone with?” Ricardo asks. “Bridget.” Alba lied. “Alba I’ll let you go just take care of our baby and you can deny it all you want I know at night when you lie next to my brother you think of me.” “You have to admit you’ve thought about making love to me again.” Fernando smiled and then Alba hung up the phone.

“Ricardo I’m sorry I didn’t mean for it to happen.” Ricardo didn’t know what she was talking about and why she was crying. Ricardo put his arms around his wife and she cried even more. “Baby what’s wrong; what didn’t you mean to happen?” “You’re gonna hate me when I tell you this.” “I’d never hate you Alba, just tell me baby.” Alba pulled away and said, “I know when I tell you; you’re going to divorce me.” “You’re going to leave me aren’t you?” Alba asks. “Alba the only way I’d leave you if you had an affair with someone and I know you wouldn’t cheat on me.” Alba back away from Ricardo and Ricardo grabbed her hand and said, “You wouldn’t cheat on me would you Alba?” “You wouldn’t do that to us because you know how it feels.” “I know how it feels.” Ricardo says.

“I didn’t mean to.” Alba cried. “Who is he?” Ricardo said getting upset. “Ricardo I’m sorry, he tricked me; I thought he was you.” Alba cried. “My brother.” Ricardo said. “Yes.” Ricardo closed his eyes to try to stop the tears from falling but they flowed anyway. “Alba when did this happen?” Alba cried and said, “The night you went to play pool with the guys.” “I’m going to kill him.” Ricardo said walking towards the door. Alba went after him grabbing his arm and he turned around. “You’re leaving me aren’t you?” “No.” Ricardo said touching her face. “He tricked you I’m not gonna blame you for any of this.” Ricardo took her hand and the two of them walked inside the house.

Ricardo sat at the bar and pulled Alba close to him. Alba sat on his lap with her back towards his face. “Stop being so nervous I love you baby I’m not going anywhere I promise.” Alba stood up and said, “I’m sorry Ricardo.” Ricardo stood up and said, “You have nothing to be sorry about Fernando does.” “I have something else to tell you and you’re not going to like it.” Alba said touching her stomach. Ricardo looked where she placed her hand and he said, “No.” “I’m not sure.” “That pregnancy test wasn’t Bridget’s was it?” Ricardo asks. “No, it was mine.” “Why didn’t you just come to me and tell me?” Ricardo asks. “I was afraid.” “Why you didn’t do anything wrong.” “I let him trick me; I couldn’t tell the difference between the two of you.” “He knows things about me that’s why I thought he was you.” Alba says. Ricardo consoled his wife and said, “He’s not getting away with this; make an appointment with your gynecologist and I’ll go with you.” “Ok.”

Two days later; Ricardo and Alba didn’t go into work. Ricardo wanted his wife to see her doctor as soon as possible. He wanted to know for sure was his wife carrying his brother’s child. On the way home it was pure silence inside the car. Alba didn’t feel too stressed because her husband believed her and he still loved her same. He showed it to her every single day. Alba worried that if she was pregnant what Ricardo expected her to do. Alba feared he’d want her to give the child up for adoption. Alba knew who she’d choose and it hurt her heart to even think about it.

“Ricardo could I ask you a question?” “Sure.” Ricardo said. “Are you going to tell me the truth?” Alba asks. “Of course I am I always do.” “This has to do with the child I may be carrying.” “Ok.” “If I am pregnant are you going to leave me; just tell me now?” “Alba I married you for better or for worst.” “I’m not going anywhere.” “We are going to be together forever.” Ricardo says. “Ok I have one more question.” Alba said. “Ok, I’m listening.” “If I’m pregnant and this child is in this world; are you going to make me give he or she up?”

Ricardo didn’t answer and Alba said, “You’re going to make me give up this child aren’t you?” “Alba we don’t even know if you’re pregnant.” “Just answer the question it’s a fifty, fifty chance I am and I just need to know how you feel.” “Alba I can’t make you do anything.” Ricardo said. “Don’t answer me like that, be truthful to me please.” Alba said. “Alba I’ll asks you a question if you are pregnant and I asks you to give up this child are you going to choose me or it?” Tears fell from Alba’s eyes and she said, “It hurts to say this out loud, but I’d chose you.”

Ricardo wiped his eyes because he didn’t expect that. He began to feel bad about what he wanted his wife to really do, so he decided to change his answer. “I thought you’d choose the baby over me.” Ricardo said. “I love you too much to let you go.” “I’m hoping that you’d love the baby just like I know I will.” Ricardo pulled into the driveway and then the garage. He turned off the car and said, “Alba I know asking you to have an abortion is out of the cards; all that you went through losing your daughter I wouldn’t ever ask you to do that.” “Baby I have to be honest with you and I hope you don’t hold this against me.” “I wouldn’t want that child in my house.” “I’d want you to give this child up for adoption; to my sister in Puerto Rico.” “She can’t have children; we could see the child two or three times a year.” “I’d sign the birth certificate because the child is a part of you.” Ricardo says.

Alba couldn’t control her crying so she got out of the car and ran inside the house feeling very heart broken. Ricardo felt horrible, but he knew he couldn’t bond with this child. He loved his wife and he knew if push came to shove he wouldn’t let the baby come between his relationship with his wife. He just didn’t want the child coming into this world wondering why he didn’t bond with it. He didn’t want to mistreat the child and he didn’t want to lose his wife either.

Ricardo backed out of the driveway and went to the bar to have a drink at The Cheesecake Factory. He couldn’t bear to see his wife in pain and he was the one that caused it. After Alba finished crying she called her mom. The two of them had a nice conversation that made her smile then she went to shower. After Alba got dressed there was a knock at the door. “Thank you.” Alba said grabbing the package. Alba sat the package on the floor, she knew exactly what it was, but she wasn’t in the mood to look at it. Alba went inside the kitchen and took her tea leaves out of the cabinet to make her some tea.

Alba sat at the bar while her water boiled when the cordless phone rang. Alba ignored the phone call and sat back down. After Alba finished her tea, she laid in bed and thought about her children, they always made her smile. Ricardo walked inside the house an hour and a half later. He sat inside the family room and fell asleep. Alba heard him and she didn’t go near him.

Alba hadn’t talked to Ricardo in three days; they were even sleeping in separate beds and taking separate vehicles to work. Ricardo knew they didn’t even know if there was a child or not. He wished he had told her what she wanted to hear, but he promised to always tell her his truth and he did. Fernando began to feel like a winner. They were separate now and that made him even happier. Fernando knew sooner or later he would have Alba. He just had a few more lose strings to take care of and he’d have all that he ever wanted.

Ricardo finished up with his patient and went to the sonogram room where his wife was working. Alba walked out the door and asks, “May I help you?” “Baby we need to talk.” Ricardo said. “We’re at work and we don’t talk our personal business here.” Alba said. “I know Alba; I just wanted to make sure you’re ok.” Ricardo said. “I’m fine I’m doing my job it’s what keeps me sane.” “Alba I do love you.” “I don’t want what I said to make you doubt my love.” “You already doubted our love when you’ve already planned on me giving it up.” Alba said touching her stomach. Then she walked back inside the sonogram room.

On the way home Alba heard her cell ringing but she couldn’t get to it so she continued to drive. Alba began to feel her heart beating fast she knew it was the call she had been waiting for. Alba continued to think, “Please God don’t let me be pregnant; if I am I’m going to lose my husband.” “I need my husband more than this baby.” Alba cried. Alba pulled into the driveway and then the garage. Alba grabbed her purse and then her phone. She saw it was her doctor that had called. Alba began to tremble she was afraid to listen to the voice mail. Alba walked inside the house, Ricardo was waiting for her.

“Can we talk?” Ricardo asks. “I’d rather not.” Ricardo stood up and grabbed her hand and said, “Alba I’m dying inside without you.” “I can’t go another day with silence between us.” “Please talk to me.” “The hospital called and left a message.” Alba said. “What did they say?” “I didn’t listen; I’ll play the message now for both of us to hear.”

**Chapter 21**

**“Marital Problems”**

“Throughout life people will make you mad, disrespect you and treat you bad.” “Let God deal with the things they do, cause hate in your heart will consume you too.” -Will Smith

“I’m losing my wife.” Ricardo said. “She’s still angry; she loves you she’s not going anywhere.” Cassandra said. “She looks at me with sadness in her eyes.” “I don’t know what else to do.” “I should have never told her my true feelings.” Ricardo says. “I can’t believe Fernando is the way he is.” “He really hates you.” Cassandra said. “I should have never taken Gloria away from him, then he wouldn’t be trying to break up my marriage.” Ricardo confessed. “So you finally come out and say it.” Cassandra said. “Have you seen him maybe if I apologize he’ll leave my wife alone.” “Ricardo are you afraid you’ll lose her to him?” “She won’t leave me for him; she hates him.” Ricardo said getting upset. “Are you sure she doesn’t hate you?” Cassandra asks.

Alba was home cleaning; when she was upset that is what she did. Alba stood up on a chair to clean the spider webs out of the corner of the wall. “What is that?” Alba asks. “Oh my God is this a camera.” Alba said touching it. Alba got off the chair and grabbed her cellphone. Ricardo was sitting on his sister’s couch when he got the call he was surprised to see it was Alba calling. “I gotta go it’s Alba.” Ricardo said getting up. Once he stepped outside he answered his phone.

Ricardo finally made it home and Alba said, “This is how Fernando knows everything; look what I found.” “Is this a camera?” Ricardo said taking it out of her hand. “Yes.” “That son of a bitch.” Ricardo said. “Do you think there’s more?” Alba asks. “There has to be I’ll start looking inside the bedroom.” Ricardo said and Alba followed. By the end of the night they found five more cameras. Ricardo and Alba sat on the couch next to each other. “I can’t believe he planted these cameras inside our house.” “He’s seen and heard everything.” Ricardo said shaking his head. “I feel violated.” Alba said.

Saturday; Ricardo decided to do some shopping alone. He was trying to find his wife something to make her smile again. He hated going the material gift route but what else could he possibly do to make her happy again. Ricardo made it home a few hours later with her a gift from Tiffany’s. “You didn’t have to buy me anything.” Alba said. “I wanted to.” Ricardo said handing her the Tiffany’s bag. “Open it.” “I don’t want it, thanks for the thought.” Alba said then got up.

Two months later; Alba had put in her two weeks’ notice and Ricardo wasn’t too happy about that. “Why are you doing this; you know this is the one thing that will upset me.” Ricardo said. “You hurt me; I hurt you I think that’s how our relationship is playing out.” “Alba we have to fix our marriage, if we don’t we’re going to lose one another.” “You’re giving my brother exactly what he wants.” “He wants us to fight; he wants us not to get alone.” “He wants us apart.” Ricardo says. “I’m going to bed.” Alba said then she walked off.

It was finally Alba’s last day at the clinic with her husband. The staff was throwing Alba a goodbye party and Ricardo didn’t want to have anything to do with it. Everyone sensed that Ricardo was angry by her moving on away from him. Alba felt it was what she needed but most of all she did it to hurt him. Ricardo knew Alba was still hurt and he was trying to make her happy she just wouldn’t accept anything he was trying to do.

Three months later; Alba was finally adjusting to her new job. The staff was great there was just one thing missing; Ricardo and Alba just couldn’t believe how much of a mistake she had made by leaving his clinic. Alba began to realize that she didn’t want to lose her husband. Ricardo was angry and sad at the same time. He couldn’t stand that Alba just left without even asking his opinion. He knew she did it out of spite. Ricardo also wondered would she ever come back to the clinic.

“Dr. Cruz did you want me to put the sonogram position on the website?” Ashley asks. “No that won’t be necessary; we have someone from the temp agency filling that position until Mrs. Cruz comes back.” Ricardo says then walks off. Pilar turned around and asks, “Did he just say his wife was coming back?” “He did I’m shocked being that she’s been gone for three months.” “I think it would be best if she came back; Dr. Cruz works better with her here.” Pilar said. “True now he’s mean and frowns a lot.” “A man that handsome shouldn’t frown.” Ashley says. “Don’t forget that man is taken.” Pilar said shaking her finger at her.

Alba was about to leave work when her car wouldn’t start. She tried and tried but nothing was happening so Alba pulled out her phone and called Ricardo. By the time Ricardo got to her job someone else was already working on it. “Thank you so much Julien.” Alba smiled. “It was my pleasure be safe.” Julien smiled. “Thank you.” Ricardo got out of his Audi and walked to his wife’s car. “You know this guy?” Julien asks before he got inside his car. “I’m the husband.” Ricardo said. “Oh nice to meet you I’m Julien.” “Thanks for fixing my wife’s car.” Ricardo said. Julien pulled off and Ricardo said, “I’ll follow you home.” “Ok.” Alba said then she got inside her car.

After Alba helped the twins with their homework; she went outside to swing with them. Ricardo stood inside the kitchen looking out the door at Alba and the twins. Ricardo really wished that he and Alba made up. When the phone rang that’s what took Ricardo’s attention. Ricardo was happy to hear his Mom’s voice and to hear she was coming to visit in a couple weeks.

A week later; Ricardo felt he and Alba were drifting more and more apart. Alba could feel it to. Alba had begun to discuss her relationship with a co-worker that she felt comfortable with. Alba hadn’t realized that he was very interested in her. Every day after work Alba would stand in the parking lot talking to Julian for almost twenty minutes. Ricardo had begun to notice she was later and later getting home.

Ricardo began to get worried so he started going to her job watching her every day. Ricardo had been doing this for over a month and he was getting more and more worried. His worried mind began to wonder and he was becoming angry. After Alba showered Ricardo walked inside the bathroom and sat on the toilet looking at Alba. Alba didn’t say anything and out of nowhere Ricardo asks, “Are you sleeping with the Mexican guy?” Alba frowned and asks, “What Mexican guy?” “The guy who fixed your car.” “He’s not Mexican he’s from South America.”

Ricardo stood up and asks, “Why do you stand outside every single day talking to him.” “What the hell are you two talking about?” Alba put her hands on her hip and asks, “How do you know we stand outside everyday talking?” “Ricardo are you spying on me?” “Yes I have been for months; answer my question.” Ricardo said raising his voice. “You’re so stupid.” Alba said grabbing her shirt. “Alba I’m not playing with you just answer the damn question.” “Why the hell are you talking to this guy?” “You can come home and talk to me!” Ricardo yelled.

“This is insane; you’re insane.” “I’m not going to argue about something so silly.” Alba says. “Are you sleeping with him because you sure as hell aren’t sleeping with me?” “You won’t even let me touch you.” Ricardo says. “Is that what’s bothering you I won’t have sex with you; you never ask for sex anymore.” Alba said. “Because you’ll turn me down.” Ricardo said. “How do you know if you never ask?” Alba said then she walked out of the bathroom.

Sunday after church Alba and Stacey went to have lunch at The Olive Garden. “Can you actually believe that Ricardo thinks I’m sleeping with this guy from work?” “He’s such a jerk.” Alba says. “Are you sleeping with him?” “Stacey of course not; I’m not an adulterer I love my husband.” “Then Alba you have to forgive him and tell him.” “You don’t want to lose him do you?” Stacey asks. “No.” Alba responded.

Monday after work as always Alba and Julien stood outside talking and Julien admitted something to Alba that she didn’t expect. “Alba I really like you.” Julien said. “I like you too.” Alba smiled. Julien moved closer to Alba and said, “I like you as in I want to date you.” Then he kissed her and Alba moved her face. “I, I’m married.” Alba said. “I know I can’t help the way I feel.” “Julien I’m not gonna cheat on my husband.” “I gotta go.” Alba said opening her car door. Alba drove off and headed home as fast as she could.

Ricardo made it home around six; he was tired. All he wanted to do was shower and get a bite to eat. “I have your dinner on the table.” Alba said. “Ok, thank you.” Ricardo said. Then he walked inside the kitchen that’s when Alba walked inside the kitchen. “What would you like to drink?” Ricardo didn’t know what to say, Alba hadn’t really talked to him in months. “Ah lemonade is fine.” Ricardo responded. “Ok.”

While Ricardo finished his meal; Alba put up the dishes. Ricardo watched her the entire time. “The grilled chicken is delicious.” Ricardo said. Alba turned around with a smile on her face and said, “Thank you I hoped you’d like it.” After Alba finished the dishes she sat at the bar next to Ricardo. “Could we talk?” Alba asks. “Sure.” Ricardo said looking at his plate. “Ricardo I’m sorry that I’ve been angry.” “I shouldn’t have asks you that question, it was unfair of me to expect you to be able to deal with well you know.” “Ricardo I do still love you; I want us to get back close, you’re my best friend.”

Ricardo finally turned to look at Alba still not saying a single word and Alba said, “I’m sorry for leaving your clinic.” “The job change was to only upset you further and that was evil of me.” “I’m not that kind of person.” “Ricardo please forgive me; I’ll do anything to make you happy.” “If you’ll take me back I’d love to come back and work for you.” “I know the position is probably filled, but I can take out the trash or anything just to be back.” “My life was a lot better when I was there.” “I miss the patients, the staff, but most of all you.” Alba says.

“Alba that’s all I’ve wanted for you to forgive me; I forgive you.” “I love you so much and you can come back to the clinic tomorrow if you want to.” “I never filled your position I couldn’t.” Ricardo says. Alba smiles then put her arms around his neck and said, “I love you so much.” “I love you too; I miss you so much.” Ricardo said then he began to kiss her and she kisses him back. Their kisses lead to the bedroom.

After the two of them finished making love Alba straddled Ricardo on the bed and he held on to her hips. “Did you really mean it when you said you’d come back to the clinic?” Ricardo asks. “Of course; I’m putting in my notice tomorrow.” Ricardo pulled Alba down and starts kissing her some more. “Alba I want us to have a baby; I think it’s time.” Ricardo smiled. “You’re sure you want this.” “Things will change Ricardo.” “Something’s will change but not everything I promise.” “I’m not Juan I’m not going to put the child off on you every second of the day.” “I’m going to be involved; you trust me right?” Ricardo asks. “Of course I do, I just thought we’d wait a few more years.” Alba said.

**Chapter 22**

**“Captivity”**

“An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

Alba was finally back at the clinic with her husband everyone were so happy to see her. All the staff could see that Dr. Cruz was happier and that was a plus for the clinic. The patients were happy to see Alba too. She was so friendly and loving; she talked to the patients. She even passed out gifts from time to time. That’s why Ricardo loved her so much because she wanted to make everybody happy and with all that love to spread around she still had so much love to give him.

Ricardo and Alba had been making love almost every day. They were trying to get pregnant and it was really fun trying to make a baby. “We’ve been going at this for months and nothing.” Ricardo said. “Maybe I need to see my doctor; something’s probably wrong with me.” Alba said. Ricardo stood behind her and kissed the back of her neck and said, “Nothing’s wrong with you, it could be me.” Alba turned around and said, “What if my body won’t produce another baby since I’m pass thirty-five.” Ricardo smiled and said, “No, Halle Berry was like almost fifty when she had her first.” “She was forty or forty-one Ricardo.” “Your body can produce ten more babies if we wanted, lets both just make appointments and see what’s going on.” “Ok.”

A week later; Ricardo’s test results came back. Ricardo was fine so they were just waiting on Alba to see the doctor to see was there anything wrong with her. “My doctor’s appointment is tomorrow at four o’clock.” Alba said. “I’ll be there with you stop looking so worried.” Ricardo said. “What if I can’t give you a child?” “Come on we already have Jayden and the twins and we can adopt.” Ricardo smiles. “I guess you’re right.” Alba said then hugged him. “Let’s get out of here before we’re late and I don’t feel like hearing Stacey’s whining.” Ricardo smiled. “I’m going to tell her what you said.” Alba smiled.

Ricardo and Alba finally made it to the restaurant. After everyone ordered their drinks and food Stacey and Luis announced they were having another baby. “Congratulations.” Alba smiled. Alba was happy for her friend, but she was also sad inside because they were trying to conceive and nothing was happening right now. Ricardo leaned over and whispered in Alba’s ear, “Are you alright?” “Yes, of course.” Alba smiled. Ricardo took her hand and said, “We’ll be ok.”

The next day Ricardo and Alba were at her doctor’s appointment. Alba found out that her fallopian tubes were blocked was the reason she couldn’t get pregnant. “What’s the procedure to unblock her tubes?” Ricardo asks. “Surgery.” The doctor responded. “Why surgery?” Ricardo asks. “After carefully reviewing the images I think surgery is the best option because of the location of the blockage and there’s a lot of blockage Dr. Cruz.” The doctor explained.

Ricardo and Alba were on the way home and Ricardo said, “If you don’t want to do this surgery you don’t have to.” “We want a baby we have to.” Alba said. Ricardo reached out and grabbed her hand and said, “I promise I will be with you all the way.” “I’ll nurse you back to health I promise.” Then Ricardo touched the back of her head and said, “We’re in this together; I promise this is going to be a happy pregnancy.” Alba smiled and said, “I believe you.”

Summer had come and Alba was doing more fun things with the twins. They were so full of energy. “Hey let Mommy rest and I’ll take you two out for yogurt.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok.” Leonardo said. “Baby you want anything while I’m out.” “No I’m fine; I’m gonna lie on the couch for a while.” “Are you ok?” “Just tired they tired me out.” Alba smiled. “We won’t be gone long.”

A week later; “Ricardo I’m ovulating you need to come home now.” Alba smiled. “I’m on my way, get in bed and wait for me.” Ricardo smiled. “I’m already there naked waiting on you.” “I’m pulling in the driveway.” “Doors unlocked.” As soon as Ricardo walked inside Alba was sitting in the bed waiting on her husband smiling at him. “I’ve been waiting on this all day.” Ricardo smiled. “Me too; come here.”

Once the love making began Alba’s body felt incredible and once he entered her vagina Alba knew something wasn’t right. Alba thought, “This is not my husband.” Alba stared into Ricardo’s eyes and he stared into her eyes continuing to please her. Alba wrapped her arms around his neck and he asks, “How does it feel?” Ricardo asks. “Good, don’t stop.” Alba whispered. Alba hoped this was her husband giving her pleasure, but deep down she knew this wasn’t her husband.

Ricardo was good in bed but he wasn’t this good and Alba knew. Alba just couldn’t stop herself she needed this kind of sex so she didn’t stop him. Then out of nowhere she said, “Fernando I love you.” Fernando smiled because he knew she wanted him and he wanted her just as bad. “I love you too.” Fernando smiled. Once they finished Alba always immediately fell to sleep like always and Fernando left shortly afterwards.

A couple weeks later Alba and Ricardo were still trying to conceive. Alba had begun to think she was pregnant she had start to feel nauseated and light headed. Then Alba thought it could be her nerves getting the best of her. She didn’t want to get her hopes up. Ricardo came home around ten o’clock, he had a long surgery. Alba was already sleeping when Ricardo walked inside the bedroom. After he showered, he got in bed with his wife naked. He began kissing her and undressing her in her sleep.

“Ricardo.” “Go back to sleep.” Ricardo said. “I’m not in the mood tonight.” Alba whispered. “You will be.” Ricardo said then he kissed her neck and worked his way to her ear. Alba smiled because she was getting turned on. Once the love making had begun Alba had a flash back of how it was when she and Fernando were making love. This was the same way, Alba opened her eyes and said,“Ricardo turn on the lamp.” “In the middle of sex you want the light on.” Ricardo said surprised. “Yes please.” Ricardo turned on the lamp and laid back on top of her. “What’s wrong?” Alba looked at Ricardo and he wondered why she was staring at him that way. “Let me see your side.” Alba said. “Alba you want to see my side.” “Yes, let me see your birth mark now.” Alba demanded. “Alba do you think I’m my brother?” Ricardo asks. “Let me see it right now.” Alba said raising her voice.

So Ricardo let her see his right side and there it was. Ricardo asks, “What am I doing to you that reminds you of my brother?” “Nothing.” Alba said hoping they could just finish what they started. “Are you sure?” “Yes I’m sure.” “You want me to just stop this?” Ricardo asks. “No of course not, I want you.” Alba said touching his arms. “Ok then.” Ricardo smiled. They made love twice that night and it was incredible. Alba wondered why her husband felt that incredible. I mean don’t get me wrong he was great in bed but he had stepped up his game and Alba loved that.

The next day at work things weren’t going so smoothly. Alba wondered what had gotten into her husband; he was all over the place. He seemed out of his element, forgetting patient names, not walking into the correct rooms. “Dr. Cruz what’s wrong?” Alba asks. “Nothing, I’m looking for Mrs. Dorothy.” “She’s right here.” Alba pointed at the door. “Oh thank you baby.” Alba looked at Ricardo because he normally didn’t call her baby at work.

“Mrs. Cruz, could I talk to you inside my office?” Dr. Gibson asks. “Ah sure.” Alba said walking inside. “Close the door.” “Sure.” Alba responded. “You can have a seat.” “What’s up with your husband today?” “I was going to asks you; I’m not sure.” “He’s strange today.” “He seems to be someone else.” Dr. Gibson said. “That’s impossible.” Alba smiled. “Yeah I know that.” Then Alba began to think about their love making last night. “Oh my God.” Alba said. “What?” Alba stood up and said, “Ah I forgot Mrs. Hayes is waiting on me in the sonogram room; we’ll talk later.” Alba smiled. “Sure.” Dr. Gibson smiled.

Ricardo and Alba were on their way home. Alba said, “You’ve never had an off day like today.” “I thought last night was great we made love twice.” “Tell me what’s wrong?” Alba asks. “I don’t know.” “I’m just having one of those days.” Ricardo responded. “Ok.” Alba said staring out the window.

The next day; Pilar came into the sonogram room where Alba was working. “That man can’t be Dr. Cruz.” Pilar said. “Excuse me.” Alba said turning around with a look of shock on her face. “Baby I’m just joking.” “Dr. Cruz hasn’t been himself I think it may have to do with him stressing about you two having a child.” “Yeah me too.” Alba smiled. “Take care of him Alba he really needs you.” “Thank you, I need him too.”

Later Alba sat with Mrs. Ross while she was getting her chemotherapy treatments. “How’s my favorite girl?” Mrs. Ross asks. “I’m fine and how’s my favorite patient?” Alba smiled. “I’m fine; something’s wrong what is it?” Mrs. Ross asks. “Nothing I’m just worried about Dr. Cruz.” “You know that’s not him.” Alba sat up and asks, “What do you mean?” “He looked at me today like he didn’t know me.” “He wouldn’t look me in my eye.” “Alba I know you feel it to.” Mrs. Ross says. Alba wiped her tears and said, “I think it’s his twin brother.” “What are you going to do baby?” “I have to find my husband.” “I hope he hasn’t hurt him.” Alba says. “You can’t let him know you suspect anything.” Alba gave Mrs. Ross a kiss on the cheek and said, “Thank you.” “Anything for you Alba.”

Alba and Ricardo were on their way home and Alba already knew that wasn’t her husband but she had to play the part. “Did you want to eat at home or go out today?” Fernando asks. “Home is fine.” Alba said. Once they got home Fernando walked inside the bedroom and he said, “Come shower with me.” “I was going to start dinner.” Alba said. Fernando smiled and said, “I told you I was going to cook; come on.” He said taking her hand. “Ok.” Alba said really hating to this. Once the two of them got inside the shower Fernando began to touch her and kiss her. Alba was trying not like it so much but she enjoyed everything he was doing to her and Alba felt bad.

Fernando finally turned off the shower and he continued to kiss her more and more. “I love you so much.” Fernando whispered. “I love you too.” Alba said. They finally got to the bed and Fernando laid Alba down and he put her legs up. He began to tease her with his tongue and Alba felt like she was about to explode. “You want me don’t you?” Fernando smiled. “Yes.” Alba responded. He smiled at her and then he got on top of her and began to please her. “I want you on top.” Fernando whispered. “Ok.” Alba said.

For the next couple days Alba was following Fernando. She was determined to find her husband. On the fourth day of following Fernando, he drove to an abandoned hospital suite Downtown Dallas. Alba saw the suite he walked into and she followed him. Fernando looked back from time to time to see if anyone was following him.

Fernando walked into a room it looked like an old medical storage room, boxes were everywhere and it was dark inside. Ricardo sat on the floor with his arms tied to the back and his head was hanging down. Ricardo raised his head when he saw the light from Fernando’s flash light. “What did you do to me?” Ricardo asks. “What do you think?” “I did to you what you planned to do to me.” Fernando smiled. “You’re not going to get away with this; Alba’s going to figure it out.” “I doubt it; we’ve been having the most incredible sex every single night since you’ve been gone.” “Even if she has figured it out, she’s not going to want you back man just face it.” “Alba’s mine now and there’s nothing you can do about it.” Fernando smiled.

“Fernando you have to let me go; what did you give me?” Ricardo asks. “Something to help you rest; soon you’ll stop fighting and you’ll go ahead and die.” “Fernando I’m your brother don’t do this.” “You started this; you brought me here remember.” “I was just smarter than you.” “Fernando I’m sorry.” Ricardo said. “I bet you are sorry you didn’t tie me up.” “You took Gloria away from me and now I have my chance to take Alba away from you.” “Alba is different from Gloria that’s why I’m so wild about her.” “The way your wife makes love to me I know she loves me.” “The way her legs shake when she climaxes and the way she leans her head back and open her mouth it’s amazing.” “I’ve loved every moment of it.” Fernando smiled.

Ricardo got really upset when Fernando said that to him. He began to yell at Fernando and Fernando just laughed. “You’re angry, sorry bro, you lost I won.” “You haven’t won yet; Alba will see you for who you really are!” Ricardo yelled. “No, she will see you for who you are; you’re playing this good guy role with her when you’re the evil twin.” “One day Alba will realize she’s with the wrong guy.” Fernando smiled.

Alba had taken photos of the suite and the address and then she texted Stacey and Bridget. She was inside hiding waiting for Fernando to leave. Alba was determined to see just what was inside that room. Alba heard Fernando when he was leaving. He put the keys back above the door then left out. Alba waited awhile before she got out of the trash can. Alba got out and dusted herself off. She grabbed the keys and walked inside it was dark. Alba was afraid to walk inside dark rooms she touched the wall to see if she could feel for a light switch but nothing. Alba realized she had her cellphone so she pulled it out and turned on the flash light.

“Ricardo.” Alba called. “Alba.” Ricardo whispered. Alba continued to move the phone around to see if she could see him and when she spotted him she ran to him. Alba sat on the floor beside him and then she sat her phone on the floor and touched his face. “What did he do to you; what did he do baby?” Alba asks. “He drugged me; please get me out of here.” “I knew you’d come.” Ricardo says. “Of course, I’m gonna get you out.” Alba said taking the knife out of her pocket. After Alba cut the rope off his arms and legs she helped him up. Ricardo could barely stand because Fernando had just drugged him some more.

Alba finally got Ricardo outside and the light was really hurting his eyes. “Alba I can’t do this.” Ricardo said in pain. “I know baby I know.” “When we get to the car you can cover your eyes.” Ricardo fell to the ground and Alba tried to help him up. Alba was afraid to leave him there alone to get her SUV. “Baby you have do this or we won’t get to the hospital.” “I’m too weak to carry you, you’re very heavy.” Alba said. “I just need to rest.” “Alba I’m hungry, I’m tired, and I’m thirsty.” Ricardo said closing his eyes. Then a stranger came up and asks, “Is everything alright?” “No my husband’s been hurt; could you please help me get him to my car?” “Sure.” The man said. Once they got Ricardo in the backseat Alba asks, “Do I owe you anything?” “No, I just really wanted to help you.” “Thank you so much.” Alba said. “You’re welcome.” Before Alba pulled out she opened a bottle of water and poured some inside his mouth.

Alba sat inside the hospital room with her husband. He was hooked to so many machines and Alba was so afraid that he wouldn’t make it. Alba called Stacey and Stacey was there within the matter of minutes. After Alba explained to Stacey what all had been going on Stacey said, “I can’t believe you kept all that from me.” “I didn’t want you to worry.” “Alba you’re always living these Life Time movies.” Stacey joked. “I know; I’m so happy I found him.” Alba said sitting down. “Alba how did you realize he wasn’t Ricardo.” “He was strange with the staff at work, the patients.” “Ricardo’s never like that.” Alba explained. “He’s lucky to have you.” Stacey said.

After Stacey left Ricardo start calling Alba’s name. Alba was just walking back inside his room. “Alba, Alba where are you?” Ricardo called. Alba walked to his hospital bed and said, “I’m here baby; how do you feel?” “Lay next to me.” Ricardo said. “Ok.” Alba said. Alba took off her shoes and laid beside him and he put his arm around her. “Don’t hurt yourself there’s an IV in your arm. “I was so afraid that you wouldn’t come searching for me.” “Ricardo, he did trick me, but the moment we got to work I realized he wasn’t you.” “I had to make him think I didn’t suspect a thing.” Alba explained. “We don’t have to talk about what you two did.” Ricardo said. “Ok.” “How are you feeling?” “Much better.”

After the police took Alba and Ricardo’s statement Ricardo had fallen asleep. Alba got out of bed with Ricardo because she heard her cell phone ringing. “Hello.” “Alba where are you?” Fernando asks. “You’re home?” Alba asks. “Yes waiting for you; I cooked dinner.” Fernando said. “Fernando I know it’s you.” Alba said. That came as a surprise. “The police should be there shortly to arrest you for what you did to my husband.” “Alba what are you talking about?” Fernando asks. “Please just stop I know you’re not my husband ok, the gigs up.” Alba said then she hung up the phone.

**Chapter 23**

**“The Stalker”**

“Love her and protect her that’s what every woman wants.”

-Chantanell Santos

“You look beautiful pregnant.” Ricardo said touching her small baby bump. “I’ll be so glad when I’m out of the first trimester I’m miserable.” Alba said sitting down. “What would you like to eat?” Ricardo asks. “Cheese.” “Cheese you always want cheese, anything else?” “No just cheese.” Alba smiled.

A week later Ricardo and Alba flew to Puerto Rico to visit his family. “Alba you look so beautiful pregnant.” Flavia said. “Thank you.” Alba smiled. “Pregnancy really agrees with you.” “Mama’, Alba and I are going to go inside the bedroom and rest before dinner.” “Ok, I’ll have everything cooked in an hour.” “Ok, thanks.” Ricardo said then gave his Mom a kiss on the cheek.

Alba and Ricardo laid in bed and Alba said, “Let’s have sex.” “No, what about the baby.” Ricardo responded. “We’re not going to hurt the baby.” “I don’t know, it just doesn’t feel right making love to you and you’re pregnant.” “Ricardo you act like I have a disease, it’s just a baby.” “I really want you; I miss your body being next to mine.” Alba says touching him. “I’ve never seen you like this.” Ricardo smiled. “Like what?” “Begging for it and all.” “Well give it to me then.” Alba smiled. “Ok just a little.

After dinner Ricardo and Alba walked on the beach. Alba enjoyed herself and being with her husband was spectacular. “I love you so much Alba.” “I love you too.” “When this baby comes I promise things are going to be better than what they are now.” “I’m gonna keep you happy I promise.” Ricardo says. “I believe you and I’m gonna keep you happy too.” Alba smiled.

Ricardo and Alba were finally home; Stacey came over the next day to visit. “You look so pretty.” Alba complimented. “Thank you; I feel like I’m going to burst.” Stacey said taking a seat. “How about we go sit outside, I made us lemonade and appetizers we can relax by the pool.” Alba said. “Ok great.”

Alba and Stacey sat outside having a great conversation; Alba decided to make a confession. “What confession?” Stacey asks sitting her glass down. “Have you ever made love to your husband and thought about another guy that you’ve been with?” Alba asks. Stacey frowned and said, “No, Luis is the best.” “Now I have seen some men on television and thought about them whenever we’ve made love a couple times.” “Alba who are you thinking about; not Juan are you?” Stacey asks. “No of course not.” “Remember I was telling you that Ricardo’s brother tricked me and we had sex a few times.” “Yeah, Alba you aren’t.” Stacey said nearly jumping out of her seat.

“Stacey I would never intentionally cheat on Ricardo, but lately when we have sex the only way I can climax is if I think about when his brother and I having sex.” “Alba are you serious?” “I feel so bad, sex with Ricardo is amazing, but sex with his brother was I don’t know it was so good Stacey.” “Alba I think if Ricardo heard you it would break his heart.” “I know it would; I just had to tell somebody.” “I hate Fernando, but sometimes I find myself fanaticizing about the times we had sex and he was amazing.” “The way he feels inside of me makes me tremble.” Alba says.

“So what does he do differently?” Stacey asks. “His moves, I can’t describe it he’s incredible in bed.” “The way he kisses my shoulder and holds my waist.” “Alba you don’t think you’re with the wrong twin do you?” “Of course not I love my husband and I’d never act on my feelings.” Stacey sat up and said, “Oh my God, you have feelings for this guy.” “I didn’t mean it like that.” Alba said. “Alba you better be careful you just said, “You’d never act on your feelings.” Alba put her head back looking up at the sky and said, “Forget what I said ok, yes Fernando is a great lover that’s it, I don’t want him.”

After Stacey left Alba went inside Ricardo’s office to see what he was up to. Alba realized that Ricardo wasn’t in a good mood and she wanted to find out what was wrong. “Alba just leave me alone.” Ricardo said. “What’s wrong?” Alba said touching his head. “Nothing, baby I’m busy.” “I have a lot of papers to fill out.” “Monday is going to be a very stressful day; we both have a lot to do at the clinic.” Ricardo says. “I know we do, but we have today and tomorrow to enjoy.” “I can’t enjoy I have a stack of papers to read and sign.” “Let me help you.” Alba said trying to grab some of the papers. “I didn’t ask for your help ok.” Ricardo said raising his voice. “Ok, I’ll just go.” Alba said with her feelings hurt

Wednesday; Ricardo and Alba were leaving work late. “Don’t forget we have to stop at the market.” Alba said. “I remember Alba.” “Ricardo what’s wrong; you’ve had an attitude with me for days now.” “Did I do something wrong?” Alba asks. “I’m just not in the mood ok.” “Ok.” Ricardo pulled up at the market and he normally opened the door for Alba but this time he didn’t. Alba was feeling very frustrated because her husband was pissed about something and she couldn’t figure out what it was.

“Ricardo wait up; what is your problem?” “You didn’t even open the door for me.” “I’ll tell you what my problem is; you are my problem.” Ricardo said. “I’m your problem; what did I do?” “I heard you Alba; I heard what you told Stacey.” “What did I tell Stacey you lost me?” Alba said. “Let’s get in the car because this is going to get loud.” Ricardo said grabbing her arm. “You don’t have to grab me like that; you’re going to hurt me.” Alba said pulling away. The two of them finally got inside the car and Alba said, “What did I tell Stacey; it can’t be that serious.” “Well it is Alba; you told Stacey in these exact words that Fernando is a great lover.”

Alba turned her head and looked out the window she didn’t know what to say. “Alba do you know how I felt when I heard you say that to her.” “You finally admitted it when I suspected it.” “You think about him when you’re with me don’t you?” Ricardo asks. “No.” Alba said. “Why won’t you look at me?” “The conversation we were having was private.” Alba said. “You should have never said it if you didn’t want me to hear it.” “All you said was how you really felt, you want my brother.” “You’re just like Gloria.” Ricardo says. Alba looked at Ricardo and said, “I’m nothing like her; don’t ever say that again.” “You are she said the same damn thing; Fernando is such a great lover.” “What next you’re going to run off into the sunset with him?” Ricardo asks. “No, I don’t want your brother ok.” “Take me home!” Alba said raising her voice.

They finally made it home, Alba sat on the couch and Ricardo went inside his office. Alba felt horrible that Ricardo heard what she said to Stacey. She was so thankful he didn’t hear the entire conversation. Alba knocked on Ricardo’s office door, but Ricardo never invited her inside, so Alba took it upon herself to invite herself inside. “I’m not in the mood Alba.” “I need my privacy.” Ricardo says not looking her way. “Ricardo I’m so sorry for what you heard me say.” “I didn’t mean it; I don’t want your brother I swear.” “I love you.” Alba says. “Right now what you say doesn’t even matter to me.” “I could care less about what you’re saying to me; get the hell out of my office.” Ricardo says. Alba walked out of the room and closed the door.

A couple days later Ricardo still wasn’t talking to Alba so Alba decided to go spend some time with her cousin. “Alba why are you over here; you’re not even talking.” Bridget said. “I just needed to get out of the house.” “Oh just use me then.” Bridget said getting off of the sofa. “Would you like something to eat or drink?” “Water.” Alba responded getting up. Alba sat at the bar and Bridget said, “There’s obviously something you want to talk about so tell me.” “I did something wrong.” “You did something wrong that’s hard to believe Mrs. Goody To Shoes.” “Bridget I’m serious.” Alba said. “I already know about you telling Stacey, Ricardo’s brother is better in bed.” “What?” Alba frowned. “You butt dialed me and I ease dropped on your conversation.”

“That’s not it.” Alba said opening her bottle of water. Bridget smiled and said, “Damn that’s more.” “Bridge.” “Alba why do you tell Stacey everything, you don’t tell me anything.” “I don’t tell you because I don’t know.” Alba said. “I’m proud of you no matter what you do Alba.” “Married people cheat and I know you’re not the cheating type but some people just have a weakness.” “Ricardo’s brother got you thinking huh?” Bridget says. “Bridget I had sex with Fernando and I knew it was him.” “I didn’t stop him and I told him that I love him.” Alba admitted. Bridget sat her beer on the bar and she just stared at Alba, she was shocked. “Alba are you planning on leaving your husband?” Alba wiped her tears and said, “Of course not; I had to admit this to someone and I couldn’t say it to Stacey she’d judge me in the worst way.” “Is this baby Fernando’s?” Bridget asks.

Alba was finally in her second trimester; she and Ricardo were back on track it took Alba many apologies to get her husband to forgive her. Ricardo was ready to get past that and move on to bigger and better things. Around two o’clock Ricardo was inside his office when his phone rang. “Dr. Cruz how may I help you.” “Ricardo it’s your Mother.” “Hi Mama’.” Ricardo smiled. After Ricardo got off the phone with his Mom he went to track his wife down.

“Alba I need to see you inside my office when you finish with Mrs. Cawley.” “Oh I was just finishing up; I’ll be there in two minutes.” Alba said. “Ok.” Alba stepped back inside the room and said, “After your doctor views the sonogram he’ll be calling you in two to three days ok.” Alba smiled. “Thank you so much Mrs. Cruz.” “You’re welcome.”

Alba went straight to her husband’s office. Alba gave him a kiss and said, “So what’s up?” “Sit right here.” Ricardo said patting his lap and Alba said, “Ok; what’s on your mind?” Ricardo put his hands on his wife’s baby bump and said, “Fernando has this silly idea that our baby is his baby.” “He’s been filling my Mama’s head with this silliness.” “She told me that he’s back here and he’s planning on taking you away.” “Ricardo that’s never going to happen.” “I know that but he doesn’t.” “He thinks that he can take you Alba.” “He has this silly idea that you’re in love with him.” “That’s ridiculous, baby he can never take me away from you.” “I love you not him ok.” Alba says turning to him.

Friday after work Alba met Stacey to do some baby shopping. “Your tiny bump is so cute.” Stacey said. “Thank you, it’s tiny but I feel much bigger.” Alba commented. “I finally found out what I was having.” Stacey smiled. “The baby is finally opening the legs huh.” Alba smiled. “We’re having a boy I’m so excited.” “Well congratulations, you wanted a boy.” “I did.” Stacey said. Alba rubbed her baby bump and said, “I really hope this is a girl; I want one so bad.” “I hope it’s a girl too.” Stacey said.

After Alba and Stacey finished baby shopping they went their separate ways. Alba had to turn around because she left her phone on the counter at the store. Alba finally got her phone and was walking to her car when someone was waiting for her. “How are you?” Fernando asks. “I’m fine; could you get away from my car so I can get inside it?” “Yes, after you hear me out.” “There’s nothing you can say I don’t want to have anything with you.” Alba said. “How’s my baby?” “This is not your baby; you’re crazy to even think that.” “To say it is so laughable.” Alba smiled. “Alba you and I both know that when I made love to you that night you knew it was me; you called my name for goodness sake.” “Deep down you were happy it was me.” “I have a theory that you sit around with your friends and you tell them what a great lover I am in bed.” “I know you do.”

“Fernando the thought of you making love to me makes me sick to my stomach.” “The only man that will ever make love to me is my husband.” Alba says. “Then you’ll always have that boring sex that my brother gives.” “I’m sure you’re already in the position before he even says anything.” Fernando smiled. “Move.” Alba said. “Alba why else do you think Gloria got away from him.” “My brother’s a boring lover.” Fernando smiled. “I’m deeply in love with my husband and love makes me stay.” “I don’t want you; I don’t want you in my life.” “Will you just leave me alone?” Alba says.

“I’ll never leave you alone; you’re carrying my child and you’re in love with me.” “This isn’t your baby and I got caught up in the moment.” Alba said holding her baby bump. “So you finally admit that you knew it was me making love to you.” “Alba I know that’s my baby, the way you held on to me the night we made love twice.” “The way you trembled and held your head back.” “The way you looked at me and kissed me.” “I know that’s my child and you know it too.” Fernando says. Alba cut Fernando off and said, “Get the hell out of my way.” “I don’t want to hear this shit anymore, I have to go.”

For the next two weeks Fernando was showing up everywhere Alba went. She didn’t want to tell Ricardo because he’d be upset. She especially didn’t want Fernando telling Ricardo about her calling his name and telling him she loved him. Alba wanted Ricardo to be happy and when it came to Fernando, Ricardo’s entire attitude changed. “I can’t lose my husband.” Alba said.

After Alba shopped with Stacey and Bridget they stopped at restaurant to get a bite to eat and that’s when Fernando showed up pretending to be Ricardo. Alba knew exactly who he was and she wanted so badly to tell her friends but they hadn’t realized it wasn’t Ricardo. “Where are you two going?” Alba asks. “To the rest room you have your husband to keep you company.” Bridget said. “Don’t take too long.” Alba frowned. Once the two of them walked off Alba said, “Why in the hell are you here.” “I wanted to see you, you keep avoiding me.” “My God this child isn’t yours; I’m not yours.” “I’m never leaving my husband ok.” Fernando put his hand on the back of Alba’s head and said, “You’re in denial, you want me you’re just scared to admit it.” “You’re crazy.” Alba said.

Stacey and Bridget sat down and Bridget asks, “What’s wrong Alba?” “I have to go.” Alba frowned. “Ricardo what did you do?” Stacey asks. “This is not Ricardo; this is his psycho brother; Fernando.” Alba said. “Really.” Bridget smiled. “Yes.” “Wow he really looks like Ricardo; I see how he tricked you.” Bridget said. “Bridget shut up.” Stacey said. “I’m sorry.” Bridget said. “I’m leaving.” Alba said standing up. Fernando followed her and then Stacey got up and said, “Bridget I’ll be right back.”

“Fernando just leave me alone.” “I don’t want to have anything to do with you; do you understand that?” Alba says with tears in her eyes. Stacey walked up and said, “Leave her alone.” “She doesn’t want anything to do with you.” “This has nothing to do with you.” Fernando said. “Can’t you see what you’re doing to her?” “You’re making her cry.” Stacey says. “Alba I’m sorry I just love you so much and I was trying to convince you that I’m the man for you.” “I love my husband.” Alba said wiping her tears. “You don’t love him, you know you love me.” Fernando said and then he walked away.

“He’s gone are you going to be ok?” Stacey asks. “Yeah I gotta go home.” Alba said. “Call me as soon as you get there ok.” “I will bye.” Stacey went back inside of the restaurant and Bridget asks, “How’s Alba?” “Upset, she’s gone home.” “Girl Fernando looks good.” “Bridget he looks just like Ricardo.” Stacey said. “I know that; Alba’s one lucky girl.” “She should just screw the both of them.” Stacey began to laugh and she asks, “Where the hell do you come up with this?” “Alba loves her husband.” “Why the hell is Ricardo’s brother so taken with Alba?” “Bridget I don’t know.” “You know something tell me.” “It’s Alba’s business to tell not mine.” Stacey said. “She slept with Ricardo’s brother didn’t she?” “That little sneaky hoe.” Bridget smiled. “He tricked her like he was Ricardo ok.”

Stacey had finally had her baby boy. Ricardo and Alba rushed to the hospital to see baby boy. “He’s so adorable.” Alba smiled holding him. “He’s handsome.” Ricardo corrected. “Whatever Ricardo.” Alba smiled. After Alba and Ricardo finished visiting they headed to pick up a few things from the market.

“We have a lot of cheese on the shopping cart.” Ricardo said. “We need ice cream, bananas, and corn on the cob.” Alba said. “You have really weird cravings.” “This is good stuff.” Alba smiled. “Yes it is.” Once the two of them got on the ice cream aisle they ran into Fernando. “Are you following me and my wife?” Ricardo asks. “Hey didn’t know you two were in here.” Fernando smiled. “Fernando you got away with kidnapping and drugging me.” “I’m gonna find a way to get you locked away for good.” “Stay the hell away from my wife; she hates you just as much as I do.” Ricardo said. Then Ricardo took Alba’s hand and they walked away. Fernando stood there watching the two of them just smiling.

**Chapter 24**

**“Dreaded Decisions”**

“Trust in the lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths.” -Proverbs 3:5-6

While Ricardo finished painting the nursery Alba sat inside the family room on the floor putting the bassinet together when she began to feel some pains. “Ouch.” Alba said getting up. Alba sat on the couch and she could feel the pains getting stronger every ten minutes. “Ricardo, Ricardo!” Ricardo ran out of the nursery and asks, “What’s wrong?” “I think I may be in labor.” “Right now; you’re not seven months yet.” “Ricardo please help me; I’m in a lot of pain.” Alba said. “Ok, let me change shirts one minute.” Ricardo said then ran to the bedroom.

Ricardo finally got Alba to the hospital to get monitored. Ricardo sat in a chair next to her holding her hand. “You’re going to be fine baby, I’m right here.” Ricardo said touching her baby bump. “I hate pain.” Alba frowned. “You’re ok, I’m not going anywhere.”

Alba was finally sent back home. After Alba settled inside her bedroom Ricardo went to get some of her favorite things to eat and brought them inside the bedroom. “Thank you honey.” Alba said sitting up. Ricardo laid beside her and rubbed her baby bump and said to the baby, “Stop giving Mommy such a hard time.” “She kicked me.” Ricardo smiled. “She’s feisty like her Mommy.” Alba smiled.

Monday morning Ricardo was up getting ready to head to work. Alba had gotten up to see him off. “Get back in the bed you’re supposed to be resting.” Ricardo said. “I don’t like being home alone; I’m not use to being in this big house by myself.” Alba said. “My Mama’ and sister will be here in three days.” “I’m getting off early; I’ll call you ok.” Ricardo said. “Ok, I love you.” Alba smiled. “I love you too.” Ricardo said then gave her a kiss on the lips. “I’ll call you at nine and every hour after that to check on you.” “Ok.”

Alba awakened when the phone rang at nine-thirty. “Hello.” “You’re still sleeping.” Alba yawned and said, “Yeah.” “I miss you and everyone here misses you.” “I miss them too and you.” Alba smiled. “I can’t come home early today.” “I forgot about the surgery at three o’clock with Dr. Gibson.” “That’s ok; I’ll be here just relaxing.” “I’ll call you every hour until I go into the OR.” “I’ll bring you something special home ok.” Ricardo says. “Ok.” After Alba got off the phone she fell back to sleep.

The next day Ricardo’s cellphone wouldn’t work and he didn’t have time to call the cellphone company to get it straightened out. He had so much work to do at the clinic. When he got a chance he called Alba on his office phone totally forgetting to tell her his cellphone wasn’t working. Around two o’clock Alba had fixed her a plate of food and sat on the couch that’s when the phone rang. Alba looked at the caller id to see it was her husband’s cell number.

“Hey baby.” Alba smiled. “I called because I have some free time so I’m gonna come home and be with you for a few hours.” “Really.” Alba smiled. “Yes; I’ll be there in about ten minutes.” “Ok, I’ll see you then, the front door will be unlocked.” Alba smiled. “Thank you baby.”

When Ricardo made it home he was all over Alba. “I thought you were so against having sex since I’m on bed rest.” Alba said. “I changed my mind.” “I miss your body so much.” Ricardo smiled. “We can’t on the couch; we have to go in the bedroom.” “Ok.” Ricardo said grabbing her hand. The love making had begun and Alba was happy to receive this pleasure from her husband. Once he got inside that feeling came to her and she closed her eyes.

“Ricardo.” Alba called. “Baby this feels so good.” “Stop right now.” Alba demanded. “Are you serious?” “Yes, get it out of me.” Ricardo got up and asks, “What’s wrong?” “Where’s your cellphone?” “In my pants pocket.” Alba got up and grabbed her phone then called his cell and it began to ring. “I’m lost; why did you call my phone?” Ricardo asks. “Forget it.” Alba said. “Are you sure?” “Yes.” “Did you wanna finish?” Ricardo asks rubbing her back. “If you want to.” “I want to.” Ricardo smiled. Alba and Ricardo continued to make love. Alba couldn’t get out of her mind how much he felt like Fernando, but she knew he couldn’t possibly be Fernando it was no way.

Alba immediately fell asleep and didn’t awaken until five o’clock when Ricardo awakened her. “Hey you’re naked.” Ricardo said. “Because you undressed me earlier.” Alba said sitting up. “I undressed you.” Ricardo said looking strange. “Yeah you were incredible I love you so much baby.” Alba smiled. Ricardo stood up and said, “Alba I didn’t come home early today.” “Ricardo stop playing, you called me on your cell.” “We started making love and I thought something seemed strange so I called your cell and it rang.”

Ricardo grabbed the sides of his head with both hands, looked up at the ceiling and said, “That son of a bitch got me.” Alba grabbed her rob at the foot of the bed and asks, “What are you talking about?” “Alba you didn’t make love to me today; that was my brother.” Alba stood up to tie her robe and said, “That’s impossible Ricardo; would you please stop saying that.” “Alba I forgot to tell you earlier that my cellphone wasn’t working.” “I’ve been so busy today at the clinic I didn’t have time to call the cell company.” “My brother must have called pretended to be me and have them to transfer my number to his phone.” Ricardo explained.

Alba ran inside the bathroom and locked the door. Ricardo went to the door and tried to get inside but it was locked. “Alba please baby open the door.” Alba got inside the shower to wash Fernando’s scent off of her. She couldn’t believe that he got her again. She continued to asks herself, “Why me, why me?” Once she finished showering she just sat in the shower in the fetal position crying. Ricardo finally got the knob off the door and walked inside. He saw his wife sitting on the floor so he got inside with her and sat beside her.

Ricardo put his arm around her neck and said, “I’m sorry Alba it’s my fault I should have warned you.” “I never thought he’d do that.” “He’s always two steps ahead of me.” “Baby I am so sorry.” Alba cried out and said, “I should have known better.” “I should have known it wasn’t you.” “I knew but I knew it had to be you because of the phone.” “I’m so stupid Ricardo, I’m stupid.” “Alba you’re not stupid baby.” “Why won’t he leave me alone?” “I just want him to leave me alone.” Alba cried.

After Alba calmed down Ricardo called his sister over to keep Alba company and then he left the house. Ricardo was sick of Fernando once and for all. If the authorities weren’t going to do anything to him he was. Ricardo felt it was time to take the law into his own hands. That was the last time Fernando was going to take advantage of his wife and him. It wasn’t hard finding Fernando, he was uptown at Sambuca sitting at the bar having drinks, it looked like her was celebrating. Ricardo took a seat beside him and he said, “I knew you’d show sooner or later; what would you like to drink?” Ricardo just start pounding on him.

“Alba relax I’ll get the phone.” Cassandra said. After Cassandra hung up the phone Alba said, “You said Oh my god; what happened?” “Ricardo is in jail.” Cassandra answered. “Jail.” Alba said shocked. “Yes for beating the crap out of Fernando; I have to go bond him out.” Alba stood up and said, “I’m coming with you, let me grab my purse.” “Ok.”

The next day; Ricardo picked his Mom and older sister up at the airport. His mom noticed that his hand was wrapped up and she asks, “Ricardo what happened to your hand?” “I had a fight, nothing to worry about.” “Is it broken?” “Three fingers Mama’, but I’ll be ok.” Ricardo said. “How’s Alba and the baby?” “Their fine; Alba’s on bed rest, seeing you will make her feel better.” Ricardo smiled. “I sure hope so.”

Two weeks later; Cassandra had come over around ten to pick up her mother and sister to hang out with her for the day. Alba was still resting when she came over. Around noon Alba got up to eat lunch and get dressed because she had a doctor’s appointment. Ricardo had gotten so busy at the clinic he didn’t have time to pick up Alba. “Ricardo it’s ok; I’ll just drive there.” “I’m sorry I got caught up at work and not realizing what time it was.” Ricardo said. “Ah have you seen my car keys?” “They should be on the key hook inside the kitchen.” “No they’re not there.” Alba said sitting her purse on the bar. “Honey you got twenty minutes to get to the appointment.” “I always misplace my keys.” “Take my SUV.” “I hate driving vehicles I’m not use to driving.” “It’s an Infiniti how hard is it to drive?” “I’m getting the key gosh.” Alba said.

Alba finally got inside the SUV and Ricardo said, “It’s raining so careful.” “I know how to drive in rain.” “I know it’s just so many lunatics driving on the road.” “I’ll be careful ok.” Alba smiled. “I love you I’ll see you in fifteen minutes.” “I love you too dear.” Ricardo smiled and said, “Call me when you’re in the parking lot and I’ll come out to meet you.” “Ok, bye.”

Once Alba pulled out the driveway the rain was coming down steady but not too hard. Once she got out of the community the rain began to get thick and heavy. Alba didn’t mind driving in weather like this, but she hated when the rain was so heavy she could barely see the road. Alba took off her sunglasses and put on her eyeglasses. “Much better.” Alba said turning on the radio. Ricardo had one of his Latin cd’s in the cd player that was playing so Alba decided to listen to that.

Alba was passing an intersection and out of nowhere a truck was coming at her. Alba saw the truck and she tried her very best to stop but she was going too fast. Alba could see the truck coming after her in slow motion and there was nothing she could do to prevent from being hit. Ricardo was at the gynecologist office pacing the floor. He continued to look at his watch and he realized that his wife was already ten minutes late. “Where are you Alba?”

Five minutes later; one of the women behind the glass came out and asks Ricardo to come to the back. “I didn’t see my wife walk inside. “The doctor would like to see you.” The nurse said. “Ok.” Ricardo said having such a bad feeling come over him. “Dr. Cruz I hate to be the bearer of bad news I’ve gotten a call that your wife has been involved in a horrible car accident.” “The paramedics are on their way.” Ricardo became dizzy, he could see the room spin and his eyes began to get foggy. “Someone get a chair for Dr. Cruz right now!” The doctor yelled trying to hold him up.

When Ricardo came back to reality he was sitting on a chair and the nurse handed him a cup of water. Ricardo took a few sips and asks, “What happened?” “You’re fine you just got a little dizzy.” “Let’s get over to the hospital to check on your wife.” The doctor smiled. “Ok.” Ricardo said standing up. Once they got over to the hospital side Ricardo waited inside the waiting room. Ricardo called his sister. “Ricardo I’m so sorry we’ll be there in twenty minutes; don’t stress Alba will come through this.”

The doctor finally walked back into the waiting room Ricardo was sitting down and she sat beside Ricardo. “How bad is she?” Ricardo asks. He looked at the doctor and he could tell it was pretty bad by the expression on her face. Ricardo was really regretting hearing this. He was trying to be strong but at the same time he felt so helpless and weak. “Dr. Cruz your wife and your unborn child are hurt very badly.” “I need you to make a decision.” “A decision.” Ricardo repeated. “We don’t think we can save both of them; you have to make a choice.” “I have to choose weather I want to save my wife or my unborn child?” Ricardo asks. “Yes, I’m so sorry.” The doctor said then stood up. “I need a couple minutes.” “Sure.”

Ricardo sat there in silence, his hands began to shake. He took his phone out his pocket to call Stacey. Stacey was at the same hospital but she had no idea what was going on. When her phone rang she looked at it to see it was Ricardo. She smiled and said, “Hey Ricardo.” Ricardo didn’t respond, he was trying to talk but there was so much emotion and sadness in his voice he couldn’t speak. “Ricardo I can’t make out what you’re saying; what about Alba?”

There was an older lady inside that same waiting room; she saw what Ricardo was going through. She stood up and took his cell out of his hand, Ricardo said nothing. “Young lady; Dr. Cruz is trying to tell you that Alba’s been in a terrible accident and he needs you to get to the hospital as soon as you can.” “Thank you I’m already here I’ll be there in five minutes.” Stacey says. “Thank you.” The older lady handed Ricardo back his phone, he couldn’t speak so he gave her a smile. “You’re welcome.” She smiled.

Stacey walked inside with her newborn baby. She sat the baby carrier on the table next to Ricardo. “Ricardo what happened; how is she?” Stacey asks sitting next to her. “I have to make a decision.” “Decision.” Stacey repeated. “They can only save one of them.” Tears start falling from Stacey’s eyes that’s when Cassandra and their older sister walked inside. “Ricardo what decision?” Stacey asks. Cassandra stared at her brother and held her sister’s hand. “I have to decide who I want to save my wife or my unborn child.” Ricardo said. “The decision is easy.” Stacey said. Ricardo looked at Stacey, tears were falling from his eyes and he said, “The decision it’s not easy Stacey; it’s the hardest decision I’ve ever had to make.”

Stacey dreaded saying and Cassandra asks, “Go ahead and say it Stacey you know Alba just as much as Ricardo does.” “Alba made the decision for you.” “What do you mean?” Ricardo asks. “Alba wants you to choose the baby, not her.” Ricardo stood up, he became angry. He began to yell and that made Stacey’s newborn son cry. Cassandra grabbed the baby to console him. “My wife is dying, my child is dying and you want me to choose a child that I’ve never met over my wife.” Stacey stood up and said, “If you chose Alba’s life over this child it is going to devastate her; you may as well dig a grave for her because it’s going to kill her.” “I’m not letting my wife die because you say that’s what she wants.” Ricardo says raising his voice.

Ricardo walked off and Stacey cried and said, “Ricardo I’m sorry; that’s what she wants.” Ricardo walked through the double doors then Cassandra sat the baby back down. Ricardo’s sisters sat on both sides of Stacey. “You know he didn’t mean to yell at you.” “He’s upset.” Cassandra said. “I know he is; I know the decision is hard for him.” Stacey said wiping her tears. “Like you said, “The decision is easy for him because Alba already made it.” “Ricardo’s broken right now, but he’s going to listen he’ll chose the baby I know he will.” Cassandra said rubbing Stacey’s back.

A few hours had passed and they hadn’t heard anything. Alba’s doctor found Ricardo and spoke with him in private.

The baby girl had just been born and was in NICU. “You can see baby girl now if you’d like.” “Alba’s dead.” Ricardo said. “Alba’s in surgery, she’s fighting for her life ok.” “Keep praying, go see your baby girl; she looks just like your wife.” The doctor smiled. Ricardo wiped his eyes and said, “Thank you.” Then the doctor walked off.

Ricardo loosened his tie some more; he walked inside the NICU. The nurse told him to sign a book and he did. He looked at his daughter inside the incubator she was so tiny and so beautiful. Ricardo touched her face and said, “Mommy’s going to be fine; if she’s not I don’t know what I’m gonna do.” “I don’t know how I’m going to be able to stare into your eyes.” Tears ran down Ricardo’s face and he said, “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be telling you this.” “Dr. Cruz would you like to hold her?” One of the nurses asks. “Sure.” Ricardo smiled.

Ricardo sat down and held his baby girl; she was so tiny she could fit in one hand. Ricardo sat down; he touched her tiny head and said a prayer for not only her but his wife. The nurse was coming around and asks, “May I take a few pictures of you and baby girl?” “Sure.” Ricardo smiled. Ricardo left out in twenty minutes; he went inside the bathroom to wash his face. He looked at himself in the mirror, his eyes were so red and his face was sad. “Alba I can’t lose you; if I made the wrong decision it’s gonna kill me.” “Why would you want me to choose a baby over your own life why?” Ricardo asks himself. “I should have chosen you.” “I’d probably be talking to you right now.” “I should have chosen you.” Ricardo says.

Ricardo walked back inside the waiting room; his two sisters and Stacey stood up. Ricardo sat down without saying a word. Cassandra walked over to Ricardo and sat beside him. “How’s the baby?” “She’s fine; she’s only three pounds, but she’s gonna make it.” “She’ll be in NICU for a few months but she’s good, she looks just like Alba.” “She’s a beautiful little girl.” Ricardo smiled. “That’s good news.” “Is Alba going to be alright?” “I don’t know Ramona.” “Ricardo you made the right decision.” Stacey said.

An hour later Stacey left the hospital to take her son home and Juan showed up at the hospital. “Hi Juan.” Cassandra smiled. “Hi how’s Alba?” Juan asks. “We’re not sure.” “I heard Ricardo had to make a decision; he chose that baby over Alba.” “How stupid is he.” Just as the words left Juan’s mouth Ricardo was walking into the waiting room. “How stupid am I.” Ricardo repeated. Juan turned around and said, “You made a stupid decision choosing that baby over your wife; what about her other children.” “They need her not a sister.” Juan says. “I did what my wife wanted me to do; unlike you, you’ve never listened to Alba when she’s told you what she wants and what she needs.” Ricardo says.

Juan got into Ricardo’s face and Ricardo wasn’t backing down. Ricardo didn’t care if Juan was bigger than him. Ricardo knew he was stronger and in much better shape. Cassandra and Ramona stood in the middle of both of them. “Juan you need to leave.” Cassandra said. “She’s my wife I’m staying.” “She’s your ex-wife get it right.” Ricardo said raising his voice. Juan sat back down and Ricardo walked out of the waiting room. Ramona went after Ricardo and Cassandra sat and talked with Juan. Stacey was back at the hospital shortly. She sat beside Cassandra and asks, “Have the doctors said anything about Alba?” “No.”

“Stacey how are you?” Juan asks. “I’m fine; how are you?” Stacey asks. “Pissed off; how could you tell Ricardo to choose that baby over Alba’s life?” “Because that’s what Alba wanted.” “Alba should be alive with her kids.” “Juan you know how badly Alba wants that little girl and thank God this decision isn’t in your hands because we all know you’d make the wrong decision.” Stacey says. “I’d make that decision because I need her and her kids need her.” “She can always have kids.” Juan says.

“And what about that innocent child; Alba’s lived her life and she knows a mother’s love.” “Alba loves that child more than her life and that’s being a mother; you’ll never know how that feels.” “All you care about and think about is you; that’s why you don’t have her now.” “Remember Alba lost her Mom the same way, her father was smart enough to choose Alba over his wife.” “Thank God that you at least had the chance to know her.” After Stacey said her peace she walked out of the hospital to get some air.

“Ramona thanks for keeping me company.” “I just need to be alone.” “I need to be alone.” “I need my wife to come out of this surgery.” “I need to be able to see her eyes and hear her voice.” “I need her to be alright.” Ricardo says. Ramona rubbed his back and said, “She’ll be fine, we’re all praying for her.” “Thank you.” Ramona left out and Ricardo sat in silence. Within minutes the doctor walked inside and Ricardo stood up. “Alba’s out of surgery in recovery right now if you’d like to see her now.” “Dr. Cruz she’s not out of the woods right now.” “She does have stitches in her face and a lot of bruises all over her body.” “She’s fighting and the next twenty-four hours are very crucial, so I can’t allow anyone inside that room but you.” “No one will enter that room but me.” “Thank you, follow me.”

Once the doctor walked Ricardo to the room she said, “We’ll have her room available in intensive care shortly.” “Ok, thank you.” Ricardo walked inside the room and got to his wife immediately. He touched her face and tears fell from his eyes. “Baby I’m sorry.” “I should have come to get you.” “Alba you have to fight, you have to fight and come home to our daughter.” “The twins, Jayden they need you too more than I do.” “Baby we love you.” Ricardo sat down until the doctor came back. Ricardo finally gave everyone an update on his wife’s prognosis and then they all went their separate ways.

Stacey finally got home and she just wasn’t in the mood to talk. Her husband was sitting inside the family room holding their son. Luis stood up and sat their son inside his bassinet. Stacey passed by him heading upstairs and he followed her. Stacey took off her coat and then sat on the bed. “Stacey, why did you tell Ricardo to choose the baby over Alba?” “I thought she was your best friend.” “Luis she is.” “You’d rather have the baby than Alba’s life?” “Juan is pissed at you; what about Alba’s other children?” “Luis are you crazy; I didn’t make that decision.” “Alba made that decision a long time ago and I just told Ricardo what she said.”

“You didn’t have to say anything that wasn’t your business.” Stacey stood up and said, “It was my business as her best friend; Alba has always said, “Never let my husband ever chose my life over our child.” “I wasn’t going to sit there and let him chose Alba.” “When Alba wakes up and realizes that she’s lost another child it will kill her and she will hate me because she trusted me.” “I don’t expect you or any other man to understand.” “Stacey you’re selfish, you had no right to do that.” “What you’ve done is heartless; it looks to me like you hate Alba.” Luis says.

Stacey couldn’t control her tears and she said, “You’re such a stupid ass person.” “You have no idea how hard it was for me to tell Ricardo that.” “He was furious at me.” “You don’t know how it feels to carry a child for months and have to lose it.” “Do you know what Alba had to do when she lost her daughter in the past?” “Even though her daughter was dead, she had to push that child out of her body.” “Do you know how devastated she was; how that fucked up her mental state?” “You can’t even imagine how horrible that must feel.” “I can’t even imagine how that feels.” “Alba has been scarred for life because of that.” “If she had lost another baby girl I don’t know if Alba would be fighting for her life right now.” Stacey says.

“Stacey I’m sorry, I never looked at it like that.” “I just thought you were being selfish making decisions that had nothing to do with you.” “I’m sorry Stacey you are her best friend and I know she confides in you and tells you lots of things.” “I shouldn’t have judged you without hearing your part of the story.” “Forgive me I’m sorry.” Luis says taking her hand. Stacey wiped her tears and her husband held her in his arms. “I’ll never make that judgment again, you were right to speak up.”

**Chapter 25**

**“The Progress”**

“Sometimes the truth is hard to speak.” -Chantanell Santos

Two weeks later; Alba and baby girl were still inside the hospital. Baby girl was getting bigger and stronger and Ricardo had a lot of decisions to make. Ricardo sat in NICU holding his daughter. “I have to come up with a name for you beautiful.” Ricardo smiled. “Your mom had so many names that she wanted to name you; what should I name you beautiful?” “Your mom loves the name Gabrielle and I love the name Katherine and Katerina.” “I have a name Katerina Gabriella Cruz; I think your mom will love that name.” Ricardo smiled. After Ricardo left the NICU, he went ahead and filled out the birth certificate papers. “That’s a beautiful name Dr. Cruz.” The nurse smiled. “Thank you.”

Ricardo walked inside Alba’s room and he was happy that she wasn’t in critical condition anymore. Ricardo touched Alba’s face and said, “I named our daughter and I hope you like the name just as much as me.” “Her name is Katerina Gabriella Cruz.” Ricardo saw Alba move her mouth and he said, “Alba you want to say something, say something baby, anything.” Alba’s eyes began to move and Ricardo said, “Open your big pretty green eyes Alba, I need to see them.” Her eyes were open and she stared at Ricardo and he smiled at her.

Two months later; Alba was already home getting settled. Physically Alba was fine, but mentally she wasn’t herself. Ricardo hadn’t heard her utter a single word and that worried him. The baby had been home for a week and she hadn’t held the baby. She didn’t even want to be around the baby and that scared Ricardo. Ricardo spoke with Alba’s doctor frequently; she thought maybe Alba was going through postpartum depression. “Here’s a prescription this should help Alba with her depression and also help her rest better.” The doctor said. “Thank you.” Ricardo smiled then he finally left.

Ricardo finally got home; Alba was inside the bedroom sitting staring at the wall. Ricardo sat beside her and just start to talk to her. She never said a word and that worried him a lot. Ricardo went inside the family room where Cassandra and Katerina were. “How’s Kat?’ Ricardo asks. “Oh she’s great; she just drank almost three ounces of milk.” Cassandra smiled. “That’s great; how has Alba been since I left?” “She’s been inside that room; I don’t think she’s well.” “Well her doctor thinks she may be going through post-partum.” “I have her some meds so I hope it helps.”

Another week had passed and Ricardo wasn’t happy about his wife not talking. She just wasn’t doing much of anything. Ricardo was happy that her mom was arriving today. “How are you?” Ricardo smiled giving her a hug. “I’m fine; where’s my baby girl?” Susan asks. “She’s in the master bedroom.” Ricardo said. “Ok.” “Go on inside I’ll get your bags.” “Thank you Ricardo.”

Susan walked inside the master bedroom and said, “I’m here Alba.” Alba looked up and smiled at her. Susan gave her a hug and she could tell Alba was happy to see her. For the next couple of days Alba stayed under her Mom. Ricardo felt that Alba was happy but he still didn’t see any progress on her speaking.

“Ricardo she hasn’t uttered a single word to me; what’s wrong with her?” Susan asks. “I think she needs to see a speech-language Pathologist, but first I need to speak to the neurologist that did the MRI on her because something is wrong.” “She may need another one.” Ricardo explained. “Why an MRI?” “I think her brain is damaged because she won’t speak.” “She listens and sometimes I’m not sure if she understands.” “She hasn’t talked since the accident.” “I thought she was going through depression but I think it’s more serious.” Susan stood up and said, “Well she’s your wife and I know you know best.” Susan turned around and looked at Alba and said, “Honey I’ll be back I’m gonna go fix you something to eat.”

A couple days later; Ricardo went to speak to the neurologist to get some answers about his wife and from the MRI they didn’t see anything suspicious so Ricardo thought he’d do another one on his wife to be sure. “Alba you have to lay here, the machine is going to take you into this.” Ricardo pointed. Alba began to shake her head no and Ricardo said, “You’ll be ok, I’ll be right here.” Alba still wouldn’t do it; it took her mom to talk her into doing it. “Thanks Susan.” “You’re welcome.” After Alba’s MRI; Ricardo took her and Susan home.

Alba laid in bed and Ricardo laid beside her. “Baby you did good.” “I wish you could talk and tell me how you feel.” “Alba I love you, I miss you and the reason for all those test is to help you heal.” Ricardo says. Ricardo put his arm around Alba’s waist and Alba fell asleep, so Ricardo stayed next to her. Ricardo had awakened an hour and a half later; when he opened his eyes Alba’s face was close to his. He kissed her and she opened her eyes. She didn’t know what to do she was sort of confused to what she should do so she moved back.

Alba had been seeing a speech language Pathologist for a month now and Ricardo was getting frustrated because Alba wasn’t making any progress. “I don’t know what else to do.” “Call Fernando he specializes in this, he’ll help her.” Cassandra said. “I don’t trust him.” Ricardo said. “I know our brother has done some unforgivable things, but he’ll do this for Alba.” “You’ll be right there he can’t do anything.” “I don’t know Cassandra I’m gonna try to deal with Dr. Lindsey maybe her methods will eventually work.” Ricardo says. “I hope so Ricardo.”

A few days had passed and things were getting harder and harder, Alba couldn’t comprehend a lot of things and she was frustrated. Sometimes she’d sit and cry; she didn’t know what was wrong with her. Alba tried on some many occasions to talk but the words wouldn’t come out. She wondered how long would Ricardo deal with her illness before he gave up on her.

Saturday; Ricardo met his brother at Nylo. “Brother I’m surprised you wanted to see me; how are things?” Fernando asks. “Things aren’t so great.” Ricardo answered. “Something wrong with Alba and the baby." Fernando asks concerned. “You haven’t heard.” “Alba was in a terrible car accident a couple months ago; she and the baby survived but Alba is different.” Ricardo says. “What do you mean she’s different; did she lose a limb, she’s burned badly; what?” Fernando asks. “It’s nothing like that, she’s not talking and I’m not sure if she understands anything we say to her.” “She tries to speak but she can’t.” “She gets frustrated and she cries.” Ricardo says.

Fernando picked up his drink and took a sip and said, “So you need my help?” “I do; Fernando I know you and I have our issues; we don’t get alone.” “I know you care about my wife.” “You don’t want her to suffer.” Then Fernando cut him off and said, “I care about Alba, you can’t say it can you?” Fernando smiled. “Say what?” Ricardo asks. “That I love Alba; I love her just as much as you and you can’t say that.” “You may love her but her heart belongs to me.” “Remember Alba’s my wife, she’ll never be yours I didn’t come here to argue.” “I simply came here because I know you will do what it takes to help her.”

“What makes you think I can help Alba?” Fernando asks. “I know about that experimental drug you gave to some of your patients with the same symptoms as Alba, I need you to help her.” “Ricardo I just can’t give Alba that; there are test and plus I lost my license because of that; the FDA never approved the drug.” Fernando explains. “Alba needs this; she can’t be a mute all her life.” “I just got my career back I’m sorry.” “Fernando please do this for Alba.” “Ricardo if I could give her the drug I would.” “I don’t have the drug anymore.” “What do you mean you don’t have the drug anymore?” Ricardo asks.

“It’s in Mexico where I left it in a safe deposit box.” “The authorities are not going to let me bring it here; as soon as I go through customs they’ll arrest me.” Fernando explained. “I’ll go over there and get it, my wife needs it.” “Ricardo it’s not as easy as you think.” “Fernando what did you do?” After Fernando explained Ricardo said, “Your ways are going to get you killed one day.” “I’ve changed.” “I don’t know what I’m going to do about my wife; she’s a mess.” I’ve had Alba seeing a speech-language Pathologist and I don’t think she’s giving Alba what she needs.” “Alba’s not getting any better and I feel we’re wasting our time.” Ricardo says then picks up his drink.

“I know this may not be what you want to hear, but I think if you let me take over her case, I promise within a few months with my guidance and knowledge you’ll see some progress.” “I know in time Alba will be back to normal.” “If you’re able to put your harsh feelings aside for me. “As long as I can be present during the sessions.” Ricardo said. “I don’t have a problem with that.” Fernando said. Ricardo shook his hand and said, “Deal.”

Alba had been seeing Fernando for only three weeks now and Ricardo was seeing lots of progress. Ricardo was happy and he was beginning to trust his brother, but he still didn’t want his brother around his wife alone. Every day after work Ricardo would go over things that Fernando worked with her on. “Alba you’re doing great.” Ricardo smiled and took her hand and she smiled back.

Monday; Fernando was working when he received a call from his brother. Fernando told Ricardo that he over booked appointments by mistake could he bring Alba into his office around one o’clock. Ricardo wanted to reschedule but he knew Alba needed this session because his brother was very busy with his new practice so he had to take what he could get. So Ricardo called his sister and she was able to take Alba to her session.

During the session Cassandra sat inside with Alba until she got bored. “Fernando I’m going to go to the cafeteria I’ll be back.” “Sure take your time.” Fernando said. “How much longer will this take?” “About an hour.” “Ok.” Once Cassandra closed the door, Fernando said, “Looks like we’re alone.” Fernando got up and walked over to his mini fridge and said, “Alba I have something I have to administer, it’s going to hurt a little but you’ll be ok.” Alba didn’t say a word she just looked at him. Fernando sat back in front of her and said, “There’s going to be a little stick; it’s going to hurt just a little.” “This is going to help with your speech progress.” “This drug is going to heal the left side of your brain; which is damaged.” “With the proper dosage twice a month you’ll be perfect in no time.”

Ricardo made it home around six-fifteen Alba was sleeping in bed next to the baby. Seeing the baby next to Alba shocked Ricardo. He walked out of the bedroom and went to search for his sister. Ricardo found Cassandra inside the kitchen. “Ah Cassandra why is Kat in bed with Alba?” “She wanted her; I couldn’t say no.” “She wanted her, really?” Ricardo smiled. “Yes, she picked her up and I tried to stop her, but she gave me that look like she missed her and I let her take her.” “I’ve been keeping an eye on them.” Cassandra explained. “Thank you Cassandra.” “You’re welcome.” Cassandra smiled. “I’m going to shower so you can go ahead home.” “Ok, have a good night.”

Fernando had been administering the drug to Alba and Alba’s recovery was speeding up. Alba was getting better and Fernando was happy. He wanted Alba better but more than anything he wanted to backstab his brother and have Alba for himself, but this time he didn’t want to be cunning. He thought with his guidance and help Alba would see that he was the better man and come to him.

**Chapter 26**

**“What He Did”**

“I miss being a kid.” “Because skinned knees are easier to heal than broken hearts.” -Unknown

Fernando was changing Alba’s appointments more and more. Ricardo didn’t question his brother because his wife was progressing more and more. Cassandra was taking Alba to her appointments more and Fernando was still giving Alba the injections that Ricardo knew nothing about. “How do you feel?” Fernando asks smiling. When Alba spoke she spoke slowly. She was finally able to say sentences. “I feel good.” Alba responded. “That’s good.” After their session Cassandra was still gone so Fernando just made small talk.

“I love you Alba.” Fernando said. Alba didn’t say anything she just smiled at him. Fernando took her hand and said, “I wish you loved me Alba.” “In the past I’ve done bad things and I guess that’s why I don’t deserve your love.” “I hope you trust me.” “I trust you.” Alba said. Fernando smiled and said, “I’m glad you do.” “I promise I’ll never do anything else to hurt you.” “Ok.”

After Cassandra and Alba left the hospital, they headed over to the clinic to see Ricardo. “Alba sit here Pilar’s not here today.” “I’ll go track your husband down.” Cassandra says. While Alba sat a few of the receptionist were back and since there were no patients they sat gossiping. They hadn’t realized that Alba was even sitting there. “I’m so sick of that new girl.” “She’s been here three months and she thinks she can do anything she damn well pleases.” Emily said. “Dr. Cruz is taken with her.” Gail said. “That’s only because his wife can’t give him the attention that he’s use to.” “Gail that doesn’t mean he has to cheat on his wife.” “Alba can’t help what she’s went through it’s not like it’s her fault.” Emily says. “I think he’s enjoying the attention because he’s not getting it from her.” Gail said. “Well you know how men are when they’re not getting it at home they get it somewhere else.” “It’s not her fault.” “Look Alba’s a beautiful woman, but sometime men take attention from other females when they’re not getting it from their significant other.” Gail says. “She’s giving him too much attention and she knows he’s married.” “I’m tired of the looks and her giggling all the time, it’s so disrespectful.” Emily says.

“Oh shit Alba’s sitting in Pilar’s desk.” Emily said. Gail turned around and said, “You’re just seeing her there.” “I don’t think she understands what we’re saying.” “I overheard Dr. Cruz telling new girl that she’s not speaking or understanding when people talk.” Emily says. “Why would he even tell her that, that’s not her business?” Gail frowned. “Let’s stop talking and get back to work.”

Cassandra walked back up front to get Alba. Ricardo met them inside the hall and gave Alba a hug. “You look so beautiful today baby.” Ricardo smiled. Alba said, “I love you.” Ricardo looked at her and said, “You love me.” So Alba repeated herself that’s when Anna walked out of the sonogram room and Ricardo said, “I love you too baby.” Ricardo gave her a kiss on the forehead. Anna walked up and said, “This must be Alba; how are you?” Alba didn’t respond and Ricardo said, “She doesn’t speak much.” “Oh I’m sorry.” Anna smiled. “Hi.” Cassandra smiled. “Hi.” Anna smiled. “Dr. Cruz I’ll sit these on your desk.” “Thank you Anna.” Ricardo smiled.

Once Alba got home she continued to think about what Gail and Emily were talking about at the clinic. Alba knew those two gossiped all the time. She wondered was their gossip the truth; did her husband have something going on with the new girl? Alba continued to think about when she walked up and how she looked at her husband. Alba didn’t like the looks it hurt seeing it, but she couldn’t do anything about it.

Ricardo made it home late and Alba realized it was later than usual. She sat in bed with her daughter holding her. When Ricardo walked through the door; he stepped inside the master bedroom to be surprised his wife was up. “You’re up.” Ricardo smiled. Alba didn’t say anything; she stood up and laid the baby in her bassinet. Ricardo walked behind her and put his arms around her waist. Alba instantly smelled woman’s perfume and she said, “Perfume.” Ricardo didn’t say anything; he gave her a kiss on the cheek and walked to the bathroom.

The next day after Alba’s session with Fernando, Alba told Cassandra that she wanted to go see her husband. Cassandra was impressed with Alba, she was speaking much clearly. Once Cassandra pulled up at the clinic Alba said, “I can go alone Cassandra.” Cassandra smiled and said, “Wow Alba; of course you can go I’ll be right here.” Alba got out of the car and walked inside the clinic. Once Alba walked inside she opened the door and walked past the receptionist desk. Cassandra decided to walk inside the clinic to wait for Alba.

Instead of Alba going to her husband’s office she went to talk to one of the ladies she was very close with that was getting chemotherapy treatments. “Alba is that you?” Mrs. Ross smiled. Alba sat beside her and gave her a hug. “How are you; I’ve missed you. “I’m fine, I miss you too.” Alba smiled. “Talk as slow as you have to, it’s ok.” Mrs. Ross said grabbing Alba’s hand. Alba smiled at her and she said, “I’m so happy to see you Alba.” “I’ve been praying for you every single day.” “You’re always on my mind.” Mrs. Ross says. “May I ask you a question?” “Of course you can.” “How’s the new girl taking my place?” Alba asks. “She’s not you Alba; she’s ok though I have no complaints.” Mrs. Ross answered.

“That’s not what I mean; does my husband like her?” Mrs. Ross looked at Alba and said, “Honey I don’t know.” “Ok, how is she around my husband?” “Does she look at him like he’s her boss or she looks into his eyes like she likes him?” “Oh Alba I’m sorry, I don’t want to upset you.” “She does doesn’t she?” “She’s a flirt, don’t worry about her, if I wasn’t sick I’d put her in her place.” Mrs. Ross smiled. “Thank you.” Alba smiled.

After Alba finished talking with Mrs. Ross, she went to search for her husband. Alba walked inside his office and Ricardo was standing up and the new girl was sitting on his desk, it looked like he was touching her face. “Alba.” Ricardo said surprised. The new girl stood up and she said, “Dr. Cruz I better get back to work.” “No I’ll leave.” Alba said and walked out.

Alba was walking through the waiting room; Cassandra was sitting there when she saw Alba walking towards the door in a hurry. “Alba.” Cassandra called but Alba continued to walk away. “Ricardo.” Cassandra called. “Did Alba come through here?” “What happened?” “Did she come through here or not?” “Yeah; what the hell happened?” Ricardo walked out of the door and Cassandra followed.

“Ricardo where is she and what did you do?” Cassandra asks. “Alba took something out of context.” Ricardo said. “What do you mean out of context?” “She saw Anna sitting on my desk.” “Are you crazy; why the hell was she sitting on your desk?” “I don’t know Cassandra.” “You like this girl don’t you?” “No I don’t like that girl; I love my wife.” “Well you certainly aren’t acting like it.” “Alba’s not stupid, so I suggest you come up with a better answer.”

Fernando was surprised to get Alba’s call, but he couldn’t make out what she was saying because she was crying so much, it took him five minutes to get her to calm down. “I’ll come get you, I’m on my way.” Fernando said grabbing his car keys. Fernando made it there within fifteen minutes, Alba was sitting outside. Alba got inside his car and she didn’t say a word. “Alba what happened?” Alba sobbed but she didn’t respond. “Alba can I take you home?” “No.” Alba said shaking her head no. “Is my home fine?” Fernando asks. Alba shook her head yes.

Alba had been sitting at Fernando’s house for two hours. Fernando decided to call Ricardo to tell him that Alba was with him. “She’s with Fernando.” Ricardo said getting up. “How?” Cassandra asks. “She called him.” “I can’t believe she called him.” “She trusts him.” Cassandra said. “Stay here with Kat, I’ll be right back.”

Fernando sat beside Alba and said, “I gave you my special tea and you still won’t talk to me.” “Why were you crying; why are you sad?” “Ricardo.” Alba said. “What about Ricardo; take your time you can say it.” Fernando said. “He doesn’t love me anymore.” “That’s crazy he’s wild about you.” Alba began crying and said, “He likes the new girl at the clinic.” “He hates me because I’m like this.” Alba stuttered. “Alba, he’s crazy then.” “I love you; is that why you called me?” Fernando asks. “Yes.” As soon as Fernando was about to kiss her his doorbell rang.

Fernando answered the door and Ricardo asks, “How is she?” “She’s upset.” Fernando answered. Ricardo walked inside, he sat beside Alba, but she wouldn’t look at him. “I’m sorry Alba what you saw was nothing at all.” “You like her.” Alba said. Fernando stood next to the door watching the two of them their backs were to him. “I don’t like her.” Alba looked at Ricardo and said, “You touched her face; why?” “I don’t know.” Ricardo answered. “Alba, baby let’s just go home and straighten this out.” Alba stood up without saying a word. “Thanks Fernando.” Ricardo said then he and Alba left.

Cassandra was rocking Kat back to sleep when she heard Ricardo and Alba walk through the door. Cassandra walked inside the baby’s nursery and closed the door. Cassandra sat on the rocking chair and said, “I think you parents are going to need some time alone; so we’ll hang out here.” Alba sat on the couch and Ricardo sat beside her. “Why did you touch her face?” Alba asks. “Alba I don’t know.” Ricardo responded. “You like her don’t you.” Alba asks slowly. “I don’t like her; I love you.” “Could we just drop this Alba?” Ricardo asks. Alba began to yell and scream; Ricardo didn’t know what she was saying. Alba was so out of control; she ran inside the master bedroom, closed and locked the door.

Cassandra laid the baby down and then went inside the family room. “I heard all the yelling; what happened?” Cassandra asks. “Alba had a tantrum.” “Did you tell her the truth?” “Yes Cassandra.” Ricardo said getting upset. “What did you tell her?” “It doesn’t matter; Anna is nothing to me.” “Something happened between the two of you; you better stop lying to her.” “Alba feels you’ve been unfaithful.” Cassandra said grabbing her keys off the table. “Cassandra I’m faithful to her; what else do I have to do?” “Make her believe you because you know that’s a crock of bull.” “You and that girl have something going on and Alba’s going to keep on until you tell her the truth.”

In the middle of Cassandra and Ricardo’s arguing, Alba slipped out the front door with a suitcase. She got into her car and drove off. “Cassandra I don’t have time to argue with you plus this has nothing to do with you.” Ricardo said then walked to their bedroom. Ricardo knocked at the door and said, “Alba baby let me in I’m sorry I’ll tell you everything; just open the door.” Ricardo knocked some more but heard nothing. He twists the knob and the door came open. “Alba.” Ricardo called walking inside, he saw drawers open. “Alba.” Ricardo called walking inside the bathroom.

Ricardo ran out the bedroom and said, “Alba’s gone.” “What?” Cassandra said shocked. “She’s not inside the bedroom.” Ricardo walked outside to see her car gone. “She’s in her car, she shouldn’t be driving. Ricardo said running inside the house. “She’s in the car; do you think she’s ok to be driving?” “I don’t know; stay here I’m going to look for her.”

**Chapter 27**

**“The Consequences of His Actions”**

“Seeing him in a different light made me trust him.”

-Chantanell Santos

Fernando was lying on his couch watching television when his doorbell rang. Fernando sat his bowl of popcorn on the table and answered the door. “Alba.” “Could I stay; I don’t have any other place to go?” Alba asks. “Of course.” Fernando said taking her suitcase out of her hand. Alba sat down and Fernando asks, “Have you eaten anything?” “I’m not hungry.” Fernando was quiet shocked that she was there. “Where’s Ricardo?” “Home.” “Alba why did you leave again?” “My wife doesn’t love me.” “Husband.” Fernando corrected. “Husband.” “Yes, he’s your husband.” “He doesn’t love me.” “Why do you think that?” Fernando asks.

Alba didn’t respond and Fernando put his on the sides of her neck and said, “Ricardo loves you; you just have to talk to him.” “I don’t want to; he’ll just lie to me.” Fernando leaned closer and said, “If things get so bad that you just can’t be with Ricardo you can come here and I won’t pressure you.” “You and your husband have unfinished business and you’ll never forgive yourself unless you hear him out.” Fernando guided Alba into his arms and he held her. He wanted to take advantage of the situation but he didn’t. He knew she really wanted her husband.

Once Alba had fallen asleep on the couch, Fernando once again called Ricardo and he came running. Fernando saw Ricardo pulling into his driveway so he stepped outside. He stood in front of the door and Ricardo said, “I’m sorry she keeps coming to you; she trusts you.” “I know she does; Ricardo I don’t know what’s going on with you and the new girl, but Alba seems to think that you two are involved.” “Fernando I’m not involved with anyone.” “That’s not for you to convince me of it’s your wife.” “How is Alba?” Ricardo asks. “She’s lying on my couch sleep.” “Ricardo, Alba has come to me twice today and it’s taken everything in me to not take advantage.” “If she comes back a third time I won’t call you.” “What I will do is run off to Puerto Rico with your wife and I’ll never let her come back to you.” Fernando says. Ricardo didn’t say a word; Fernando opened the door and said, “There’s your wife.”

Ricardo walked over to the couch, knelled on the floor and touched her cheek. “Alba.” She opened her eyes but she said nothing and Ricardo said, “Will you please come home?” “I swear to you I will explain everything.” “You promise?” Alba asks. “I promise I won’t lie to you, just come home.” “Ok.” Cassandra left with Kat when Ricardo and Alba arrived. “Tell Mama’ I’ll be over in the morning to get her.” Ricardo said. “Ok.” Cassandra said grabbing the diaper bag. Ricardo locked the door and walked inside the bedroom where Alba was. “Are you ready to talk?” Ricardo asks. “Yes.” Alba answered. “I shouldn’t have ever disrespected you with Anna.” “Alba I never had sex with her.” “I did take her out for dinner a few times and. Alba cut Ricardo off and said, “You took her to dinner; why?” “Baby I don’t know, I guess I was lonely she was someone I could talk to.”

Tears fell from Alba’s eyes and she asks, “Why did you have to talk to her; why didn’t you just say no?” “Alba I’m sorry, she was giving me a lot of attention and I was dumb enough to fall for it.” “I was stressed because of your accident and I needed someone to talk to.” Ricardo says. “So you told her things about me?” Alba asks. “I did and I’m sorry.” “I should have never confided in her it was wrong.” Ricardo said. “You like her a lot don’t you?” “Alba I don’t like her, I enjoyed her company.” “You can’t look at me; what else are you keeping from me?” “You promised that you’d be honest, be honest please.” “What else are you keeping from me?” Alba asks. “Alba; could we just finish this conversation tomorrow?” “No, I want to know everything and I want to know it today.” Alba said raising her voice. “From time to time she performed oral sex on me.” Alba looked at Ricardo and said, “She what?” “I’m sorry Alba it should have never happened.”

Alba stood up and was about to walk out the room but Ricardo grabbed her arm stopping her from walking. “Don’t touch me you son of a bitch.” “If she performed oral sex on you; you did the same to her right?” Alba said raising her voice. “I never did that to her.” “You expect me to believe that!” “I’m telling you the truth.” “Alba don’t walk away from me you said to tell you the truth and I’m trying to tell you the truth, but you can’t even handle the truth.”

Alba got so in raged she began to hit his chest. “Alba stop I’m trying to be honest, just stop it.” Ricardo said holding her arms. “I hate you so much.” “I’m leaving you and I’m taking Katerina with me and you’ll never see her again.” Alba said. “You’re not taking Kat anywhere and you’re not going anywhere do you hear me!” Ricardo said letting her arms go. Alba wiped her tears away and she said, “I’ll never look at you the same.” “I hate you; you’re just like Juan and Alex.” “Alba I didn’t sleep with her; I’d never do that.” “Having oral sex is the same as sex.” “No it is not.” Ricardo said. Alba slapped Ricardo in the face and it hurt. She began to hit him in the chest again.

So Ricardo grabbed her hand stopping her and that pissed her off so badly. So she began to bite his chest harder and harder until he pushed her on the bed. Ricardo got on top of her, holding her down. “Stop I know what I did to you was wrong and I’m sorry.” “I never wanted to hurt you and I was stupid to even let her do that to me.” “Alba you have to forgive me; I’m stupid, but I love you.” “Get off me, get off me!” Alba yelled still trying to fight him. “I’m not moving you need to calm down.” “I’ll let you up if you just calm down.” Ricardo says.

Alba finally stopped moving, she began to breathe hard and Ricardo touched her face with his right hand. “I’m so crazy about you just like the first time I laid my eyes on you Alba.” “Forgive me.” “I want to get up.” Alba said. “Have you calmed down?” “Yes.” So Ricardo let her sit up and she began to bit his neck. “Alba let me go.” Ricardo said but Alba wasn’t letting up she was trying to hurt him. Once Ricardo got her off of him he said, “You’re so crazy Alba; what’s gotten into you?” “You have with your cheating.” “I want you to fire that bitch.” “I never want her at the clinic do you hear me.” “If you ever have any other contact with her I am leaving and I’m moving far away from you.” Alba threatened. “Ok Alba whatever you want, just don’t leave me.”

Both Ricardo and Alba were out of breath, Alba was tired she had fought him enough and Ricardo was tired of holding her off of him. “Alba are you ok?” “Just move.” Alba frowned. “No not until I know that you’re done with your tantrum.” “I have bite marks all over my body.” “I don’t care, you deserve every mark.” Alba said. Ricardo took off his shirt and Alba saw what she had done, she didn’t know she had gotten that angry. “Alba you bit me badly.” “I don’t care.” Alba said. “Alba I love you; you did that because what you thought I’d get angry and leave.” “I’m not going anywhere.” “I love you.” “I don’t love you.” Alba said. Ricardo backed up off of Alba and she sat up, but she didn’t’ get off the bed. Ricardo got closer to her caressing her face Alba looked down at the bed not giving him eye contact.

Ricardo began to kiss Alba and she didn’t push him away. He kissed her more and more and she did the same. He kissed her neck and pulled up her shirt working his way to her belly button. The two of them began to make love and Alba wanted him, but she was still angry with him. As he made love to her he apologized over and over. Alba said nothing; she just enjoyed the sex that her husband was giving her.

The next day; Ricardo went to work to finish up a few lose strings. “What the hell happened to your eye?” Dr. Gibson asks. “Alba is what happened to my eye.” “She hit you?” “Yeah, she did this too.” Ricardo said pointing at his neck. “What the hell got into her?” “She found out about Anna.” “Is that why Anna isn’t here?” Dr. Gibson asks. “Yeah I spoke with her early and told her she couldn’t work here anymore.” “Ricardo whose going to do the sonograms; is Alba coming back?” “Chad; Alba’s not stable enough to come back just yet.” “I’ll be doing the sono’s until Alba decides to come back.” “That’s going to be a hell of a work load on you.” Dr. Gibson said. “I know but I made the mess so I have to deal with it.”

“So how did Anna take it when you fired her?” Dr. Gibson said. “Not so well; a lot of tears, but I had to do what Alba told me to do.” Ricardo said. “Yeah you did.” “I gave Anna two weeks’ pay, so she should be ok until she finds another job.” “This job was never promised to her anyway.” Ricardo says. “True; well let me get back to my patients.” Dr. Gibson said. “And I have a few sono’s up.” Ricardo smiled.

Around one o’clock Alba got her baby girl dressed and then she put on her long black v neck maxi dress and gold sandals along with her long triple gold necklaces. Alba finally made it to the clinic; she put baby girl in her stroller and headed to the fifth floor. Everyone were surprised to see Alba, she looked breath taking. “Alba you look beautiful.” Pilar smiled. “Thank you; is my husband busy?” “He’s been busy all day; he’s been doing his work and sonograms all day.” “He should be in the sonogram room.” “Ok.” “Leave the baby here; we’ll watch her.” Pilar said. “Ok, thank you.”

Alba knocked at the door to the sonogram room and Ricardo said, “Come on in.” Alba walked inside; Ricardo was surprised to see her. “Hey.” Ricardo smiled. “Is this where you two did it?” “Alba please, no I’d never do that.” “You and I have done a lot of things in here; why not?” Alba asks. “I thought we were good Alba.” Ricardo said. “Because you and I had sex last night.” “I’m still angry; I just came here to see if she was here.” “Alba you wanted her out and she’s out.” “You don’t have to feel threatened by her existence; she’ll never come inside this building again.” “Will she ever come around you?” Alba asks. “No.”

“I’m gonna go now.” Alba said. “Alba don’t go.” Ricardo said moving closer to her. “Why should I stay?” “Because I ask you to.” “You have work to do; I should be going.” “I don’t have another patient for twenty minutes.” Ricardo said. Ricardo touched her face and said, “You always look so beautiful in black.” Alba didn’t say anything and Ricardo said, “I need you to forgive me.” “I need our house to feel like a home again, and I wish you’d come back to work.” “You’re asking for a lot.” “I’m asking for things that I know you want to.” “I want to get my life back on track and I want to be able to communicate with my children.” Alba said. “Alba what about me?” “I want to forgive you I just can’t right now.” Alba said then she walked out.

Two months later; “Alba you’re making great progress.” “You think so.” Alba smiled. “I know so.” Fernando smiled. “Alba I’m so proud of you.” Fernando said and grabbed her hand. Alba looked down at his hand and she didn’t let go. Fernando noticed that she didn’t make a move and he said, “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have done that.” “I better go; I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Alba finally made it home and from the looks of it Ricardo was waiting on Alba and he didn’t look too happy. “You saw Fernando alone.” Ricardo said. “I did; did I do something wrong?” Alba asks sitting her keys on the table. “You know damn well you did something wrong.” “You’re to never see him alone.” “Cassandra was supposed to go with you but you insisted on going without her.” “Alba you’ve been doing this every week.” “I know.” Ricardo says. Alba laughed and said, “It wasn’t a secret.” “Don’t piss me off Alba.”

“Ricardo I’m lost, I thought you trust your brother.” “I don’t; the only reason I agreed to let him see you is because he’s a brilliant doctor when it comes to your illness.” “I don’t trust him and I’ll never trust him.” “Well I trust him.” Alba said folding her arms. Ricardo smiled and said, “Do you not remember what he did to you to us.” “He raped you several times, put cameras inside our home; should I go on?” Ricardo asks. “He didn’t rape me.” Alba said getting upset. “Alba, he pretended to be me; he tricked you into sleeping with him.” “I think the authorities would call that rape.” “Ricardo I just got home I don’t have time for this.” “Alba don’t walk away from me; you need to understand that you can’t ever see my brother alone.” “He’s my doctor and I’ll see him when I want and without you or any of your hound dogs.” Alba says then walks off.

“Ricardo are you ok?” Cassandra asks pouring him another glass of wine. “I swear to you I’m being punished.” “Alba is going against everything that I say.” “Life was so much easier before her accident.” “She demands this, she demands that.” “She’s not listening to me.” “Ricardo this may have to do with you screwing the help.” “I didn’t screw her.” “Whatever Ricardo; Alba’s just acting out because of what you did.” “Does she have to piss me off with Fernando of all people?” “Of course she’s going to piss you off with Fernando it’s the best way to get you back in the worst way.” Cassandra smiled. “Whose side are you own?” Ricardo asks. “The broken hearted woman’s side.”

**Chapter 28**

**“A New Friendship Develops”**

“Enjoy the little things for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things.” -Robert Brault

Alba was over to Fernando’s; the two of them were inside the kitchen laughing having a great time. “I better not have another glass; I have to drive home.” Alba said. “Yeah two glasses are enough.” Fernando agreed. The two of them sat back inside his living room just talking some more. “Ricardo’s going to be pissed that you’re over here with me.” “He’ll be alright; we’re friends right.” “Sure.” Fernando smiled.

Two days later Alba was inside the kitchen cooking. Katerina was in her swing smiling. “Oh you’re getting sleepy.” Alba smiled. Alba put her stuffed chicken breast inside the oven then sat down at the bar and stared at her daughter. “Kat I’m so blessed to have you.” “I never thought you’d be a part of my life and you are; you’re here.” “You’re the best gift your Dad has giving me.” Alba yawned and closed her eyes. Alba stood up when she heard Ricardo walking inside.

“Something smells good.” Ricardo said walking inside the kitchen. “Hey.” Alba said. “Hey; you’re in a good mood.” “I am; how was work?” “It would be better if my queen was there by my side.” “Oh.” “Well I’m gonna shower ok.” “Sure.” Alba sat back down to hear her cell vibrate, it was a text from Fernando that read, “I wish you were here.” Alba smiled and texted back; “I’ll see you around noon.” Fernando texted back; “Wyd?” Alba texted back; “Cooking.” Fernando texted, “What are you cooking?” “Stuffed chicken breast, steamed broccoli and rice.” “Sounds delicious I’m eating a microwave dinner later.” Alba texted, “☺ sorry.”

After Ricardo finished eating he got the baby and went inside the nursery with her. Alba went inside the kitchen and grabbed some plastic containers putting food inside. Then she left out in a hurry. When Alba was pulling into Fernando’s drive way he was locking his door. Fernando turned around and was surprised to see Alba. Alba got out of her car and had a grocery bag in her hand. Fernando met her with a smile and said, “Hey, I didn’t expect you.” “I brought you dinner.” Alba smiled. “You brought me dinner.” “Yes.” Alba said handing him the bag. “Alba you’re so sweet.” Fernando smiled taking the bag out of her hand.

The two of them walked inside his house to his kitchen. Fernando sat the bag on the counter and grabbed a plate. “I was just about to go grab me a bite to eat.” “Oh.” Fernando pulled the food out of the bag and opened the containers and said, “Alba you’re really something else.” “I never expect you to do this.” “Thank you Alba.” “You’re welcome.” Alba smiled. “Really thank you.” Fernando said then he pulled her close and hugged her. Alba smiled and said, “You’re welcome, I didn’t want you to have to eat a microwave dinner.” “I always fix more than enough food.” “I really appreciate this.” “Well I better get home before Ricardo realizes I’ve disappeared.” Fernando walked Alba to her car and said, “Well I’ll see you tomorrow, be safe.” “Thank you; you too and enjoy your dinner.” “I will.”

For the next couple of weeks Alba was bringing Fernando dinner. Fernando sat down about to eat his dinner and asks, “Alba why are you doing this; bringing me food every day?” “Because you don’t have anybody to cook for you.” “I have Rosie but she’s out of town.” “Your maid I know.” Alba smiled. “No really why are you doing this; you don’t have to.” Fernando said. “Fernando you’re my friend and you won’t let me pay you for your medical expertise so I have to find a way to repay you.” “Alba you don’t have to pay me; I’m helping you because I love you.” Alba blushed and said, “I like taking care of you too.” Fernando took her hand and said, “I’m glad.”

The next day around seven Alba left her home to take Fernando some dinner. When she pulled into his drive way he was getting out of his SUV and he put the little girl on his back. She looked to be around three, maybe four years old. Fernando smiled when he saw Alba and he put the little girl down. “Hi; who is this pretty girl?” Alba smiled. “My daughter; Selma.” Fernando smiled. “Well she’s gorgeous like her father.” Alba smiled. “You cooked me something.” “I did.” Alba smiled. The three of them walked inside; Fernando sat the bag of food on the table and said, “Alba we’ll be right back.” “Sure.” “Relax; have a seat.” Fernando smiled.

Fernando came back down stairs without Selma and Alba asks, “Why didn’t she come back?” “She’s tired; she was sleeping inside the car.” “Oh; why didn’t you tell me you had a daughter?” Alba asks. Fernando sat beside Alba and said, “I need to explain something to you.” “Ok.” “Selma’s almost four and I’ve never really had a relationship with her because I didn’t want her.” “I know that sounds harsh and mean of me.” “Her mom and I were never in a relationship.” “We had drinks we both were drunk and then Selma is born.” “I take care of Selma financially, but I haven’t been in her life until I met you.” Fernando explained.

“Why me?” Alba asks. “Alba you’re the reason why I’m this better man.” “I changed because of you, because of the things you’ve said to me.” “I’ve never had a woman to say the things you’ve said to me.” “I want to be the man that will make you fall in love with me.” “That starts off with treating my child like my daughter and not a check.” “I see you with your children, I see the love you have for all of them and I need to be that way.” “You make me wanna be a better person.” Fernando explained. Alba smiled and said, “That’s good you’re trying to change.” “You are a good man.” “Thank you.” Fernando smiled.

Alba followed Fernando inside the kitchen to see what Alba had prepared for him today. While he put the food on his plate he asks, “Alba how are you able to trust me after all I put you through.” “I put cameras inside of your house.” “I tricked you into having sex with me several times and yet you still look and treat me like I’m one of the good guys.” “There’s good in everyone; when God made us he didn’t make any mistakes.” Alba said. “You can make any man fall in love with you.” “Thank you for forgiving me; I’m not that same man I used to be.” “I know you’re not.” Alba said touching the side of his face.

Ricardo walked inside the house calling Alba’s name. “Where’s Mommy; Kat?” Ricardo said sitting her inside her swing. Ricardo checked the bedroom and ran upstairs. “Kat; Mommy’s not here.” Ricardo said grabbing the remote. As soon as Ricardo got comfy on the couch with Kat; Alba walked through the door. Ricardo stood up and laid Kat inside the bassinet. Ricardo walked up to Alba and was about to kiss her but she turned her head. “Where have you been?” Ricardo asks. “Just running a few errands; how’s Katerina?” “She’s fine, sleeping.” “I made one of your favorites.” Alba said. “Please tell me it’s the stuffed jalapeno and shrimp wrapped in bacon.” “Yes.” Ricardo picked Alba up in his arms and gave her a long kiss. Alba kissed him back. The long kiss leads to a make out session on the couch, with a lot of touching.

Alba took bubble bath while Ricardo finished his dinner. By the time Alba was getting out Ricardo walked inside. Alba reached for the towel to cover her naked, wet body, but Ricardo snatched the towel. “Why did you do that?” Alba asks. Ricardo dropped the towel on the floor and got closer to her. Alba smiled and asks, “What are you doing?” “Admiring the view.” Ricardo smiled. “Are you going to do something about it?” Ricardo reached out his hand and Alba took it.

Ricardo took her to the bed; he sat down and had Alba to straddle him. “Do you want to do this?” Alba smiled and said, “I want what you want.” “No, I didn’t ask you that; do you wanna make love to me?” “Alba I want you to want me like you’ve always wanted me in the past.” “I don’t want to always be the one to come to you.” “You use to always come to me.” Ricardo says. “It’s getting late; I’m going to bed.” Alba said. Ricardo held her so she couldn’t move and said, “Alba I’m not trying to turn you off.” “I just don’t want to force myself on you.” “Of course I’d make love to you every single day if you’d let me.” “I just want to know your true feelings; what do you want?” Ricardo asks.

Alba touched both sides of Ricardo’s face and looked him in the eyes. “I want you to understand that Alba’s different.” “I’m not the fast talker and sexy person I was before the accident.” “I wish I were but I’m not.” “I know you miss her.” “Ricardo I want you to look at me like you use to.” “Alba I do.” “You don’t; you don’t because you’re still hiding something from me.” “Our relationship is never going to be the same until you own up to the lie.” “What lie Alba?” “I don’t know that’s what I’m trying to find out.”

Alba sat at Fernando’s house playing with his daughter on the floor. Fernando sat on the couch admiring the view. “Are you my daddy’s girlfriend?” Selma asks. Alba smiled then Fernando interrupted and said, “Selma, I told you she’s my friend; she’s married to my brother.” “Do you like my Daddy?” “I do he’s my friend; Selma.” Alba smiled. Alba continued to play with Selma until Fernando noticed Alba out of breath.

“Hey sit here; I’m gonna get you a glass of water.” Fernando said. Fernando came back with water and said, “Take a sip.” Alba drank half of the water and Fernando asks, “How do you feel?” Alba couldn’t speak and Fernando said, “Selma go upstairs and play I’ll be up later.” “Ok.” Selma got up and headed upstairs; Fernando had Alba to lie down and relax. “Don’t try to talk; just relax you just got too tired that’s a side effect from the drug.” Alba closed her eyes and Fernando sat on the floor close to her.

It began to get late and Fernando knew that Ricardo would be worried about his wife and furious if she stayed all-night at his house. He didn’t want there to be any strain in Alba’s marriage because of him. “Why is my wife at your house?” Ricardo asks getting pissed. “She stopped by to play with her niece.” “You don’t have a daughter.” “I do; I just called to tell you your wife isn’t feeling well and she’s here on my couch.” Then Fernando hung up.

A week later; Fernando’s mom came over to visit. “How are you doing Fernando?” “I’m fine.” “Your brother told me that you’ve been helping his wife with her illness that’s wonderful of you.” “Thank you Mama’.” “Mama’ would you like anything; eat, drink?” Fernando asks. “You cook now.” Flavia smiled. “No someone cooked for me and I have left overs.” “Who is this girl?” “Someone special that’s all you need to know.” “Ok; sure I will have some of your leftovers.”

Saturday; Alba was getting her things together to go visit Ricardo’s mother. “You look very pretty today; I thought you and I were going to see a movie.” Ricardo said. “We are but that’s at seven.” “You and your Mom always say I never visit her.” “So Katerina and I are going to visit for a couple hours.” “I won’t be gone long.” Alba says. “Ok; tell Mama’ I said, “Hi.” “I will.”

After Alba left Ricardo was picked up by Dr. Gibson. “So the wife didn’t have any problems with you going golfing today.” Chad smiled. “She didn’t; she’s visiting with my Mama’.” “That’s good; so how is she?” “Physically she’s fine; I just think she trust the wrong people.” Ricardo said. “Would this have to do with your brother?” “Yes ever since he’s been her doctor she’s taken a liking to him.” “She doesn’t think I know but I know every single day she’s taking him dinner.” “What?” “Like I said she trusts the wrong people.” “She’s totally forgotten about the bad he’s done and I know he’ll do it again.” “Keep an eye on her; you don’t want her to be sucked into your brother’s craziness.”

Alba had been at Ricardo’s mothers’ house for an hour when Fernando showed up. Flavia was inside the kitchen fixing her dessert. So Alba and Ricardo sat outside on the back just conversing. Flavia watched and listened from the window. Once Flavia put her dessert inside the fridge she grabbed her phone, went inside her bedroom and called her son.

“Give me a minute my Mama’ calling something could be wrong with Alba.” Ricardo said. “Take your time.” Chad said. Ricardo walked away and answered his cell. “Hi Mama’.” “Hijo (son) where are you?” “On the golf course; how’s your visit with Alba and Kat going?” “It’s going great; are you aware of your wife and brother’s relationship?” Flavia asks. “Relationship; what are you talking about?” Ricardo asks scratching his head. “This friendship the two of them share.” “Your brother isn’t disrespecting your wife and she’s not disrespecting you, but something’s wrong with this picture.”

Ricardo smiled and walked further away from his friends. “Mama’ as long as their talking I’m not gonna stress about it.” “Ricardo you don’t understand; Alba’s falling in love with your brother.” “Did she tell you that?” “She didn’t have to tell me that.” “She looks at him the way she use to look at you.” “You should be paying more attention to your wife than your love for golf hija (son).” “Mama’ thanks for calling me; I gotta go now.” Ricardo said then hung up the phone.

“Ricardo are you ready?” Chad asks. “I’m gonna leave now I have some place to be.” “Is Alba alright?” “I’m not sure; I’ll see you and the guys later.” “How are you getting home; you rode with me.” Chad said. “I’ll catch a cab, don’t worry about me.” Ricardo said. “Here.” Chad said throwing Ricardo his car keys. “Thanks now how will you get home?” “Don’t worry about me; go take care of your wife.” Chad smiled. “Thank you.”

Flavia was happy when she saw Ricardo knocking at her door. Flavia opened the door with a smile. “You came; come on inside.” “Mama’ how are you?” Ricardo asks. “I’m fine; I’m worried about you and your wife.” Flavia said hugging her son. “Mama’ we’re fine.” “Well it doesn’t seem like it from how close she is with your brother.” Flavia said. “Where’s Alba?” “Out back.” Flavia pointed. “Thank you.”

Ricardo stepped outside; Alba and Fernando were surprised to see him. Fernando stood up and spoke to Ricardo; Ricardo was cordial. He walked over to his wife and Fernando walked inside the house. Ricardo had both of his hands out for Alba to grab and she did. “What are you doing here?” Alba asks. “I missed you that’s why I’m here.” Ricardo smiled. Ricardo put his arms around her waist and held her.

Fernando stood inside the kitchen staring at the two of them when his mom walked inside the kitchen. “They’re a beautiful couple aren’t they?” Flavia smiled. Fernando turned around and said, “They are.” “Hija when are you going to get a wife?” “Mama’ I’m working on it.” “She’s not your brother’s wife is she?” Fernando smiled and said, “You don’t have to warn me; I know Alba’s off limits.” “Fernando it’s time to settle down and leave all those reckless women alone.” “Mama’ I know; I have a few errands to run I just came over to check on you.” “Well you take care and next time bring my nieta (granddaughter).” “I will next time.”

Ricardo and Alba sat on the swing outside. Ricardo had his arm around her neck and she leaned over on him. “Alba I love you and I want you to trust me like you use to.” “We’re not the same people we use to be.” Alba responded. “Alba I know we’ve both changed, but our friendship and relationship should be better than what it is.” Alba sat up and said, “I’m trying.” “I know you are but you’re putting a lot of trust into Fernando.” Alba stood up and asks, “Is that what this is about; my friendship with your brother?” “He’s my friend that’s all.” “He wants more than friendship.” “He respects our marriage; what more convincing do you need.” Alba said. “He’s playing games he always does.” “I’m not going to argue about this over and over.” “Talk to Fernando about this not me I’ve had enough of this.”

Alba and Ricardo were back home and Alba wasn’t in the mood to talk to her husband. “Alba I’m sorry I just think Fernando has an agenda.” “You always think the worst about people.” “Can you blame me after everything he’s done to us?” “Alba let me inside the room.” Ricardo said beating on the door. “Go away.” Alba said then walked inside the bathroom. Ricardo got so angry he knocked the door down Alba couldn’t believe it. “What is wrong with you?” Alba asks with a shocked look on her face. “I told you I wanted to talk and you always do this lock up inside the bedroom to keep me out.” “I’m sick of it when I want to talk I want to talk.” Ricardo says. Alba walked back inside the bathroom that’s when Ricardo grabbed her arm and said, “I’m so sick and tired of this.” “Where is the woman I married?” “I’m getting sick and tired of this little girl do you hear me!” Ricardo yelled. “She died in the car accident.” Alba said and that’s when Ricardo let her go.

**Chapter 29**

**“His Weakness”**

“Don’t choose the most beautiful person in the world; choose the person that makes your world the most beautiful.” -Unknown

“Alba could I asks you a question?” Fernando asks. “Of course.” “Do you forgive me for all the bad things I’ve done to you?” “Of course; why do always ask me?” Alba asks. “Because we’ve become such good friends.” “I couldn’t be your friend if I was holding a grudge.” “Ok.” Fernando said. “So what are you doing for Thanksgiving?” Alba asks. “Nothing.” “What about you?” Fernando asks. “I’m not sure; I may go home to visit my family in Louisiana.” “I’ll miss you if you leave.” “I’ll miss you too.”

Alba made it home; she grabbed her laptop that she hadn’t been on since her accident. Alba began surfing the web and she did some online shopping while she was on the web. Then Alba went to her email account but she realized that her husband’s account was open. She was curious as to what type of emails he received in his personal email so she looked and came across some emails from Anna and photos of the two of them. Alba jumped off the couch dropping the laptop and she ran out of the house.

Alba sat inside her car and cried; she blamed herself for her husband having to lean on another female. Instead of going over to Fernando’s she went to Cassandra’s house. “Alba come inside; I’m surprised to see you.” “Hey.” Alba said walking inside. Alba sat on the couch and she said nothing else. “Alba do you need anything?” “No.”

Ricardo finally got off work after a long emergency surgery; to come home to an empty house. After Ricardo showered and got dressed he called his wife’s cell to realize it was inside the family room on the couch. After Ricardo had eaten he realized it was getting later and later. Ricardo knew where she was and he was trying not to get upset, but once it was past ten o’clock Ricardo jumped in his car to go find his wife.

Fernando was lying on the couch when he heard someone pulling into his driveway. “It’s kind of late.” Fernando thought. Fernando answered the door to see it was Ricardo. “Where’s my wife?” Ricardo asks. “She’s not here.” “Fernando I’m not in the best mood; where the hell is she?” “She’s not here ok; I’ve had a long day and I’m not in the best mood either.” Fernando frowned. “If you happen to see her tell her to call me.” “Yeah now get out.”

Once Ricardo got inside his car his cell rang. “Cassandra I’m in the middle of something.” “You might want to get over here; Alba’s here and I think something’s wrong.” “She came over but she’s not saying a word.” “She’s with you.” Ricardo said surprised. “She is; where else did you think she was?” “Never mind I’m headed that way.”

For the next two weeks Fernando hadn’t seen Alba and he was becoming worried. He wondered why she hadn’t returned any of his calls or text messages. He was beginning to not be able to eat or sleep. He missed Alba a lot; she was the only real friend he had in Texas besides his colleagues. “Alba what have you done to me?” Fernando asks himself.

After Fernando finished with his last patient he decided to call his brother. “That’s impossible; I ask Alba yesterday how was her session and she said, “Great.” Ricardo said. “Well she hasn’t been here for two weeks.” “I thought maybe she was sick or something.” Fernando says. “I’m not sure why Alba’s not coming to her sessions; are you sure you didn’t do anything to her?” Ricardo asks. “I’d never hurt Alba; I’m sorry I called.” Fernando said then hung up the phone.

Before Ricardo went home he stopped by the flower shop to grab his wife some flowers. When he got home Alba was on the floor playing with Katerina. “How are my two favorite girls?” “We’re fine.” Alba smiled. “These are for you.” Ricardo smiled. Alba stood up and took the flowers and said, “Thank you.” Later on that day Alba and Ricardo took a hot bubble bath together. “It’s been a long time since we did this together.” Ricardo said. After the two of them finished and they got dressed and laid in bed watching television.

“Alba.” “Yes.” “Fernando called me; he wanted to know why you hadn’t come to any of your sessions?” “You’ve been telling me for days that your sessions have been great; why did you lie?” Ricardo asks. “I just don’t want to go to the sessions anymore, I don’t need them.” Alba responded. “You didn’t have to lie to me.” “I wouldn’t have made you go if you didn’t want to go.” “I didn’t think you’d understand.” “Well Alba I do I’ve always understood you when no one else did.” Alba thought, “I guess you haven’t realized that my heart is broken and you’re the reason for it.”

Thanksgiving Day; everyone spent the day at Flavia’s house; she was doing all the cooking with her two daughters. Alba was surprised to see Fernando there; she spoke to him but she wouldn’t go near him and Ricardo noticed that first hand. “Ricardo I’m assuming you spoke with your wife about her friendship with your brother; good for you.” Flavia smiled. Ricardo didn’t say anything he walked back over to his wife and daughter.

Ricardo sat beside Alba and whispered, “Are you sure you’re ok?” “Of course I’m fine it’s Thanksgiving Day.” Alba responded. Dinner was served around three o’clock and everyone were having a great time. It had been years since Flavia had all her children together at one table and it was just perfect. Flavia was truly happy and all her children could tell. It had been almost a month since the last time Fernando had spoken or seen Alba. He couldn’t help but stare at her at the dinner table. He wanted to ask her what was the matter so badly, but he knew it wasn’t the time. He sure didn’t feel like getting into an argument with his brother on a special holiday.

After dinner everyone just hung out inside the family room and talked. Alba went inside one of the bedrooms to put the baby to sleep and ended up falling asleep. Ricardo was surprised that Fernando stayed around normally after the festivities he’d leave, but he was staying and Ricardo had an idea it was because of Alba. Flavia sat beside Fernando and the two of them had a pretty good conversation.

Around six-thirty; Ricardo went to the store to get dish washing liquid for his Mom. Once he left out the door Alba walked out of the bedroom. Everyone was doing their own thing not even noticing Alba passing by. Fernando had noticed Alba and he was trying to get away from his Mom. Alba went through the kitchen to walk out back, it was cold outside and Alba could feel the cold breeze, but she needed air badly. Fernando finally got away from his mom. He grabbed his coat and his mom’s blanket off the couch and headed the same way Alba went out.

Once Fernando’s feet touched the ground he said, “Alba.” Alba turned around with her arms folded. He could tell she was cold and she looked very sad. Fernando walked closer to Alba and asks, “Why are you out here alone?” “I needed some air.” Alba responded. Fernando put the blanket around Alba and asks, “Is that better?” Alba gave him a smile and nodded her head yes. “What did I do to make you not return any of my calls?” “Nothing.” “You haven’t been to any of your sessions; Ricardo said, “You didn’t want to come anymore.” “Why; if I did something tell me what I did?” Alba didn’t respond and Fernando said, “Alba you owe me that much.”

“You didn’t do anything.” Alba responded. “Then why; why would you walk out of my life like that.” “Alba it’s been almost a month, if my brother has forbidden you to see me I understand.” “I don’t want to talk about Ricardo.” Alba said raising her voice a little. “Why?” “Fernando please leave me alone; go inside with your family.” “I’m good out here alone.” “No you’re not; something’s wrong I can feel it.” “I’ve felt it all month, tell me what’s wrong.” Fernando took his hands and held up her face, he wanted to look into her green eyes. “I can see a lot of pain in your eyes.” That’s when tears began to fall and Alba said, “I’m embarrassed.” “Why?” “It’s all my fault.” “What’s your fault?”

After Alba told him everything about Ricardo and Anna, he held her as she cried. “It’s not your fault he lied to you.” “You could have come to me I wouldn’t judge.” “It’s embarrassing, he thinks I’m slow.” Alba cried. “I don’t’ think he meant it in that way.” “He talked to that girl about me, about problems in our marriage that I didn’t even know we had.” “He doesn’t think our daughter is his.” “I guess it’s not meant for me to be happy.” Alba says. “You’ll be happy again.” “Alba you’re my friend and I love you so much.” “I don’t’ like to see you sad.” Fernando says. “But I am sad, I’m confused, and I don’t know what to do to keep your brother happy.” Alba confessed.

Fernando changed the subject and brought up her birthday. “How do you know when my birthday its?” Alba smiled. “You are one of my patients; well you use to be.” Fernando smiled. “I’ll come back I promise.” “I hope so I just really miss you a lot Alba.” Fernando said touching the back of her head. “I miss you too.” “Alba sometimes when I look into your eyes I just wanna kiss you.” “I wish you were mine.”

“Mama’ where’s Alba; she’s not inside the bedroom?” Ricardo asks. “I didn’t see her leave out.” Flavia said. “Have you seen Fernando?” “I thought he left a long time ago.” “His car is still outside.” “I have a good idea where he and my wife are.” Ricardo said walking towards the kitchen. Ricardo walked outside to see his brother hugged up with his wife. “I’m gone ten minutes and you two can’t keep away from one another.” Ricardo said. Fernando turned around and said, “It’s not like that we were just talking.” “Looks to me like you were holding my wife.” “I was giving her a hug because I was about to leave.” “Ok.” “Alba are you ready to go home?” Ricardo asks. “Sure.”

Once the three of them go inside the car Ricardo asks, “What did Fernando really want?” “He thought that I should come back for my therapy and medicine.” Alba said. “What medicine?” “No medicine just therapy.” “What is he giving you Alba?” “Nothing that was a mistake; he asks was I still taking my vitamins because they have DHA for brain development.” “Oh.”

Three days later; Selma’s mom pulled into Fernando’s driveway to pick their daughter. Fernando walked outside carrying Selma. After Fernando put Selma inside her car seat and her suitcase in the trunk; Selma’s Mom stood outside talking to him. “So who is she?” “Greta you lost me.” “The woman that you’re in love with.” “You lost me; love.” Fernando frowned. “Fernando you’re different and I never would have thought you of all people were capable of love.” “She’s the reason why you’ve all of a sudden had a change of heart with Selma.” “You spend time with Selma now and she’s so happy.” Greta says. “Yes, I am in love and she makes me a better person.” “I see her with her children and it makes me want to be better.” “Even if I don’t get this woman in my life I’ll never abandon Selma ever again.” Greta smiled and said, “I believe you and I believe you’ll get her just be patient.”

As soon as Greta pulled out Alba was pulling in. Fernando stood there with a huge smile on his face. Alba got out of her car and Fernando walked up and hugged her tight. “This is a surprise; you’re not like you were a week ago.” Fernando smiled. “It’s December my favorite month of the year and I’m not going to feel bad about things in the past.” “I’m going to live in the present and make my future great.” Alba smiled. “Good.” Fernando said taking her hand.

Alba had started her sessions back up with Fernando. After Alba finished with the speech therapist she went inside Fernando’s office. “A little birdy told me you are doing fantastic even though you missed a month of therapy.” Fernando smiled. “You’re just saying that.” “I’m not, you are doing great I’m so proud of you.” “Thank you.” Alba smiled. Fernando sat in the chair beside Alba and took her hand. “Did you remember that you have the MRI today?” “I’m not having an MRI.” Alba said. “I need this test Alba to make sure your brain is healing.” “I’ll be in there with you the entire time; if I could hold your hand I would.” Fernando says.

Fernando headed to pick up his daughter; she was sleeping when he got there. “How are you?” Greta smiled. “I’m fine; how are you doing?” “I’m great; would you like something to drink?” “Sure.” Fernando smiled taking a seat. “Iced tea or water?” “Iced tea sounds great.” “Ok.” Fernando had been sitting at Greta’s about fifteen minutes; the two of them were just talking. “Greta I can’t believe I’m talking to you about this.” “Fernando you don’t have to be shy.” “I don’t know it’s something about Alba; she really makes me happy.” “She’s beautiful but that’s not the reason I fell in love with her.” “I fell in love with her because she called me out on my shit.” “She couldn’t stand me; I was the most hated person on her list because I did some unspeakable things to her.” Fernando admitted. “What did you do?” “That’s not important.” Fernando smiled.

“I helped her during a tragedy, that’s when things changed between us and she’s forgiven me.” “Alba knows I love her but I don’t think she knows how much I’m willing to lose for her to be in my life always.” “Fernando you just have to go for it.” “When you find love you have to grab on to it and take it.” “You know she loves you right?” Greta asks. “I do, but there’s someone standing in our way stopping us from being together.” Fernando says. “What could possibly be standing in the way?” Greta asks. “That’s not important, I better go.” Fernando said standing up. “No, sit down I’m enjoying this conversation.” “I see you in a whole new light; you’re nothing like the man I slept with almost four years ago.” Greta smiles. “Thank you Greta.” Fernando smiled.

“You’re afraid of something; what is it?” “I do have a weakness and that’s what scares me.” “I’ve always been afraid of love because it makes you weak and it makes you do crazy things.” “Alba is my strength, but she’s also my weakness and that’s scary.” “Alba has the power to hurt me and destroy me at the same time.” “That’s why I’m so afraid; if I lost her forever or someone hurt her it would kill my heart.” “So that’s why I’ve tried for so long not to fall in love.” “In the past I thought I loved a woman, but it wasn’t love, it was just lust.” “Alba’s never told me she loves me, I feel she does.” “It’s just by how she acts around me and treats me.” “I’ve been hurt before and I thought it was love, but I realized it wasn’t.” “History is repeating itself and that frightens me.” Fernando says.

Greta walked Fernando to the door and Greta said, “I hope things work out with you and Alba.” “I’m sure they will eventually.” “Tell my daughter I’ll see her tomorrow and I hope she feels better.” “I’ll be sure to tell her that.” Greta smiled. “Thank you.” Fernando walked to his car and Greta said, “Fernando sometimes you just have to step out on faith.” Fernando turned around and gave her a smile.

Alba was doing great at work; she had been there for two weeks and things seemed better at the clinic, but things weren’t so great between her and her husband. Alba had many new patients and she was trying to keep up with them and get a handle on the new computer software. Ricardo stepped inside and asks, “Are you ok?” “I’m fine; just finishing up before my next patient.” Alba said without looking at him. “Alba I wish you’d tell me what’s bothering you.” “Nothing, I’m fine; I know things will get better in time.” Alba said. “I haven’t heard you say that in a very long time.” Ricardo said. “Oh I don’t know where that came from.”

Alba’s next patient came inside and the older lady said, “My daughter is running late; is she able to come inside when she arrives?” “Of course she is; let me inform the receptionist.” Alba smiled. Once Alba began the sonogram; the woman’s daughter knocked at the door and Alba invited her inside. “I’m Alba; I just started.” Alba smiled. “Alba.” “Yes, oh I’m Greta nice to meet you.” “You can have a seat right there.” Alba pointed. “Thank you.”

After Alba finished with the sonogram; Alba explained a few things to them and then she said, “Dr. Cruz will take a look at everything and he’ll give you a call in a few days.” “Thank you so much Alba, your husband is the best.” “You’re welcome Mrs. James.” Then there was a knock on the door and Alba said, “I’ll be right back.” Alba opened the door and Ricardo asks, “Is Mrs. James with you?” “She is.” “I’d like to come inside and speak to her if that’s alright.” “Sure.” Ricardo walked inside and Greta was surprised. “What are you doing here?” Greta asks. “Greta this is Dr. Cruz.” “I’m sorry I don’t know you.” Ricardo smiled. “I’m sorry you look like someone I know, sorry.” Greta said. Alba looked at her from the corner of her eye. She wondered was she another female that her husband had been stepping out with behind her back.

Saturday while Ricardo was playing golf with his buddy’s Alba was headed over to Fernando’s house. The two of them sat on his couch talking. Alba reached on Fernando’s table she saw a picture of the female at the hospital. Alba picked up the picture and said, “I know her.” Alba stood up to find Fernando. “Hey I was just putting on a shirt so we could go grab lunch.” “Who is this woman?” Alba asks holding up the photo. Fernando smiled and said, “That’s Selma’s mother; Selma’s been looking for the picture I found it and sat it on my table.” Fernando explained. “Oh, I met her the other day.” “When she saw Ricardo she asks, “What are you doing here?” “She doesn’t know you have a twin brother does she?” Alba asks. “No.”

After Fernando and Alba finished eating the two of the sat on his couch watching reruns of Everybody Loves Raymond. “I thought I was the only person who loved this show.” Fernando smiled. “You’re not.” Alba smiled. During the middle of the show Alba had a headache, so Fernando grabbed her some Advil. “Come lay beside me.” Fernando said. “I better not.” Fernando reached out his hand and said, “I don’t bite.” Alba laid on the couch beside Fernando. They were very close; Alba was used to being that close to her husband. Deep down she missed Ricardo like crazy and she wished it was him she was lying so closely to. Alba closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep. Fernando fell asleep shortly after her.

Ricardo pulled into Fernando’s driveway and said, “I knew she’d be here. Ricardo got out of his car and walked to the door. The door was opened but the screen door was locked. Ricardo could see the two inside on the sofa sleeping. Fernando’s arm was around her waist and his hand was on top of hers. The sight of that frightened Ricardo and pissed him off at the same time. “What are they doing?” Ricardo asks beating on the glass door. Alba opened her eyes first but she didn’t notice anyone standing in front of the glass door. Fernando opened his eyes and that’s when Alba saw Ricardo.

“Ricardo.” Alba said sitting up. “Open the door now!” Ricardo said raising his voice. “We fell asleep.” Fernando said. Alba stood up and opened the door and Ricardo said, “Get your things and let’s go now.” “Ok.” Alba said. “Ricardo we fell asleep I’m sorry it’s my fault.” “Alba’s not even supposed to be here with you or any man.” Ricardo said pissed. Alba put her shoes on and grabbed her purse.

**Chapter 30**

**“Lines Crossed”**

“Looking into his eyes makes me smile, he makes me happy, and being with him is so refreshing.” -Unknown

Greta picked up her daughter from Fernando’s house. After Fernando put Selma in her car seat and then he waved good bye. “I’ll see you later.” Fernando said. “You’re in love with your twin brother’s wife.” Greta said. “I am.” “Fernando you’re playing with fire.” “I think Alba’s the wrong woman for you.” “Greta I don’t mean to sound mean, but you know nothing about me.” “You and I had a one nightstand that’s all.” “You know nothing about me and you damn sure don’t know anything about Alba.” Fernando says. “You’re messing with a married woman; it’s going to be very messy.” “Greta worry about yourself as you can see I’m a man I got this handled.” “She’s going to rip your heart out of your chest.” “She may and I’m willing to take that risk.” Fernando said then walked off.

“I’m sorry Ricardo; how many times am I going to apologize.” “I should have never laid on that couch and let him be that close to me.” “I’m sorry; I do want our relationship get better.” “I know I’m the reason why our relationship isn’t the same.” “I’m sorry Ricardo forgive me.” Alba says. Ricardo realized that she wasn’t the only one that had put strain on their relationship he was the one who nearly ruined it. “Alba I’m sorry I shouldn’t have put the entire blame on you.” “It takes two and I had something to do with that also and I’m sorry.” “I just want you to stay away from my brother.” “I don’t care if you have your sessions with him at the hospital but I don’t want you with him outside the hospital.” “Can you promise me that?” Ricardo asks. “Yes, I promise.”

After Alba’s session she was trying to get out of the hospital quickly before she ran into Fernando. She was really trying to keep her promise to her husband. Alba walked out of the room running into Fernando nearly dropping her purse. “You were going to leave without coming to see me?” Fernando asks. Alba looked up at him and said, “I have a few errands to run.” “No you don’t.” “I do I have to go.” Alba said with a shaky voice. Fernando walked inside and Alba didn’t have a choice but to back up. Fernando closed the door behind him without looking back.

He grabbed her and began kissing her. Alba kissed him back and she just enjoyed kissing him and then she stopped. “Alba.” “This is wrong.” Alba said. “Why is it wrong; Ricardo did the same thing to you?” “Two wrongs don’t make a right.” “I don’t do things to hurt people just because they hurt me.” “You crossed the line and that can never happen again.” Alba says. “That’s why Ricardo doesn’t trust you.” Alba said. “I don’t care if Ricardo doesn’t trust me.” “I don’t trust you anymore; you shouldn’t have kissed me.” “Alba.” “I have to go let me by right now.” Alba demanded. “Alba I’m sorry I just got carried away, it’s because I love you.” “More of the reason for me to never see you again.” “Don’t say that Alba please?” Fernando begged.

Alba got home; she walked inside her husband’s office and sat his mail on his desk and then walked out. Ricardo was inside the kitchen cooking. When Alba stepped inside the kitchen Ricardo greeted her with a long passionate kiss. Alba’s mind went to when Fernando kissed her. “How was therapy?” Ricardo asks. “It was fine; what are you cooking?” Alba asks. “Baking chicken.” “Did you forget about Dr. Gibson’s birthday dinner tonight?” “Baby I forgot; I’ll just cover the raw chicken and put it inside the fridge.” Ricardo said.

Ricardo and Alba were dressed by seven then they headed to the hotel. “Everyone is supposed to be seated in the ballroom.” Ricardo pointed. “Ok.” Alba said and then Ricardo took her hand. When the two of them walked inside they were surprised to see Anna talking to Dr. Gibson’s girlfriend. “What is she doing here?” Alba whispered. “I don’t know; we’ll sit on the other end.” “You talk to her and I will make a scene.” “I’m not talking to her; the only woman I have eyes are is you.”

Ricardo could tell his wife wasn’t comfortable and he was trying his very best to cater to her and make her feel as comfortable as possible. “I love you Alba.” Ricardo smiled touching the back of her neck. “I love you too.” More people began to come and then the waiters brought out the appetizers and drinks. Everyone were talking and enjoying themselves. Chad stood up and looked Ricardo and Alba’s way and said, “Ricardo you and Alba get over here.” “I don’t wanna go over there.” Alba said. “I’ll go speak to the birthday boy and I’ll be back in two minutes.” Ricardo said. “Ok, sure.” Alba smiled.

“Why are you and your wife all the way down there?” “Why do you think I have two chairs next to me?” Ricardo whispered and said, “You failed to tell me Anna would be here; she’s not one of Alba’s favorite people.” “Stephanie is the reason for her being here.” “Their friends and she was kind of irritated when Anna’s name wasn’t on the list.” “I understand.” Ricardo said.

Alba heard her cellphone so she took it out of her purse to see it was a text message from Fernando that read, “I miss you.” Alba texted, “I can’t text kind of busy.” Fernando texted, “☹ doing what?” Alba texted, “At a party.” “Where’s my brother?” “Talking with everyone.” Alba got up and left the party standing in the lobby of the hotel and called Fernando. “Alba I didn’t mean to keep you away from the party.” “I was bored anyway.” Alba said. “Oh.” “I hear music the same song I’m listening too now; where are you?” “I’m at Nylo having dinner inside the restaurant.” Fernando smiled. “I’m coming to you.” Alba smiled. “I’ll be looking for you.”

When Alba walked inside the restaurant Fernando stood up and signaled for her. He greeted her with a smile and a hug. “That’s a sexy dress; my brother’s crazy for turning his back away from you.” Alba blushed and said, “You look handsome.” “Thank you; will you join me?” “I can’t sit long.” “I understand.” Alba sat with Fernando enjoying herself. “See I told you you’d feel better once you got a little alcohol in your system.” Fernando smiled. Fernando got out of his seat and sat next to Alba and said, “I’m sorry for disrespecting you; kissing you.” “My life’s nothing without you in it.” “I forgive you.” Alba said.

Alba finished her drink and said, “I better go before Ricardo comes looking for me.” “I don’t think he even notices that you’re gone.” “I don’t either.” Alba smiled. Fernando stared at Alba and said, “I wish you’d let me kiss you.” “I can’t help it I like kissing you.” “I like your kisses too.” Alba flirted. “You’re flirting with me.” Fernando smiled. “I am.” Alba smiled. Fernando leaned over and kissed her and she kissed him back. After the two of them kissed Alba said, “I better go; I’ll text you later.” “Thanks for keeping me company.” “You’re welcome.” Alba said standing up.

Alba went inside the bathroom refreshing her lipstick and then she went back to the party. When Alba walked inside Ricardo was standing up. “You’re so sexy Alba.” “Thank you honey.” Alba smiled. The two of them sat and enjoyed each other. Alba seemed happy, she wasn’t uncomfortable anymore and Ricardo was happy. Around eleven people were leaving; Ricardo and Chad stood inside the ballroom talking. “I’ll be in the restroom.” Alba whispered in Ricardo’s ear. “Ok baby.”

Once Alba was leaving the restroom she saw Fernando and he was talking to Anna. She stood at a distance and watched the two of them, Fernando noticed her before she walked away. Fernando walked up to Alba and said, “So that’s Anna.” “Yes; why were you talking to her?” Alba asks. “She actually did all the talking, she thought I was Ricardo.” “Oh; what did she say?” “Not much.” Fernando lied. “You’re not going to tell me?” “Alba it wasn’t anything; she misses him and she enjoyed looking at him tonight.” “That bitch.” Alba frowned. “You don’t have to worry about her I made it perfectly clear that she was nothing more than a mistake.” Fernando said. “Thank you.” “You’re welcome.”

Fernando got home and he thought about the things Anna had said to him not knowing he was the twin brother. He wondered should he tell Alba the truth or confront his brother. Fernando knew that Alba would be devastated when she found out what really happened between those two and he couldn’t bear to break her heart. Fernando felt he shouldn’t be the one to tell Alba that his brother should confess to his sexcapade with Anna.

Fernando made it to Ricardo’s clinic around four o’clock. “Hi I was wondering is there any way I could see Dr. Cruz.” “Dr. Cruz stop playing how are you going to see yourself.” Emily smiled. “Dr. Cruz has a twin brother ladies.” Pilar said. “Oh he does.” Emily said shocked. “Dr. Cruz have a seat and I’ll go get the other Dr. Cruz.” Pilar smiled. “Thank you.”

Ricardo went out to the lobby to meet Fernando and the two of them stepped out of the clinic into the hall. “I’m actually surprised to see you here.” “Does this have to do with me forbidding Alba from seeing you?” Ricardo asks. “No it doesn’t; I was at Nylo last night and I didn’t realize you were there until this pretty red head stepped in my face.” Fernando said. “Red head what are you talking about?” Ricardo asks. “I’m talking about that bitch you screwed Alba for.” “That bitch thought I was you and began to pour her heart out to me.” “I know everything and if you don’t tell Alba I will.” Fernando says.

Alba had made it back from her appointment at Fernando’s neurology clinic when she saw her husband and Fernando in a heated argument. She stood behind the huge green potted plant and eased dropped on their conversation. “You’d tell her this and break her heart.” “You know Alba and I are getting our marriage back on track.” “You’d really crush her heart?” Ricardo asks. “You did this not me.” Fernando said then walked off. Alba stood there and wondered, “What are they talking about crushing my heart?” Ricardo walked back into the clinic and told the women at the front; “Don’t tell Alba my brother was here.” “Yes Dr. Cruz.” Emily smiled. “Thank you.” Ricardo said walking back to his office.

**Chapter 31**

**“What’s Done In The Dark”**

“If you don’t want anyone to find out don’t do it.” -Unknown

Alba had eleven more days until her birthday and five more until Christmas. This was going to be Katerina’s first Christmas so the twins were definitely excited. Alba really didn’t know what she wanted for her birthday, but she knew she wanted to start the New Year fresh with her husband. She didn’t want any more lies tearing them apart.

“So what are we doing for your birthday?” Stacey asks. “Nothing special I just want to stay home and relax with my children.” Alba said. “What?” Bridget said. “Seriously I don’t want to go out; its cold out and I’d much rather be home.” “If she wants to stay home then it’s fine.” Stacey said. “I don’t like this Alba.” Bridget said. “Look things have changed, my life has changed I’m just not into dressing up going to this restaurant or that party.” “All I want to do is sit home for a change and relax, it is my birthday month.” “Alba’s right Bridget.” “Thank you Stacey.” Alba said.

Around five Alba had to run to the store but Ricardo’s car was blocking her car in the driveway so she grabbed his keys and left in his car. After Alba was walking out the market she popped the trunk on her husband’s car and she saw what looked like a black sting hanging out of the bottom of the trunk where the tire belong. Alba pulled the string to pull out some sexy lingerie. Alba couldn’t believe her eyes, she felt her heart beating fast and she didn’t want to believe that Ricardo had slept with another woman. Alba put the grocery inside the trunk then she headed home.

After Alba had put all the grocery away she sat inside the kitchen thinking of how she was going to confront her husband. “Hey why didn’t you wake me?” Ricardo asks. “You were sleeping so good I thought you deserved to sleep.” Alba said. “You still haven’t told me what you want for your birthday.” “Sexy black lingerie.” Alba responded without thinking. Ricardo smiled and said, “I love to see you in black lingerie.” “I bet you do.” “What does that mean?” Ricardo asks. “Nothing; I was only joking about the lingerie.” “I just want you and me to be happy.” “I don’t need a birthday gift, just honesty and happiness.” “Ok.”

“I have a confession.” Alba said. “What?” “I know I said I want honesty from you and I should be honest with you too.” “I kissed your brother at the hotel the other night.” “I’ve felt very bad about letting it happen.” Alba admits. “You kissed my brother.” Ricardo said. “Yes and I’m so sorry; it should have never happened.” Alba responded. “That’s all that happened?” “Yes, I’d never be intimate with anyone I think that’s crossing the line and our vows.” I take our vows very seriously.” Alba says. “Me too.” Ricardo said then walked out of the kitchen. Alba knew she was getting to him and she was going to make him feel so guilty he was going to confess.

So for the next four days; Alba was doing a lot of things that she used to do and Ricardo was taking notice. He felt horrible, and he was beginning to fall back deeper in love with his wife, like he had been with her in the past. Of course they were in love with one another but their love had changed and Alba’s heart had begun to love his brother. Alba tried to ignore her feelings but they were there and very real. Alba didn’t want to act on her feelings, but when she was around Fernando she did enjoy his attention and flirting. She wanted more with him but she couldn’t have two men, she chose Ricardo. He was the one who came to her rescues when she was having the worst life. He made her smile and brought the sun back into her life.

Christmas was great Alba enjoyed being with her family and she loved all her presents that she didn’t expect to get. After the twins left Alba was bored. “Alba let’s go to Mama’s.” Ricardo suggested. “You and Kat go, I’m going to clean the kitchen and get up all the paper.” “Ok; did you want me to drop off the presents at Stacey’s’?” Ricardo asks. “No after I finish I’ll drop them off I want to see the girls open their presents.” Alba smiled. “Ok; I’m not sure when we’ll be back, but I’ll call you later.”

It didn’t take Alba long to clean up; she grabbed her cell and headed to the bathroom. Alba lit her peppermint candles and ran her a nice hot bubble bath. Alba laid back in the tub very relaxed when her cell phone rang. Alba picked up her phone to see it was Fernando face timing her. “Merry Christmas.” Fernando smiled. “Merry Christmas.” Alba smiled back. Fernando held up a present that was wrapped in red paper with a huge gold bow on it and Alba asks, “What is that?” “Something I brought for you.” “You didn’t have to get me anything.” “I know I didn’t but I did.” “Alba I wanna see you.” Fernando says. “You’re looking at me right now.” Alba smiled. “I know that, smarty.” Fernando smiles. “I can come over but I can’t stay long.” “I understand.” “What are you doing?” “I’m taking a bath.” “Are you really?” Fernando asks. “I am and you’re ruining this for me.” “I never mind.” “What were you going to say?” Alba asks. “Something I shouldn’t say.” “Oh.” Alba smiled.

After Alba had gotten dressed, she put all the presents inside her car. That’s when she noticed a gift on the garage floor. Alba thought, “I didn’t wrap this.” Alba picked up the gift and just stared at it; she put it on one of the shelves and went back inside the house. Then the phone rang, “Hello.” “What are you doing beautiful?” Ricardo asks. “Nothing really.” Alba answered. “I just called to see if you still wanted to stay home.” “Everyone’s at Mama’s having a great time, you have gifts here.” Ricardo smiled. “I may come by after I leave Stacey’s ok.” “Sure, I’ll talk to you later.” “Bye.”

Before Alba pulled out of the drive way she was so curious to what was inside the purple gift with the gold bow. She shook the gift several times. “I wonder whose gift is this and what’s inside.” Alba said. Alba decided to open the gift and then she talked herself out of it. Alba put the gift back and drove out of the garage.

Alba spent an hour at Stacey’s playing with the girls and then she left. She made it to Fernando’s with food and he wasn’t home. Alba called his phone but she only received his voicemail. “Ok, I guess I should leave.” Alba said turning the door knob and the door came open. Alba wondered, “Would Fernando be upset if she walked inside his house.” She went inside and locked the door behind her. Once she got inside she saw his cell lying on the table. “Fernando.” Alba called. Alba took his food inside the kitchen and sat it on the oven. Once Alba was walking out of the kitchen someone grabbed her and she screamed out loudly. Fernando laughed until tears came out of his eyes.

“Oh my God you scared the crap out of me.” Alba said. “I’m sorry I’m in a playing type of mood.” Fernando smiled. “How did you know I’d come inside?” “Because you have a key to my house.” “I forgot about the red key you gave me.” Alba smiled. Fernando and Alba sat down on the couch. Fernando turned on his cell and sat it back on the table. “Your food is inside the kitchen.” “You always take good care of me.” Fernando smiled. Fernando got up and went inside the kitchen that’s when his cell was all the way powered up. Alba saw that her husband had sent Fernando a text message and that was strange.

Alba picked up his phone and the message read, “Don’t tell Alba about my affair, I swear I will tell her after her birthday.” “I don’t want her birthday to be another bad memory.” Alba could feel herself getting hot. Her skin began to feel clammy and her eyes were so watery. Alba tried so hard to stop the tears but they were coming so fast. Alba stood up; she sat the phone down and walked towards the door. Fernando walked out of the kitchen and he said, “The food taste amazing; I’m going to enjoy that later.”

“Alba where are you going?” Fernando asks. “Home.” Alba said without looking at him. “Alba what’s wrong?” Alba turned around and he saw her face and asks, “What happened?” “You got a message on your phone.” Alba pointed. “That still doesn’t explain why you’re crying and why you’re rushing off.” Fernando picked up his phone, looked at the messages and he knew exactly what she had read. “Alba don’t go please.” Fernando said. “Why didn’t you tell me?” “Because I didn’t want to see you look like that.” “I didn’t want your heart to hurt like it is now.” “Ricardo’s sorry.” Fernando says. Alba held the back of her head and she said, “I don’t know what I’m gonna do; I’ve been through this before.” “Alba you’re strong you’ll get through this.”

Alba walked up to him and he held her as she cried in his arms. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you; I was trying to give my brother the chance to own up to his cheating.” Alba pulled away and Fernando asks, “What can I do Alba, just tell me?” Alba put her hands on his neck and then he kissed her. The two of them bumped against the wall and Alba said, “I want you to make love to me.” “Alba I can’t do that.” “Why not; you have before.” “When I did that to you; you thought I was your husband.” “I don’t want to make love to you because you’re upset with him.” “When we make love for the first time I want you to be happy and I don’t want you to be thinking about my brother.”

Alba left Fernando’s house, she was on her way home but she decided to go to her in-laws home. Cassandra walked inside the house and said, “Ricardo I just saw your wife pulling up.” “Are you serious?” Ricardo smiled. “She’s out there.” “Hold Kat, I’ll be right back. Ricardo got outside and it was his beautiful wife outside. He couldn’t believe she decided to come, he was so happy to see her. He greeted her with a kiss and Alba smiled at him. “You’re surprised I’m here?” Alba asks. “A little, I’m happy.” “Me too.”

Alba played the part as she had planned in her head. She wanted to slap her husband until he confessed but she knew her niceness would get to Ricardo. Alba knew he was worried with the awkward quietness between them at times. In the past they talked a lot; there was never silence unless they were sleeping, even watching television they said a few words.

After Ricardo and Alba got home they put the baby to bed and both of them got comfy. Ricardo put on his grey pajama pants and Alba put on his matching button down shirt and put her hair down. Ricardo wasn’t use to Alba looking so sexy when they were going to bed. Since the baby had come her hair was always in a ponytail and she was always covered going to bed. “What’s wrong; why are you staring at me like that?” Alba asks. “You look different.” Ricardo said. “I’m feeling a lot like my old self” Ricardo gave her a smile and said, “You’re so sexy, you’re my wife; you’ve always been sexy to me.”

Alba got close to Ricardo and she began to touch his chest down to his manhood. That was surprising to Ricardo, she hadn’t touched him there in a very long time and he instantly got excited. “I see I’ve awakened someone.” Alba smiled. Ricardo smiled and said, “That really felt good.” Alba took his hand and said, “Come make love to me then.”

A couple days later; Ricardo was standing inside Chad’s office just conversing. “My wife’s had a change of heart and I’m feeling really guilty.” Ricardo said. “Change of heart.” Chad repeated. “She’s forgiven me for my past mistakes; the thing about it though she doesn’t know the real truth.” “You sleeping with Anna after she slept with your brother thinking he was you.” “I think I need to admit to my mistake.” Ricardo said. “Man are you crazy; you got away with it.” Chad said. “Chad no man ever gets away with it; my conscious won’t let me forget the lies I’ve been telling my wife.” “I’ve cheated on Stephanie so many times, but my conscious tells me I did nothing.” “Man you need to start believing your lies.” Chad says. Ricardo looked at pager and said, “I gotta go thanks for the advice I think.” “Anytime.” Chad smiled.

“Alba are you sure you wanna play this game?” Fernando asks. “I do; he’s going to admit it to me.” “I’m going to make your brother think that his old wife is back.” “He’s going to fall deeper in love with me; confess and I’m going to crush his heart the way he crushed mine.” Alba says. “Alba I think this is dangerous; what if in the process you fall back deeper in love with him.” “That’s not going to happen.” “How do you know Alba?” Fernando asks. “Because I don’t want him anymore, I want you; you’re the one that I should have been with at the start.” “Alba just stop with the games and just be with me.” “No he’s gonna pay for what he did; all I want is his confession.”

Fernando stood up and pulled Alba out of the chair. He touched the side of her face and stared into her eyes. “Alba I know your heart is hurting.” “You said two wrongs don’t make a right and you’re right.” “You don’t know how long it’s going to take my brother to admit to his wrong doings.” “How long am I going to have to wait for you?” Fernando asks. “That’s why I came here.” “I don’t want you to have to wait for me; it’s not fair to you.” “You do what you have to do to be happy.” Alba says. “Really Alba, that’s how you’re playing this, just throwing me out.” “I don’t want you to realize one day that I was a waste of time.” “I don’t want you to hate me in the process of waiting on me to leave my husband.” “I love you enough to let you go.” Alba says. “Get out of my office.” “Fernando.” “Alba get the hell out.” Fernando said opening the door.

It was finally Alba’s birthday and she hadn’t seen Fernando since she had broken things off with him. Things between Alba and Ricardo were great. Ricardo was feeling guiltier than ever. He couldn’t eat, he couldn’t sleep and he knew he wanted to start the New Year with his wife off with a hitch. Once Ricardo was about to walk to his office; he ran into his wife. “Honey what are you doing here; you’re off today.” Ricardo said surprised. “I brought you lunch from your favorite restaurant.” Alba said holding up the bag. “Thank you baby.” “Hey what’s wrong you look like you’re going to cry?” Alba said concerned.

Ricardo took her hand and the two of them walked inside his office. “What’s wrong?” “I don’t deserve you Alba.” “Yes you do.” “You’re my perfect husband.” “You take care of your family, you make me happy, and most of all you’re honest that’s what makes me love you so much.” Alba smiled. Ricardo wiped the tears in his eyes and he said, “Alba it’s your birthday and you’re bringing me lunch.” “Stop being so sad.” Alba said touching his face. Ricardo grabbed Alba’s hand and kissed it. “I’m happy Alba, you make me so happy and sometimes I feel like I’m going to lose it all.” Alba smiled and said, “As long as you continue to be honest with me, you’ll never lose me.” “That’s how relationships last baby, even when you have to tell your significant other the horrible truth.”

After Alba left Ricardo found Chad finishing up with a patient. “What’s wrong?” Chad asks. “I’m going to tell my wife the truth, I have to.” “Ricardo are you crazy; she doesn’t want the truth.” “My Alba is back.” “The Alba I fell in love with she’s back and that Alba is not going to react well to secrets.” “If you gotta tell her the truth, you need to be willing to lose her in the process.” Chad said. “She’s not gonna leave me I gotta believe that.” Ricardo said.

Around five-fifteen Ricardo called his wife to apologize that he would be coming home late because he had a surgery that was cancelled but back on. So he wouldn’t be home until after seven. Alba decided to take Ricardo some dinner before he went into surgery, but when she got there Anna was there talking to him. Alba saw the two of them exchange hugs and that almost sent Alba over the edge. Alba left the food by the door and she left immediately.

**Chapter 32**

**“Her Actions”**

“If you can’t figure out where you stand with someone, it might be time to stop standing and start walking.” -Unknown

Alba left the clinic quick and in a hurry; she was so angry. She went home and went straight to her husband’s office. She threw his papers everywhere and all his medical trophies all over the floor. She stomped his laptop until it wouldn’t come back on. Alba went inside his closet and packed all his clothes inside the luggage and sat it all inside the garage and wrote him a letter. She sat the letter on the table where he laid his car keys. After Alba calmed down she drove to Fernando’s house.

Before Alba made it to Fernando’s house she received a text message from him. Once Alba got to the red light, she opened her phone to read it. “Alba I’m sorry I got angry and made you leave my office a few days ago.” “Alba I know it’s your birthday and I want you to have the best day of your life.” “I’m just down because I can’t be the one to hold you and make you happy.” “I have you a birthday gift and I hope to get it to you soon along with the Christmas gift you never took.” “Alba even if you don’t love me; it still doesn’t change the love I have for you.” “Thank you for forgiving me.” Alba smiled and she felt bad all at the same time for pushing him away.

Alba knocked at Fernando’s door and he answered the door wearing silk black pajama bottoms and his hair was still wet. He looked so sexy; Alba was speechless. Fernando smiled at Alba and said, “I just texted you.” “I read it a minute ago.” “Could I come in?” “Of course.” Fernando said opening the door wider. “Happy Birthday Alba.” “Thank you.” “I’m surprised to see you here; I thought you’d be out celebrating.” “I don’t wanna celebrate my birthday or the New Year with anyone but you.” “Did something happen?” Fernando asks. “Yeah something happened.” “I realized that I’m with the wrong twin.” “Fernando you do bad things and you own up to them; Ricardo does bad things and he hides them.” “I don’t wanna live my life with someone like that.” “Fernando I do love you.” “I’m in love with you; I’ve just been so afraid to say it until now.”

Fernando grabbed Alba and began kissing her. Alba kissed him back and he helped her take off her coat as he kissed her. Fernando wanted Alba to be close, he wanted to feel her soft body next to his and she enjoyed his hard, strong, muscular body next to hers. Fernando stopped kissing Alba and asks, “Can I have you now?” “Yes.” Alba answered. Fernando smiled at her; he took her hand and took her to his bedroom.

Alba was quiet impressed when she stepped inside his bedroom; it was her first time seeing it and it was kept very well. His bed was a California King bed with huge post that were espresso colored wood. His comforter was white with silk white sheets. Fernando moved the comforter to the foot of the bed and began to undress Alba. Alba laid on the silk sheets that felt so incredible on her body. Fernando laid on top of Alba; he continued kissing her, her neck, and her shoulder. He began fingering her and he could tell she was very much turned on because she was so wet and her moans turned him on even more. Fernando stopped kissing her and looked into her eyes. He could tell by the way she looked at him that she wanted him. Fernando didn’t want to rush he wanted to take his time and savor every moment he had with her. “Alba I love you so much.” Fernando said. “I love you too Fernando.”

Ricardo pulled into the driveway around seven-thirty. When he used his remote to open the garage he saw the luggage. “What the hell?” Ricardo said. Ricardo got out of his SUV and walked inside the garage and opened one of the bags of luggage. “My clothes are in here.” Ricardo walked inside the house and began calling Alba’s name. Alba was nowhere to be found. Ricardo brought in the eight pieces of luggage and pulled his SUV inside the garage. Then he went to sit his key on the table to find the letter. Ricardo read the letter and he said, “What does she mean “It’s over.”

Ricardo grabbed his cell and called Alba. “Alba it’s your husband call me please, we need to talk.” Ricardo must have called Alba’s phone ten times and each time he got the voice mail. Ricardo went to Stacey’s and Bridget’s to not find Alba. Ricardo had a good feeling where she was but he was so afraid to drive to his brother’s house. He didn’t want to imagine what the two of them were doing on her birthday. Ricardo drove to his sister’s and then his Mom’s still no Alba, but Kat was with his Mom.

“Alba brought Kat over earlier when she was taking you dinner since you had the surgery.” Flavia said. “You mean Alba brought me lunch.” Ricardo corrected. “No hijo; Alba brought you dinner also that’s why I didn’t cook.” “She should have been at the clinic around five something.” “Five something; what was I doing at five something?” Ricardo said out loud. “Kat is sleeping if you want to see her.” Flavia smiled. “Oh my God.” Ricardo said looking up at the ceiling. “Something wrong hijo?” “No, I gotta go Mom.” “I’ll come back tomorrow to get Kat.” Ricardo says. “No enjoy the New Year with your wife I’ll call you when I need a break.” “Thanks Mom.”

Fernando and Alba were headed to the movies. Fernando was so happy, he finally got the girl. They were hand and hand; it was nothing that could ruin Fernando’s day. The two of them sat inside the movie theater close. Fernando had his arm around her neck. “You’re going to love this movie.” “I believe you.” Alba smiled. “I promise all your birthdays are going to be special like this one.” “Ok.” Alba smiled.

Ricardo made it to Fernando’s house, but Alba’s car wasn’t there. Ricardo thought, “It could be inside the garage.” So Ricardo got out of his SUV and began to knock at the door. Ricardo stood outside almost five minutes knocking and no one answered the door. “Damn it.” Ricardo said getting angry.

After the movie Fernando and Alba went to have dinner that’s when they ran into Bridget and a few of her other friends. “What are you and Ricardo doing out; I thought you were staying home on your birthday.” Bridge smiled. “This isn’t Ricardo; this is Fernando.” Alba smiled. Bridget grabbed Alba’s arm and pulled her the other way. “I’ll be right back.” Alba said. “Ok.” Fernando smiled.

“Alba what the hell are you doing?” Bridget asks. After Alba caught her up Bridget said, “Oh you’re more like me than you want to admit.” “Bye Bridge.” “Happy Birthday you deserve to be happy.” “Thank you.” Alba smiled. “Let me know how he is in bed.” Bridget smiled. “You already know how good he is; bye Bridget.” Alba smiled and then walked away. Once Alba got close to Fernando he grabbed her hand and asks, “So what happened; she’s Team Fernando or she’s Team Ricardo?” “She’s Team Fernando.” Alba smiled. “Smart lady.” Fernando smiled.

The next morning Alba rolled over to be close to Fernando who was warm and naked. Fernando put his arms around Alba’s waist and said, “It’s too early to be up.” “I know it’s like seven o’clock what’s wrong with me.” Alba said. “You know you have to face my brother eventually.” “I don’t want to think about him.” Alba said sitting up. “You don’t have to face him alone ok.” “You’ll go home with me?” Alba asks. “I’ll go home with you.” Fernando said getting up. “Thank you.”

After Fernando and Alba got dressed, they got inside Fernando’s Chevy Silverado and rode to her house. When they pulled in the drive way Ricardo’s black Audi was parked outside the garage. “You think he’s home?” Fernando asks. “I’m not sure; he may be in his Infiniti.” Alba said. Alba used her key to get inside the house and Fernando followed which Alba felt secure with him by her side. “Don’t be nervous ok.” Fernando said. Once the two of them stepped inside the family room, Ricardo was coming out of the kitchen.

Ricardo had a smile on his face and Alba didn’t understand why, maybe he was happy that the two of them were finally over. His smile made Alba feel kind of sad. “Alba you’re home and with my brother.” “I guess I have to say I’m not surprised.” “I guess you got my letter.” Alba said. “I did and I don’t believe it.” Ricardo said. “Well we are over.” “I want a divorce and we can share custody of our daughter.” “That’s generous of you.” “Alba I don’t want a divorce; I want you back.” “Ricardo I can’t trust you.” “Alba could we talk without my brother?” Before Alba could respond Fernando said, “I’m not going anywhere; so if you wanna talk you better speak now.”

“Ricardo I saw you with Anna after I told you never to speak to her again.” “Alba, baby what you saw was a misunderstanding.” “That wasn’t a misunderstanding, you slept with Anna and you never owned up to it.” Alba said. “Alba I was going to tell you after your birthday I swear.” “Ricardo that doesn’t matter, I chose to be with Fernando.” “Alba don’t do this, this is a mistake.” Ricardo said. “My only mistake was falling in love with the wrong twin.”

Those words hurt Ricardo’s heart and he said, “You really want me to leave; you want me out of your life?” “Yes.” Alba answered. “I’ll leave; the house is yours and the kids.” “I’m taking my Audi and a few of the suitcases you packed.” “I’m leaving the Infiniti inside of the garage.” Then Ricardo handed Alba the keys to the house. Alba didn’t see it going that easy but she had to admit she was relieved.

After Ricardo pulled out of the driveway Fernando said, “That was too easy.” Alba sat down and asks, “Why do you say that; this situation is horrible.” “He gave up too easily.” “My brother is up to something.” “What could Ricardo possibly do; maybe he is just as tired of this relationship as I am.” Alba said. “I don’t know I don’t buy this act.” “I know my brother and he aint over you.” Fernando said. “Why would you say that?” “Sex with you is beyond amazing and he’s so in love with you.” “He aint letting that go that easy.” “Alba smiled and said, “Sex with me is that great?” “I didn’t say great I said, beyond amazing and that is way better than great.” Fernando smiled.

Two days later; Alba was home getting ready for work. Alba decided to put her two weeks’ notice in to search for another job. Alba knew it would be too awkward to work with Ricardo who was soon to be her ex-husband. Alba left home early to drop Katerina off with her grandmother and she made it to work fifteen minutes early. Alba was ready to put her resignation in immediately.

“Alba I’m afraid I can’t take this.” “Why not?” Alba asks confused. “When you came back you signed a contract along with your husband stating that you’d never quit unless your health prevented you from working.” “I did what?” Alba asks shocked. “I can show you the copy.” Ashlee said getting up. Alba read over the contract and asks, “Why would I sign something like this; who did this?” “Who made this document?” “Your husband’s lawyer, I’m thinking, I’m not sure.” “Ashlee could I keep this copy?” “Sure.” Ashlee said and Alba stormed out.

Once Alba got to the sono room she called Fernando on her cell. “He did what?” “Yes I can’t resign; I was naïve enough to sign a contract without reading it.” “That son of bitch was backstabbing you and you didn’t even know it.” “He knew this relationship was doomed.” Fernando says pissed off. “What am I going to do?” Alba asks. “Talk to your lawyer, see what she can do.” “I’ll call you later.” Alba said then hung up the phone. Alba left out of the sono room and headed to her husband’s office.

“Come in.” Ricardo said. “Why did you do this to me?” Alba asks. “Did; what did I do?” Ricardo asks. “You tricked me into signing a document that stat’s I can’t resign unless I am not physically unable to work.” “Alba I told you about that a long time ago.” “I don’t wanna work here.” “Why not; we’re friends.” Ricardo said. “We’re not friends; friends don’t lie to each other and keep hurtful things from one another.” “Alba I made a mistake, let’s just go home and talk about it.” “I’m not going anywhere with you.” “Alba we never disgust our business at work; will you go home with me or not?” Ricardo asks. “I’ll be home.” Alba said then walked out. Ricardo got his keys out of his desk then he walked to his secretary. “Pilar call the temp agency and get them to bring Karen in today.” “My schedule is clear today.” Ricardo smiled. “Ok Dr. Cruz.” “Thank you.”

Ricardo finally made it home; he pulled into the driveway beside Alba. The door was already open so Ricardo walked inside, closed and locked the door. Alba was sitting on the couch; Ricardo sat beside her and said, “First off I want to say I’m sorry.” “I should have come clean a long time ago, but I was scared of losing you which I have lost you now.” “Alba after everything that happened when you had the car accident I wasn’t looking to cheat on you.” “I was stressed and I didn’t know was I ever going to have my wife back fully.” “You couldn’t talk, you didn’t understand me.” “You just seemed to really be out of it.” “The doctors continued to tell me that you were fine; you’d come around but you never did.” “I began to talk to Anna who was referred by Chad.” “She was a great worker; she reminded me a lot of you.” “She did lot of things that you did and everyone liked her well except Pilar.”

As he talked Alba felt herself wanting to vomit. “Alba I wasn’t trying to replace you and I know Anna’s not you, but it felt nice to talk to someone.” “She listened, she understood what I was going through because she went through that with her sister years ago.” “Anna always flirted a little and I always reminded her that I’m married.” “Alba I never forgot about you.” “I missed you so much and I fucked around and got too close to her and I slept with her twice.” “Alba I am sorry, the whole time I made love to her I felt like it was you.” “I closed my eyes and imagined I was being with you.” “After that I felt horrible, guilty it was very hard to look at myself in the mirror. Then I had to come home and look at you I felt you could see right through me.” “I made a mistake that I can never take back Alba.” Ricardo says.

“You made love to her twice.” “Why wasn’t once enough?” Alba asks. “I don’t know Alba; please forgive me.” “Please just let me fix this.” “I’ll make you trust me again.” Ricardo says. “I can’t forgive you.” “Why because you’re with my brother?” “Yes that’s why.” Alba said. “Alba give me a chance to make this right please, I am begging you.” Alba stood up and said, “We’ve said everything we need to say to one other.” Ricardo stood up; he looked at Alba and said, “I’m fighting for this marriage.” “We’re a family; I’m not letting my brother take you away from me.” “Ricardo I’m sleeping with your brother.” “He’s the man that I want to be with.” Tears were in Ricardo’s eyes, he knew she had probably slept with his brother but it hurt to hear her say it. “I’m not capable of keeping a secret like that to myself unlike you.” Alba said.

**Chapter 33**

**“Making Sense of Things”**

“First best is falling in love.” “Second best is being in love.” “Least best is falling out of love.” “But any of it is better than never having been in love.” -Maya Angelou

Ricardo and Alba were still living apart and Ricardo was going to do whatever necessary to get his wife back. Ricardo had learned a hard lesson and he had owned up to his mistakes. With the mistake came consequences, but Ricardo did know with mistakes came forgiveness and with forgiveness came love. Each and every day was hard for Ricardo because he had to live without his wife and daughter in the same house.

Ricardo had been living with his sister; Cassandra and he had his daughter every other week. He was glad Alba wasn’t trying to keep him away from his daughter, but it hurt to be away from her. Alba wasn’t even throwing his brother in his face; that let him know she still cared about him or she really was over him because she wasn’t playing any games.

“I meet with Ricardo and his lawyer tomorrow.” “The entire meeting is going to be so awkward.” Alba frowned. “You’ll be ok; I’ll be rooting for you even though I won’t be there.” “We’ve been separated for two months and he just won’t sign the damn divorce papers.” Alba said. “I told you he wasn’t going to let you go so easily.” Fernando said. “He should after all that he’s put me through.” Fernando reached out his hand to Alba and said, “Sit down let me talk to you.” Alba took his hand and Fernando said, “Alba when you get to the meeting tomorrow don’t be surprised if it doesn’t go your way.” “Why would you say that?” “Ricardo is going to fight until the end to keep you in his life.” “He’ll always be in my life, we have Kat.” “He wants you to continue to be his wife.” “What else could the judge do?” Alba asks. “Make you two go to counseling, schedule visits where you two interact with your daughter together, anything; don’t be surprised.”

The next day; Alba was ready for her second divorce hearing. She was nervous but she was confident that it would go her way. Alba felt more confident because she had her girls outside waiting on her. So after Alba left her divorce hearing she got hugs from her girls and she went straight to see Fernando.

“The judge did what?” Fernando asks getting upset. “The judge ordered us to see a marriage counselor twice a week.” “Alba, baby I heard that part; what was the second thing that you said?” “He ordered Ricardo to move back home so we could try and work things out.” Alba said. “I told you.” “I knew it; I knew he was up to something.” “My brother’s going to try and get you back.” “That bastard.” Fernando says. “Honey he was just as surprised as me when the judge ordered him to move back.” Alba said. “I don’t buy it; I guarantee he’s happy about it; he’s gonna try everything in the book to get you back Alba.” “He won’t get me back.” Alba said then she starts to kiss him. “That’s a way to get it off my mind.” Fernando said. Alba smiled and said, “I know.” Then she began kissing him more.

Later on that day; Alba was at the kitchen table helping the twins with their homework when she heard Ricardo walking inside the house. She knew it was going to be so awkward being under the same roof as him. Alba was going to try her very best to deal with the next three months of her life with him inside the same house. Ricardo walked inside the kitchen and spoke to the twin’s; from their reaction they were happy to see him too. “Alba how are you?” Ricardo asks. “I’m fine; I’m cooking if you’d like some.” Alba said then she walked out of the kitchen. After Ricardo finished talking to the twins he went to search for his wife.

Ricardo found Alba inside the master bathroom and he could tell she wasn’t comfortable with him in there with her. “Alba I’m not trying to invade your space.” “I didn’t know the judge would even have us do this.” Ricardo says. “I know you were just as surprised as me.” “This is your house too.” Alba says. “I’ll let you shower.” Ricardo said then he left out. After Alba finished showering she saw her phone blinking and she smiled because it was Fernando.

“Hey I was just thinking about you.” Alba smiled. “Are you coming over; I miss you.” Fernando asks. “I can’t tonight; remember it’s my week with the twins.” “I could come over.” “I don’t think that’s a good idea.” “Ricardo’s here it’s going to be kind of awkward.” “Alba you’re getting a divorce he’s going to have to get used to seeing my face around eventually.” “Don’t be mad at me.” “I understand; I guess I’ll just sit, watch the game, and eat the leftovers that you cooked last night.”

As Alba was hanging up the phone Ricardo was walking inside. Alba could look at him and see the stress in his face. Alba hate she was putting him through so much but he made his bed so he had to lay in it. “Alba is it ok to use the shower in here or I can just go upstairs.” “No I’m guessing the judge meant for us to carry on as we did when we were married.” That came as a shock to Ricardo and he thought, “And I am going to do just that.”

The night was awkward lying in bed next to Ricardo, but being that the bed was a California King they didn’t have to worry about their bodies touching. Alba was used to being close to Ricardo and he was used to being close to her; it just didn’t feel right. Neither of them slept and the next morning both of them were so tired. They were bumping each other inside the bathroom, it was a mess and for the next two weeks they continued to have sleepless nights.

“Alba we need to talk.” Ricardo said. “Sure.” Alba yawned. “Let’s go outside and talk, I don’t want the twins hearing this.” Ricardo suggested. Once the two got outside they both immediately start to talk and they laughed because both of them seemed very nervous. “You go ahead.” Ricardo said. “No you please, I don’t mind.” Alba said. “Alba we’ve both had two weeks of non-sleep.” “We’ve slept together before many times as friends, let’s just try that.” “I don’t think I can go another night without sleep I’m starting to fall asleep standing up while talking to my patients.” Alba smiled and said, “I understand, me too.”

After work Alba went by to see Fernando at work. He was still in with a patient so Alba sat inside his office waiting on him. Once Fernando finished up he walked inside his office to find Alba dead asleep. “Alba.” “Alba.” Fernando called. Fernando touched Alba and she said, “Mrs. Craig I’ll be with you in five minutes.” “Alba are you ok?” Fernando asks. Alba yawned and said, “Yeah I’m fine, I just came to see you before I get home.” “Ok; are you sure you’re alright?” “I’m fine, just a really long day.” “I’ll see you later right?” “Of course I’ll be over at eight.” Fernando gave Alba a kiss and then she left.

Alba got home showered, laid on the bed wondering what to wear while still wrapped in her towel. Alba laid on the bed thinking up an outfit and she drifted off to sleep. Ricardo walked inside the bedroom not paying attention to Alba because he was so drained. After he showered he got dressed inside the master bath and then walked back inside the bedroom. “Alba.” Ricardo called, but Alba didn’t move. Ricardo noticed she was sleeping and she was still in her towel. Ricardo didn’t want to disrespect her and dress her. So he put her legs in the bed and covered her. He got in bed next to her but not close, he turned on the television and eventually fell asleep.

Fernando was dressed waiting for Alba to show but she never showed. Fernando was pissed to say the least. He called Alba’s cell almost seven times and all he got were rings. Fernando began to let his curiosity get the best of him so he went over to Alba’s house. Fernando knocked on the door several times and rang the doorbell, but no one ever answered the door. Alba and Ricardo were in bed sound asleep, nothing was waking the two. They were tired and needed this much needed rest. Fernando was so angry, because it was another Friday he had to spend alone without the love of his life.

Alba was waking up; she could tell her body was well rested and it felt nice to be close to a warm body. Ricardo could also feel himself waking up. He could feel a soft warm body in his arms and she felt very naked. Ricardo could feel her hair in his face and he said, “Your hair smells good.” Alba responded, “You always say that.” Alba opened her eyes and Ricardo opened his eyes. The two of them realized they were next to each other very close and Alba was naked.

“Ricardo that’s you?” Alba asks. “Yeah; are you naked?” Ricardo asks. “Yeah, I must have fallen asleep yesterday after I showered.” “Ok.” “Do you see a towel anywhere?” “No.” Ricardo responded. “Ok.” “Alba I’ve seen you naked so many times, just get up it’s nothing to be embarrassed about.” “My dick is hard a rock and that’s because you are so close to me.” Alba got up and ran to the bathroom and Ricardo smiled as he watched.

After Alba got dressed she went over to Fernando’s house. Fernando answered the door and he didn’t look too happy to see her. “It’s eight in the morning Alba what do you want?” “I’m sorry, I fell asleep last night.” “I came over you didn’t answer the door; what were you really doing?” Fernando asks. “I swear I was sleeping; I was so tired yesterday.” “I know I’m sorry for being mad, come inside.” Alba walked inside and Fernando said, “I’m going back to bed; you know I don’t get up until the afternoon on off days.” “That’s fine I’ll get in bed with you.” Alba said. “Ok.”

Once Fernando and Alba got into his bed, he couldn’t sleep. “What are you doing?” Alba smiled. “Nothing.” Fernando whispered. “I thought you were going to sleep.” “I was until I got close to your body, let me just touch.” “You know what happens when you touch; you never can control yourself.” Alba smiled. “That’s a good thing don’t you think.” Fernando said then kissed her shoulder. “Yes and no.” “I haven’t made love to you in over a week.” Alba turned around to face him, she looked into his eyes and she smiled and said, “I’m sorry about last night ok.” “I forgive you.” Fernando smiled. “I love you so much ok.” Alba smiled. “I know, I love you too.” Fernando said pulling her closer.

Ricardo had been staying at his house for a month now. Things between he and Alba were better; they were cordial and had few conversations which was great. “Alba you have five minutes are we’re going to be late.” Ricardo said. “My hair is still wet.” Alba said. “I’ll drive with the window down, it’ll dry.” Ricardo said. “Ok; I’m coming.” Alba got inside the car and she was a little upset. Ricardo put the baby inside the car seat and then they drove off.

“Alba don’t be mad I told you the birthday party was at two.” “No you said three; why would I wash my hair because I thought I had time.” Alba said raising her voice. “I’m sorry if I said three; your hair looks fine wet.” Ricardo smiled about to roll the window down. “Don’t roll that window down I hate when you do that.” Alba frowned. “Are you sure?” Ricardo teased. “I’m sure.” Alba smiled. “You look pretty; you always have looked pretty in blue.” “Thank you.” Alba smiled. “I hope Katerina enjoys this birthday party.” “Did you remember to grab the camera off the bar?” “Dang it I forgot.” “Ricardo I specifically told you get the camera; now we won’t have pictures of her.” Alba frowned. “I got the camera it’s inside your purse in the back seat.” “My purse I didn’t bring a purse.” “The black bag what is that?” Ricardo asks. “I call it my diaper bag.” “Well it looks like a purse to me.”

Alba and Ricardo enjoyed the birthday party, but most of all they enjoyed each other, it felt like they were back together. They held hands and it wasn’t awkward it was what they had always done; it was so natural. Ricardo was feeling like he was getting his wife back. He wondered how he could get his brother to back off. He knew that would be almost impossible because his brother was deeply in love with her too, but Ricardo had something that his brother didn’t have with Alba and that was history.

On the way home Ricardo stopped by 711 to get a bottle of water. “Do you want anything?” Ricardo asks. “A Red Bull.” Alba answered. “Ok.” Ricardo finally came out of the store. He handed Alba her Red Bull and before he cranked the car, he opened his bottle of water and Lays potato chips. Out of nowhere Alba reached in his lap and took the chips. She began eating the chips and Ricardo said, “You always do that.” “What do I do?” “I asks you what would you like out the store, you say Red Bull, no chips and you take my chips.” “Ricardo you knew to get me chips.” “No I didn’t.” Then the two of them began to laugh and Alba said, “Oh my God it’s like we’re back together.” “That wouldn’t be a bad thing you know.” Ricardo said. Alba passed him his chips and she didn’t respond.

Monday night; Alba and Ricardo were at marriage counseling. The marriage counselor could tell that the two of them were getting along great. They were much more responsive than the first two weeks. “Alba are you still in love with your husband?” The marriage counselor asks. “Yes.” Alba responded. That made Ricardo happy; he knew if she still loved him he had a chance of getting her back. He knew they had a long road and he was going to find some way to make her forgive him.

“Alba you still love him but you’re still willing to divorce him and I can understand why because he broke your vows.” “Alba you seem like a sweet woman, very understanding, and we are all capable of forgiveness.” “In order to keep your marriage you have to try and forgive your husband.” “You don’t want it to be years from now and you began to regret your decision.” “Alba I have one more question.” The marriage counselor says. “Ok.” “If Ricardo went out on a date with another woman let’s say after this meeting; how would it make you feel; be honest?”

Alba stared at the floor then she looked at the marriage counselor and said, “It would break my heart.” “Alba that’s how Ricardo feels every time you leave your home and go see that other guy.” “He doesn’t blame you for turning to someone else.” “He did it to you so why not.” “Your husband wants you to give him a fair shot at winning your heart again; gaining your forgiveness.” “Alba you made the mistake of getting involved with someone else when this chapter with Ricardo hasn’t even closed.” “The chapter is still open and I’m afraid someone else is going to get hurt.” The marriage counselor says. Alba sat there quietly and torn between her decisions. She began to think about what the marriage counselor had said to her, she did make a lot of sense.

On the way home it was pure silence inside the car; Ricardo broke the silence by asking, “Alba are you alright?” “Yeah I’m fine.” Alba responded. “If you want the bed to yourself tonight; I can just go upstairs and sleep in the guest room.” “No of course not.” “I’m fine; I just have a lot of things on my mind.” Once the two of them got home Alba seemed sad and Ricardo felt kind of responsible for it. He hoped that Alba wasn’t angry with him and that she understood why they had to see a marriage counselor this was all he wanted. Living back in the house with Alba and the children was an added bonus and he was going to make his move eventually, but he had to do it at the right exact moment.

Alba sat inside her bedroom on the chair taking off her shoes when her cell rang. “Hey.” “Hey; how was it?” “Ok.” “You’re sad; what’s wrong?” Alba didn’t respond and Fernando asks, “You’re not thinking about leaving me are you?” “No.” “Alba talk to me; you’re giving me those one word answers I don’t like this.” “Could I please come over?” “No.” “Alba don’t do that.” Ricardo walked inside the bedroom and Alba said, “I have to go.” “He’s inside the bedroom isn’t he?” Fernando said. “I’ll call you tomorrow.” Alba said then she hung up the phone and then turned it off. Now that was music to Ricardo’s ears, he couldn’t help but smile.

**Chapter 34**

**“The Fight of My Life”**

“The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.” -C.G. Jung

“I have one month to get through to Alba.” “I have to come up with something; some way to get her to look at me like she used to.” Ricardo says pacing his sister’s living room floor. “Sit down before you burn a hole in my carpet.” Cassandra said. “I love my wife, I gotta do something.” “I know God will lead me in the right direction.” “I know God will bring her back to me.” Ricardo says.

Alba was out having dinner and drinks with the girls at Seasons 52 Fresh Grill in The Shops of Legacy. Since Ricardo knew Alba wasn’t home he decided to go have dinner with some of his male friends instead of being home alone. His Mom had Kat and the twins were with Juan so there was no need in being inside a huge house alone. Ricardo walked inside the restaurant looking for his boys to notice Alba with her friends. Ricardo turned around so neither of them would notice him. Ricardo finally found his friends and took a seat.

“Ricardo it took you long enough we ordered your drink.” Dr. Casper said. “Thank you; what did you order me?” Ricardo asks curiously. “I ordered you one of those girly drinks.” Ricardo smiled and said, “I’m sorry I’m just not into the Remy and the Hennessy.” Ricardo continued to spy on his wife and once he saw her leave the table he stopped one of the waiter’s.

While Alba was inside the restroom; the waiter came over to their table and sat two bottles of wine on their table.

“Hold on we didn’t order this.” Bridget said. “A nice young man wanted to order this for you beautiful women.” The waiter smiled. “Tell him we said thank you.” Bridget smiled. Alba and Stacey walked back to the table, they were laughing about some man near the bathroom. After the girls finished eating and drinking they sat talking. “I have drunk too much; I’ll be right back.” Alba smiled. “She’s drunk.” Tandy said. “Who’s paying for this wine?” Stacey said. “Oh that’s already paid for.” “By who?” Stacey frowned. “I don’t know; some man.” “Oh.”

Alba made it back to the table and asks, “Where’s my ticket?” “I covered it.” Bridget said. “At least let me pay for a bottle of the wine.” Alba said. “None of us had to pay for that.” Tandy said. “Why not?” “Some guy sent it over.” Bridget said. “I’ll be right back.” Alba said trying to get up. “Alba are you alright?” Tandy asks. “A little tipsy.” Alba said standing up. “Who are you looking for?” Bridget asks. Alba looked but she never saw him and she said, “No one, let’s just go.”

By the time Alba and the girls were leaving out; Ricardo and his boys were leaving out and that’s when Alba noticed him and she smiled at him. “I see you’re following me.” Ricardo flirted. “I am not.” Alba smiled. Stacey and the girls walked off without Alba. “You had a lot to drink.” Ricardo said taking her hand because she was very tipsy. “I did; Bridget ordered two bottles of wine and it was one of my favorites.” Alba smiled. “I haven’t seen you like this in a very long time.”

Stacey walked up and said, “I don’t mean to break up this happy reunion, but Alba we’re leaving.” Alba smiled and said, “Oh, I’ll see you at home.” “Stace I can take Alba home; we’re going to the same place.” Ricardo said. “You’re not going to see the movie with us?” Stacey asks. “Yeah of course.” Alba said then she began taking off her heels. “Alba you can’t do that.” Ricardo said helping her stand up straight. “On second thought take her home, she is really drunk.” Stacey smiled. “Bye Stace I love you ok.” Alba said. Stacey smiled and said, “I love you too; take care of my girl Ricardo.” “I will bye.”

Once Ricardo and Alba got home; Ricardo helped Alba get comfy and she sat on the couch. “Here I made you some coffee.” “I hate coffee.” Alba frowned. “You drank too much that’s why you need this; you’ll thank me in the morning.” Ricardo smiled. “Thank you for the wine.” “What are you talking about?” Ricardo smiled. “You, you always surprise me.” “I didn’t even know you were there.” “I was happy to see you.” Alba admitted. Alba took a sip of her coffee and Ricardo said, “I’m happy you were happy to see me, which makes me have hope.”

Sunday; Alba decided to ride to Stacey’s with Ricardo early morning so he and Luis could train on their bikes together. Stacey and Alba were having a very interesting conversation until Luis called Stacey saying Ricardo had gotten hit by a car. Alba nearly panicked crying her eyes out. The two of them jumped in Stacey’s SUV and went to get them. They finally got to them and Ricardo’s bike was in horrible shape.

“Are you sure you’re ok?” Alba asks. “I’m fine; it’s not as much blood as it looks.” Ricardo said limping. “Let me help you.” Once Alba got Ricardo home she helped him into the bathtub. “God damn it, it stings!” Ricardo yelled out. “I know you’re hurting its ok.” Alba said. “I’m sorry.” Once Ricardo finished, Alba helped him inside the bedroom, helped him get dressed and bandaged his wounds. “Lie here and I’ll get your food and drink.” After Ricardo had eaten he noticed Alba still had that worried look on her face. “Alba I’m fine ok, you can stop worrying.” “What were the kids and I going to do if you were dead?” “I can’t raise them alone without you.” Alba admitted. “I’m not going anywhere I promise.” Ricardo said then sat the tray on his nightstand.

“Come here sit closer.” Ricardo said. “I’m just worried; we should have taken you to the hospital.” Alba said. “I don’t need a doctor, I have you and I have your pain medicine that you’ve never taken.” “You’ll always have me ok.” Alba said. “Alba I don’t have you the way I want you.” Ricardo said. “We’re here together isn’t that what you want?” Alba asks. “No, I wanna be here, but I wanna be here as husband and wife excluding my brother.” “I forgot about him.” Alba said. “Alba are you sure you want my brother and not me.” “I just want you to be sure before you sign those papers erasing me out of your heart and this house.”

A week later; Alba was over to Fernando’s house the two of them were watching television. “Why are you so far away?” Fernando asks. “I don’t know.” Alba smiled. “Come here you should never be so far away.” “I need to smell you, hold you, and kiss you.” Fernando smiled. Alba moved closer but she didn’t respond and Fernando asks, “What’s wrong?” “Nothing.” “Something’s different just tell me.” “Nothing’s different honest.” Alba smiled. “Are you having second thoughts about you and me?” “No.” Fernando put his hands on the side of her face and he looked into her eyes. “Am I losing you Alba?” “No.”

“I don’t believe you.” Fernando said. “I’m here with you how much more convincing do you need?” Alba asks. “A lot more than you’re giving.” Fernando said moving his hands off her face. “Let’s not do this please.” “Alba you’re doing this; you’re sitting next to me and you’re feeling guilty about being with me; just admit it.” “He’s gotten back into your heart hasn’t he?” Fernando asks. “No of course not; please don’t say that.” Alba said. “Alba I know you; you’re never that quiet; you’re always under me like a cat.” Alba stood up and sat on his lap. She laid her head on his chest and he held her. “You’re lying to me Alba.” Alba looked up at him and she began to kiss him. Fernando began to kiss her back and the two of them ended up making love on his couch. Afterwards Alba left his house.

Once Alba got home she was so happy that Ricardo wasn’t there; she didn’t want him to sense what she had just finished doing. Even though they weren’t together she felt like she was being unfaithful; well in another sense they were still married so she was cheating. Alba showered and got dressed immediately. Alba took her clothes to the wash room and threw them inside washing machine and that’s when she heard Ricardo pull into the garage.

Alba ran out of the wash room into the family room tripping on the table hitting the floor. She immediately began to cry and she tried to get up but she couldn’t. That’s when Ricardo walked inside and when he saw her he rushed to her. “What happened?” Ricardo asks concerned. “I was running and I tripped over the table.” “My ankle hurts so badly I think it’s broke.” Alba cried. “I don’t think it’s broke.” Ricardo said touching it and that’s when Alba let out a loud cry. Ricardo took Alba to the emergency room. “The x-ray just came in your ankle is broken, you broke some of your ligaments also.” Ricardo said. Alba didn’t say anything she just laid there. Ricardo caressed her face and asks, “How do you feel?” “Better since the doctor gave me some pain medication.” “Good, just relax.”

The doctor finally came back inside Alba’s room to inform them that her ankle was out of place and that she’d need surgery. “I can’t have surgery.” Alba said getting upset. “I’ll leave you two alone to talk.” The doctor said. “Thank you.” Ricardo said. After the doctor closed the door Ricardo said, “Alba you’re strong you can do this.” “No I can’t I don’t wanna go through another surgery, I can’t.” “Baby you’ll be fine; I’ll be right there when you wake up like I always am and if you don’t want me there I won’t be there.” “If you need me to call my brother I will just tell me.” Ricardo says. Alba sniffled and said, “I don’t want him, I want you.” Ricardo smiled and said, “You got me then.” “Ok.”

Three days later; Alba was home and she had a lot of company to come by to visit her. Every one finally left around seven; that gave Ricardo time to clean up the house. While Ricardo was cleaning he heard someone at the door so he stopped what he was doing to see it was his brother at the door. “Hey; I came over to see how Alba is doing?” Fernando asks. “She’s fine; she’s lying on the couch.” Ricardo responded. “Oh, could you tell her I came by.” Fernando said about to walk off. “Sure, but you can come inside and see her for yourself.”

While Alba was resting on the couch with her eyes closed she could feel someone walking near her and when she opened her eyes she could see Ricardo walking toward s the kitchen and Fernando walking near her. “Hey.” Fernando said. “Hey.” Alba said sitting up. “No lie back down I didn’t want to wake you.” “I just wanted to look at you.” “I haven’t seen you since you were in the hospital.” Fernando says. “I’m ok; just sore.” Alba said. Alba was beginning to feel out of place and she knew Ricardo was a few feet away. She was tired of hurting her husband it was time for forgiveness.

Alba continued to stare at the direction of the kitchen. “What’s wrong?” Fernando asks. “Nothing, just a little tired.” Alba responded. “What are you looking for?” “Ah nothing.” Alba said turning her head back to him. “Lie back down I’ll sit with you.” Fernando said. “I’m not comfortable right here; I’d rather be in my bed.” Alba said. “Would you like for me to take you there?” Fernando asks. “No Ricardo can do it.” “I don’t think he’d be too pleased with you in our bedroom.” Alba said. “Ok, well I’ll get him then.” Fernando said getting up.

Fernando walked inside the kitchen and Ricardo asks, “Did you need something?” “Yeah, Alba needs you to take her to the bedroom.” “Oh.” Ricardo said and began to dry his hands. Once Fernando got back to the family room he leaned down to kiss Alba and she turned her cheek his way. That hurt Fernando’s feelings, but he didn’t make a scene. “I’ll call you tomorrow Alba; sweet dreams.” Fernando smiled. “Thank you.” Alba smiled back. After Ricardo locked the front door he took Alba to the bedroom.

Once Alba got comfy Ricardo said, “May I asks you a question?” “Sure.” “Why didn’t you let my brother kiss you?” “He kissed me.” Alba responded. “No, he went to kiss your lips and you turned your head.” “He kissed your cheek.” Ricardo said sitting on the bed beside her with his feet on the floor. “Oh.” Alba said. “Why would kissing you on the lips make you turn your head?” “I didn’t want to disrespect you.” “Why do you care now Alba?” “You and I plan to sign the divorce papers in a couple of weeks.” Ricardo says. Ricardo could see the tears in her eyes and he just wished that she’d give in and admit that she made a mistake. He was fighting for her but she had to fight for him too or they would lose everything the two of them had fought so hard in the past to keep.

“I made a mistake when I start seeing Fernando.” “He’s a mistake Ricardo; I don’t want him.” “I don’t want this divorce either.” “I want you to be my husband, I want you back.” “Please don’t leave me I can’t take it.” “I’m sorry for hurting you.” “I should have never slept with your brother.” Alba cried. Ricardo touched her cheek and said, “You could have said that a long time ago Alba.” “I’ve always wanted you back baby always.” “You do.” Alba said. “Yes Alba; you’re worth fighting for.” Ricardo smiled. Then Ricardo leaned on the bed and began to kiss his wife, she kissed him back and Ricardo said, “So this means we’re back together?” Alba smiled and said, “Yes and I’ll never leave you again.” “And I’ll never give you a reason to leave again.” Ricardo smiled.

**Chapter 35**

**“Unexpected”**

“A break up is like a broken mirror it’s better to leave it than hurt yourself trying to pick up the pieces…” -Unknown

Alba sat inside her bedroom watching television; well the television was watching her. Alba began to think about when she broke things off with Fernando. She didn’t realize just how much this man loved and cherished her; it was one of the most horrible break ups ever. Alba expected it to go easy because Fernando was such a strong man, she didn’t expect him to go off the handle. She didn’t expect the tears, all the tears made her very sad. One thing that Alba did know is that she made the right decision. Ricardo was the one for her; he was the man who she fell in love with as friends. He was the one to always make her smile. The man that came to her rescue just in time.

Alba just couldn’t get that day she broke things off with Fernando out of her head. “So are you sure you can do this today?” Ricardo asks. “Yes, he deserves to know that I’m not leaving you.” Alba smiled. “When this chapter of our life is closed; we’re going to build more beautiful memories.” Ricardo smiled. “I know.” Alba smiled. After the two of them got dressed Ricardo said, “I’ll drive you over.” “I can drive.” Alba said. “You can’t drive with a boot on your foot you can barely walk in that thing.” “Could you let me go inside; you stay in the car.” “Sure; I’m not worried about my brother doing anything stupid.” Ricardo said.

Once Ricardo and Alba got there Ricardo got out of the SUV and helped Alba get out. He walked Alba to the door then walked back to the vehicle. Alba rang the doorbell and Fernando answered the door wearing nothing but pajama pants as he always did. He had a smile on his face until he noticed Ricardo sitting inside the SUV. He invited Alba inside and once he helped her sit down he asks, “Why is my brother sitting outside?” “I could have come to get you.” Alba avoided the question and said, “I came to tell you something.” “Ok.” Fernando said sitting beside her. “Fernando I can’t be in this relationship with you anymore.” “I can’t leave Ricardo because I’m still in love with him.” Fernando sat there silently and Alba wondered what was on his mind.

Fernando stood up and began to pace the floor in front of Alba and she just stared at him. “Fernando say something.” “Alba what is wrong with you; why are you doing this?” “I realized that I need my husband I shouldn’t have ever came to you; I’m sorry.” Fernando began to laugh and he said, “This is a joke; you’re playing a sick joke on me and you need to stop.” “I don’t take jokes as funny Alba.” “Fernando this isn’t joke, I can’t be with you anymore.” Fernando turned around, his back was to Alba, Alba wanted to stand up and get comfort him, but she couldn’t because of her ankle and she would be giving him mixed signals.

Fernando turned around and said, “Alba why now; why now; why the hell are you going back to him?” “I love him.” “Alba responded. “But you love me too!” Fernando said raising his voice. “I do but I love my husband more; we have history.” “Alba you have broken me do you know that; do you know what you’ve done to my heart?” Fernando asks as tears fell from his eyes. “I’m sorry, please forgive me?” Fernando knelled down on the floor between Alba’s legs, he touched her face and Alba tried to wipe the tears from his face but he moved her hand. “Don’t touch me Alba, not until you tell me this is just a sick joke.” “You’re not leaving me; you can’t leave me.” “Alba do you know what I’ve given up for you.” “I backstabbed my brother to have you.” “I know and I’m sorry.” Alba said getting teary eyed.

Alba tried to stand up and Fernando said, “You’re not going anywhere; how the hell am I supposed to live here without you.” “You think I’m supposed to accept the fact that you’re staying with my brother!” “How the hell can I do that when I love you too!” “Alba think about this don’t leave me because you’re scared.” “I can give you a better life, better than what my brother can.” “I love you more you have got to feel that Alba.” Fernando couldn’t control his tears and his hands were shaking while he yelled at Alba. Alba didn’t know what to do; she never saw this coming.

“I’m so sorry Fernando.” Alba said with her head touching his forehead. “You planned to hurt me from the start.” “I should have known a woman like you was too good to be true.” “You can get a woman like me; you just can’t have me anymore.” “I’m already taken I’ve always been taken and Ricardo he forgives me for being involved with you.” Alba says. Fernando closed his eyes for a few seconds, he moved away from Alba standing up. “You know what I wish for you.” “I wish you were dead; then me or my brother wouldn’t have you.” “Yes Alba I’m that man if I can’t have you I don’t want any other man to have you.” “I hope you die of a terrible disease and I hope my brother has to suffer like I am right now.” Alba’s eyes filled with tears, she couldn’t believe her ears. “You hate me?” Alba asks. “Now I do.”

Alba got up best she could and she walked out of his house. She couldn’t feel the pain in her ankle because his words stabbed her heart and that hurt like hell. Ricardo got out of the SUV to help her. By the look on her face he could tell it didn’t go well. Alba sat inside the passenger side and she cried. Ricardo leaned over and held her for a few minutes. Once Ricardo and Alba got home Ricardo sat beside Alba and asks, “What did he say to you?” “He said a lot, he wishes that I die from a horrible disease and die so you won’t have me either.” “He said that to you?” Ricardo asks. Alba wiped her nose and said, “Yes and from the look in his eyes he meant it and that’s what hurts the most.” “I guess I hurt him very badly.” Alba says. “I’m sorry baby.” Ricardo says holding her.

Six months later; things were going great between Ricardo and Alba. They were happy; things were just falling into place for them. “What are you thinking about?” Ricardo asks. “I missed my period.” Alba said. “What?” “Don’t get too excited.” Alba said. Ricardo smiled and said, “If that’s a baby in there I won’t be sad.” “You won’t.” Alba smiled. “Of course not; you know me enough to know that a baby makes our life better not the other way around.” Ricardo said. “You’re right.”

A couple days later; Alba’s period still hadn’t come on, she was spotting but that was it. Alba decided to schedule a visit with her doctor. After Alba’s doctor visit she came home to rest, but before she laid down she picked up her baby girl and laid her in bed next to her. Ricardo made it home early to find his favorite girls all snuggled in bed under the covers fast asleep. Ricardo gave both of them a kiss then he went to shower.

Three days later; Alba’s doctor called her; her doctor thought it would be wise to have a mammogram since she had never had one. Alba really didn’t see the need to have one, but she scheduled one because her doctor suggested it. Alba finally had her mammogram and she was just waiting on the results; Alba didn’t worry herself about those types of things, she had enough things to worry about. Alba went on with her life like she had always done.

A week had passed and Alba hadn’t heard anything from her doctor until she realized she had a voice message. “Oh why does she need me to come back in?” “I’m just wasting gas talking to her every other week.” Alba thought. Two days later Alba went back to see her doctor; she was ready to get this over already. Alba and her doctor sat inside her office.

“Mrs. Cruz I know you’re wondering why I called you back into my office.” “I am.” Alba smiled. “I’m afraid I have some bad news; Alba you have breast cancer.” When her doctor said that Alba nearly blacked out. As her doctor sat and explained things Alba was somewhere else and Alba said, “I know all about breast cancer; I deal with breast cancer patients all the time.” “I need silence ok.” Alba said upset. Dr. Hailey stood up and said, “I’m so sorry Mrs. Cruz; take your time.” Alba sat there and so many things went across her mind.

Once Alba got back to work Ricardo caught up with her and gave her a kiss. “How was your appointment?” Ricardo asks. “My appointment was fine; I’m fine.” Alba smiled. “That’s good news baby; well I have to get back to work; we’ll talk later.” “Ok.” “I love you ok.” “Ok.” Alba said not looking at him. Ricardo didn’t have time to question her so he left out.

Alba had gone a week without telling her husband and it was killing her. Alba wasn’t sure how far the cancer had spread in her right breast and she didn’t want to think about. Alba was afraid that she wasn’t going to live and she knew she had to just suck it up and tell her husband. She knew that Ricardo would know what to do.

Alba took a bath and some many mixed emotions were going through her head. After she finished she just sat in the tub and let the water run out. Alba bent her knees and sat her head between her legs and she cried. Ricardo walked inside the house looking for Alba. He went inside the bedroom and he noticed the light on inside the bathroom so he walked inside. He saw his wife inside the tub, she was crying. Ricardo took his shoes off, grabbed a big towel and covered her. Ricardo sat inside the tub in front of her; Alba knew he was there she was just so afraid to look him in his eyes.

“Alba baby talk to me; what’s wrong?” Alba didn’t respond. “Alba I can’t help you if I don’t know what’s wrong; be honest with me.” Alba held her head up and she said, “I have cancer in my right breast.” Ricardo didn’t know what to say at first; he grabbed his wife and he held her until she stopped crying. “Everything’s going to be ok.” “I promise you’re not going through this alone Alba.” “I don’t wanna die.” Alba cried. “You’re not gonna die baby; I am going to do everything I can to help you get better, I promise.” Ricardo said.

The next six months were hard for Alba and the family. Alba’s cancer was widely spread and the doctor gave her only a few months to live. Ricardo was trying to be positive and cheerful about his wife’s condition, but in reality he was breaking down begging God to please spare his wife’s life. He needed Alba; he wanted to grow old with her and their children. Ricardo started to think about when his grandmother died of cancer. He and his brother were only twelve years old. They were so upset; they had lost their Dad now their grandmother. He remembered the two of them had made their minds up to become doctors. Ricardo the Surgeon in Oncology and Fernando the Neurologist. The two of them said they were going to invent some miracle drug that cured all cancers. Right now Ricardo wished that dream had come to pass.

“How’s Alba?” Flavia asks. “She’s inside the bedroom resting.” “I’m going back inside with her.” Ricardo says. “Of course; I’ll take care of Kat and the twins.” “Thank you Mama’.” Ricardo walked back inside the master bedroom; Alba was vomiting blood. He grabbed a towel to help her then helped her back in bed. “I don’t know how long I can do this; I’m tired of fighting.” Alba cried. “Alba please don’t say that; I need you to fight.” “We need you to fight baby; I can’t live without you ok.” Ricardo says. Alba looked into his eyes and she could see fear in his eyes, she suddenly wanted to fight and she said, “Ok baby I’ll fight.”

The rest of the day Ricardo sat in bed with his wife and the two of them watched their favorite show Everybody Loves Raymond. Once Alba fell asleep Ricardo tucked her in bed and went to check on the children. “Mama’ I’m gonna run to the market and pick up Alba some fresh flowers for the bedroom; do you need anything while I’m gone?” “No hija; smile it’s all in God’s hand now.” Ricardo gave his Mom a smile and said, “I know it is; if Alba dies; it’s going to be hard for me to accept it.” “I know, you’ve got to be strong for the kids’ hija.” Flavia said. “I will be.”

When Alba had awakened it was ten o’clock and her husband was right beside her. “I’m here you can go back to sleep.” Ricardo said then kissed the side of her head. “I just wanna look at you.” Alba sat up and Ricardo turned on the lamp. “Ricardo stop worrying; I’ll be fine.” “I’m not afraid to die anymore.” Alba says. “I’m afraid to live in this world without you.” Ricardo admitted. “Alba touched his face with her right hand and said, “I’ll always be with you; whenever you see a butterfly flutter around that’ll be me, letting you know that I’m ok, that I miss you and I’m watching over you and our children.” Ricardo smiled and he said, “You always know how to make me smile.”

Monday morning Ricardo was at work talking to Dr. Gibson. “We’ve done everything, surgery, chemo, radiation, experimental drugs, none of it has helped.” “Dr. Evans has tried almost everything; every night I look over her chart before I go to bed and I don’t know what else we can do.” “The experimental treatments that she qualified for haven’t done anything but make her sicker and weaker.” Ricardo says. “Ricardo I can’t say everything’s going to be alright because I have no idea what you’re going through.” “I’m sorry this disease has fallen on your wife.” “Let’s just keep bringing her back in for chemo; she seems in better spirits being around everyone.” Dr. Gibson says. “She does.” Ricardo agreed.

“Alba told me yesterday that she’s not afraid to die.” “That scares me because I’m scared as hell; I don’t want to lose my wife.” “I’m trying my very best to be strong for her and the kids.” “I feel like my insides are ripping apart; all I ever wanted was my wife back.” “I get her back and I’m about to lose her.” “I need a miracle Chad.” “I can’t lose her.” Ricardo says. “When things man made doesn’t work we have to turn to God; God’s going to see you through it.” “I feel like God is punishing me.” “I would rather have this terrible disease than see my wife living with it.”

Ricardo wiped his eyes and he said, “Alba’s lost everything; her strength, her health, her hair and pretty soon her life.” “She’s gotten to the point where she doesn’t care if I see her without the wig or the scarf.” “She told me she’d fight it, but she’s not strong enough.” “She refuses to die inside the hospital; she wants to die at home in peace.” “What if I’m here when Alba takes her last breath; what if she’s alone.” “I don’t want my wife to die that way.” Ricardo says. “Ricardo if you have to take a leave to see your wife through this we all understand.” “I gotta go home; I have a bad feeling.” Ricardo said. “I understand; tell Alba we’re praying for her.” “Thank you.”

Ricardo got home and his bad feeling was right; his wife was lying on the floor unconscious. Ricardo rushed her to the hospital. Ricardo waited and waited to see what news her doctor was going to give them. Ricardo paced the floor back and forth. He prayed out loud and to himself. “Dr. Evans how is she?” Ricardo asks. “She’s not good Dr. Cruz.” “I’ve given her something to make her comfortable and we’ve started the blood transfusion.” “I’m not sure if she’s going to get through the rest of the week.” “I’m sorry.” Ricardo took a deep breath and fought his tears; he immediately went to see his wife.

Flavia had just landed in Puerto Rico; she hadn’t been home in three months, it was good to be back. She hated leaving Ricardo because of all his family was going through. She hoped she would see Alba before she said her final goodbye. “Fernando thank you so much for picking me up.” “Of course Mama’ I wouldn’t let you take a taxi.” Fernando smiled. “Hija when are you going back to Texas?” Flavia asks. “My life is here now.” Fernando said concentrating on the road. “Your brother needs you; his wife is very sick the doctor has given her only a few months to live.” “Alba’s sick.” Fernando said surprised. “Yes, the poor thing has cancer, she’s lost so much weight, and all her hair is gone.” “Ricardo is all over the place he’s scared.”

Fernando pulled his car over and got out of the car. The thought of Alba being sick and dying was too much for him to bear. He began to vomit on side of the road. Flavia got out of the car and asks, “Hija are you ok?” “I just need some fresh air get back inside the car.” “Fernando I know you’re in love with your brother’s wife.” “If you need to see her now would be the appropriate time to see her.” “If there are any unspoken words that you need to say to her, now would be the time hija.” Flavia says.

Ricardo sat in the hospital bed with his wife; he could tell something was on her mind, but what? “Honey.” Alba called. “I’m here.” “May I ask you a question about your brother?” “Sure.” “Does he know that I’m sick?” Alba asks. “I’m sure he does; I haven’t spoken to him since well you know.” “Oh.” “I’m sure Cassandra or Mom has told him.” “Do you think he really hates me; I don’t wanna die knowing he hates me.” Alba said. “He doesn’t hate you, he was just angry.” Ricardo said. “Could you do me a favor?” “Sure anything.” “Could you call him and let me talk to him; I need to ask for his forgiveness one more time.” “I can’t die knowing he hates me.” “Of course.” Ricardo said taking his cell out of his pocket.

Two days later Fernando was on a flight to Texas. He had to see Alba he had to give her his forgiveness before it was too late. Before Fernando drove to the hospital he stopped the flower shop to grab Alba some flowers. Once Fernando was stepping inside the hospital he saw Ricardo was calling. “Fernando this is Ricardo.” “I know who it is I haven’t deleted your number yet.” “There’s something I need to tell you.” “I know Alba has cancer, Mom told me a couple days ago.” “I’m at the hospital; could I see her?” Fernando asks. “Of course you can; she’ll be waiting for you.”

Ricardo walked back inside Alba’s hospital room and said, “Fernando’s here, he’ll be up in a few minutes.” “Really.” “Yes.” “Thank you honey.” Alba said. “You’re welcome.” Once Fernando walked inside he and Ricardo said their hellos and Ricardo said, “I’m gonna go grab something from the cafeteria; I’ll be back.” “Alba do you need anything?” “No I’m fine.” “Ok.”

Fernando sat the flowers on the nightstand beside Alba’s bed. He didn’t sit down and he didn’t say a word. He stared at Alba; Fernando knew the last time he saw Alba; she could barely walk because she had a broken ankle. She had on purple jogging pants and a grey baseball style t-shirt. Her hair was hanging down and she looked so beautiful to him and she still looked beautiful even though she was sick. She looked very pale and thin; she had a colorful scarf on her head.

Alba said, “I know you probably don’t wanna see me, but I really need to see you.” Fernando still didn’t say anything, he seemed to be in shock and Alba said, “I need you to forgive me.” “The last time we spoke you said some really horrible things to me and I know I hurt you.” “I’m sorry Fernando.” Alba cried. Fernando finally snapped out of his trance and he walked up to her bed. He sat in the chair and pulled it as close as he could.

“Alba I’m sorry for what I said to you; I never meant what I said I was just angry.” “You shouldn’t be asking for my forgiveness I should be asking for yours.” Alba saw tears in Fernando’s eyes and within a matter of seconds they were falling down. “I don’t want you to cry Fernando.” “I’m going to be fine; it’s my time to go.” Fernando took her hand and said, “Don’t say that Alba, I don’t want you to die.” “How am I going to go each day knowing that you’re not here breathing the same air as me?” “You’ll be fine; could you do me one favor?” Alba asks then she began to cough. “That’s blood.” “It’s normal I’ll be ok.” Alba said.

After Alba calmed down Fernando asks, “What favor do you need; you can have anything you want Alba.” “When I go Ricardo is going to not only need his sisters, but he’s going to need his brother.” “I need you two to forgive each other of the past; you’re brothers.” “Could you please stay in contact with your brother, you two need each other.” “Anything you want Alba.” “I don’t want you to tell me what I want to hear I want you to mean it.” Alba said. “I’d never lie to you.” Fernando said taking her hand. “Thank you.”

The next day Fernando was at the hospital bright and early. “Go on and run your errands I’ll be here with Alba.” “Thank you.” Ricardo said. “Ricardo; Alba wants us to call a truce, to be like brothers should be.” “I know she told me.” Ricardo said. “Are you going to be able to do this?” Fernando asks. “I’m trying too; I just need some more time.” “I understand.” Ricardo stepped back inside Alba’s room. The lights were still off and she was still sleeping, Ricardo gave her a kiss on the lips then he left. Fernando sat on the recliner next to her bed and read his newspaper. Twenty minutes later; Alba said, “Ricardo.” Fernando sat his newspaper on the floor and turned to Alba. “Ricardo’s gone; I hope it’s ok if I’m here.” Alba smiled and said, “Of course; could you turn on the light?” “Sure.”

Around noon Alba seemed to be more talkative, she had eaten and taken a shower. “Why do you look at me that way?” “I look that horrible?” Alba asks. “No you look that beautiful to me.” “I know I may be out of place telling you this, but I’m still in love with you.” “I don’t want you to die Alba; I’m sorry I ever said, “I wished you’d die of a terrible disease so my brother wouldn’t have you either.” Fernando says. “That’s ok; people say horrible things when their angry; I understand why you said it.” “Alba I’ll always regret being that angry with you.” “Fernando these are my last days of my life; I wanna spend them talking about happy times.” Alba said.

Fernando sat on Alba’s bed and he asks, “Alba why are you giving up?” “I’m not giving up I know it’s my time and I’m fine with that.” “Alba I don’t wanna lose you; I don’t want you to die.” “I know I haven’t been around, but I was always planning on coming back giving you my forgiveness.” Fernando said. “Fernando I’ve been fighting this cancer for six months now and I’ve fought and fought.” “I’m really tired and I wish you and your brother would just let me go.” “She’s waiting on me and every day I have to say no I need another day.” “Who; who is she?” Fernando asks confused. “My daughter in heaven; she’s there fluttering around.” “She’s my little butterfly; when it’s my time to go I’ll just reach out my hand to her and she’ll grab on.” Alba says holding her arm up.

Fernando grabbed her arm and said, “I’m not letting you leave me now Alba.” “I just came back; tell her to go please.” “Please tell her to go Alba.” Alba could hear Fernando’s heart beating fast and she said, “She’s gone; I’m not ready I’m not going anywhere ok.” Alba said turning around to face him. Fernando had tears all over his face and Alba wiped them away. “Everything’s going to be alright I promise.” Alba smiled. “Nothing will ever be the same Alba.” “I love you so much and it’s hard; I know you’re fighting.” “You just have to be strong; don’t leave us Alba please.” Fernando begged. “There’s nothing more they can do for me.”

Fernando stood up, loosened his tie and sat back on her bed. He grabbed Alba and held her tight. Alba didn’t know what to say so she said nothing. Fernando held on to her tight and he wouldn’t let her go. That’s when Ricardo walked inside the room; he saw they were having a moment so he decided to walk out before he flew off the handle.

**Chapter 36**

**“Bye, Bye Butterfly”**

“When you get to the end of all the light you know and it’s time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen; either you will be given something solid to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly!”

–Edward Teller

Alba’s parents had finally made it to Dallas and Alba was happy to be back home. Ricardo left home to pick his Mom up from the airport. “Alba’s resting.” Stacey said getting her dinner tray off the bed. Bridget got out of bed with Alba and walked outside. Alba’s Mom stood up and said, “I’m gonna go check on Bridget.” “Sure.” Stacey said. “Stacey.” Alba called. Stacey sat the dinner tray on the ottoman and walked up to the bed. “I’m right here.” “Is Ricardo back?” “No, he just called he said he’d be here in twenty minutes.” Alba began to cough and she said, “Sit beside me; I need you to tell you something.” “Sure.”

Alba passed Stacey a key and said, “This key is to my safe deposit box at Wells Fargo.” “I have presents and videos for each of my children for the next ten years.” “Really.” Stacey smiled. “Yes; the day I found out I had cancer I began making the videos because I wasn’t sure how long I’d be here.” “Stacey could you make sure each birthday they get the gift and the video and watch it on that day?” Alba asks. “Alba of course I will; I promise you, I won’t let you down.” Stacey said as tears fell from her eyes. “No tears you promised.” Alba said. “I know it’s just hard because I’m losing you.” “I never imagined this Alba.” “I love you so much; you’re my best friend, but most of all you’re my sister.” Stacey cried. Alba began to cry and she said, “You’re all of that to me too.” The two of them hugged that’s when Ricardo walked inside.

Ricardo and Alba had a house full of people, but Ricardo stayed inside the bedroom with Alba. “There are a lot of people inside our house isn’t it?” Alba asks. “Yes, everyone wants to be here for you.” “Mama’ is making your favorite Puerto Rican dessert.” “Ok, I’m happy.” Alba smiled. Ricardo grabbed her hand and held it to his face. He rubbed her hand on the side of his face and he kissed it. “Don’t cry baby.” Alba said. “I don’t want to; I’m trying to be strong Alba.” “I know.” “I need to tell you something.” “Ok.” “Ricardo I know when I go it’s going to be hard at first for you and the children.” “I’ll always be here with all of you, remember what I said about the butterfly.” Ricardo smiled and said, “I remember baby.”

“Ricardo I don’t expect your life to stop because I’m gone.” “You are free to date, to have sex, to marry any woman you chose, but not Anna.” Alba smiled. “I understand you don’t have to worry about that in death I’d never disrespect you.” “Thank you.” Alba smiled. Ricardo continued to look her in the eye and Alba said, “I don’t want you to feel guilty about loving someone else.” Alba said touching his face. “I can’t love anyone else Alba.” “Yes you can, I just have one thing to ask of you.” Alba said. “What is it baby?” “Kat won’t remember me please tell her about me and don’t let my daughter call another woman Mommy ok.” “That’s all I want Ricardo; can you do that for me?” Alba asks as tears fell from her eyes. “Yes baby I promise; you have my word she’ll never say that to any woman.” “I’ll explain it to her.” Ricardo hugged her and Alba said, “Thank you.”

Around six-thirty Fernando came over; he and Ricardo sat outside on the back and just talked. “Thank you for coming back, Alba’s been really happy to see you every day.” Ricardo said. “Thank you for inviting me here after all I’ve done to try and mess up your life and your marriage.” “I’m sorry Ricardo.” Fernando says. “You’re forgiven.” “If you need to see Alba, go ahead, I’m gonna play with the twins before they leave.” Ricardo said standing up. “Thank you.”

Fernando stepped inside Alba’s bedroom she was wide awake watching television. “Is that a smile I see?” Fernando smiled. “Hi; come inside.” Alba smiled. Fernando sat in the chair and Alba said, “Get closer, Ricardo’s not gonna freak out.” “Are you sure?” Fernando asks. “Yes, he’s giving me everything I want.” Alba smiled. “Ok.” Fernando sat on the bed next to Alba and said, “May I asks you something?” “Of course.” “If there was an experimental drug that you could take that could heal you from your illness would you take it?” “I would, but there is nothing out there like that.” “I’ve qualified for a few clinical trials; experimental drugs whatever you call them and none of them helped me.” “They just made me sicker and weaker.” Alba explained.

“I understand.” Fernando said. Alba began to cough a lot and Fernando held on to Alba. “Fernando you and Ricardo are going to need each other; promise me that you’ll be there for him please?” “I promise Alba; I won’t let you down.” “Thank you.” Alba said letting him go. Fernando stared into Alba’s eyes and looked into her eyes. “Alba this is the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do; let you go forever, I can’t.” “I need you to do something for me.” “What is it?” Alba asks. “I need you to trust me.” “What is it?” Alba asks. “Don’t question me just take it Alba please.” Fernando said. “I can’t take another experimental drug Fernando.” “Alba just do this for me and I’ll never ask you to do anything else.” “Ok.” Alba responded. Fernando grabbed Alba a bottle of water and she took the pill. Within a matter a seconds Alba was yawning. Fernando fixed her pillow and her covers. “I love you Alba.” Fernando said touching the side of her face. “I love you too Fernando.” Fernando smiled and he said, “Get your rest ok.” “Ok.” Fernando kissed her lips and said, “You will always be my biggest regret.” Then he finally left out of her room.

Two days later; Alba was under the weather she continued to have chills and sweats. Ricardo stayed by his wife’s side he knew her time to fall into a deep sleep was coming and he didn’t want to miss her final goodbye. Alba cried and cried because she was in so much pain. “Let me just give you something.” Ricardo said. “I don’t wanna die in my sleep; I wanna die staring into your eyes; that’s how I want to go.” Alba said. Ricardo wiped his tears and said, “I don’t like to see you hurting; just let me give you half of it.” “It’ll take some of that pain away.” Ricardo says. “Ok.”

Later; Ricardo had to run to the clinic to pick up some papers. Alba sat inside the nursery with her daughter. She rocked her in the rocking chair and just talked to her. Alba’s parents watched Alba with her daughter. “She’s wanted that little girl for so long and she has to leave her soon.” “This just breaks my heart.” Susan says. “God needs her more than we do; we have to let her go.” Clint said. Susan wiped her tears and said, “I know it’s just hard.” “She’s our only child; I’m supposed to go before her.” Susan cried. Clint took his wife’s hand and said, “She has four beautiful children; we’ll see our daughter in them.”

After Kat had fallen asleep Alba went to the bathroom in the hall. After she finished she took the scarf off her head and stared at herself. “All my hairs gone, I have bags under my eyes and yet my husband still looks at me like I’m the most beautiful woman in the world.” Alba put the scarf back on her head and wiped her tears. Once she walked out of the bathroom her mother asks, “Alba honey do you need anything?” “Could you come inside the bedroom and hold me Mom.” “I don’t wanna be alone.” “Anything for my baby girl.” Susan smiled.

Around five-thirty; Stacey and Bridget stopped by after work. They always brought Alba something like flowers or fruit. “Thank you, I love papayas.” Alba smiled. “You’re welcome Bridget said. “One day we’ll all see each other again.” “Don’t sit around and cry over me ok.” “I’m going to a better place; I’m leaving you all soon and I want you all to think happy thoughts about me because we’ve had the greatest times together.” “Whenever you two are shopping or having dinner and a drink, I’ll be there.” Alba says. “You’re right.” Stacey said. Bridget never said anything, it was hard for her. Alba always thought it would be Stacey to take it the hardest because Bridget was stronger, but Stacey turned out to be strongest.

Two days later; Alba was able to finally sit and relax. She was calm and that’s what scared Ricardo. Ricardo held his wife in his arms and he talked about their past; the good times they shared. Alba smiled through all of it and then all of a sudden Alba said, “Ricardo look at me.” Ricardo let Alba go and he turned to her. Alba yawned and said, “I will cherish every day of my life that I spent with you and our children.” “You will always be the man to mend my broken heart; the man to have my heart forever.” Alba touched his face with both of her hands and just stared into his eyes. Ricardo put his hands on top of hers and said, “I’m not ready to let you go Alba.” “I know you’re not, but you have to let me go.” “Could you take me outside to my flower garden please?” Alba asks. “Of course.” Ricardo got off the bed and then he picked her up.

Ricardo sat on the recliner holding Alba in his arms. The two of them sat in silence and they looked into each other’s eyes. Alba said, “I’m ready.” Ricardo knew what she meant and this time his tears were uncontrollable. Alba reached her hand up to the sky and that’s when the butterfly fluttered in the air. “I love you so much Ricardo.” Tears were coming out of Ricardo’s eyes so fast. Ricardo sniffled and he said, “I love you too baby so much.” Alba’s eyes began to close and that’s when her hand fell down. Her head went back on Ricardo’s chest. Ricardo held on to her and she had no pulse. Ricardo cried out, “Alba.” He said her name over and over and then the butterfly disappeared.

“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” -1 John 2:17

Stacey and Bridget were walking out of Stacey’s house and that’s when the felt a cold chill. “Did you feel that?” Bridget asks. “Yeah.” Stacey said. That’s when a butterfly fluttered in their faces. The two of them were shocked and Stacey smiled and she began to cry. Bridget took Stacey’s hand and she said, “Bye Alba; rest in peace you deserve it.” The two of them stood on the porch hugging and crying over their friend.

 “When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure.”

-Unknown

**The End**