

Choices

A Novel By
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Prologue

I woke up to what sounded like a car engine backfiring. My head and face hurt and I had to blink several times just to get my eyes to focus. My mind was slow to respond and I was disoriented. I could tell by the way the beginning of dawn's sunlight barely shined through the big picture window that it must have been very early in the morning. I was in an unfamiliar room in bed with a naked guy lying across my naked body. I couldn't see his face, but I immediately recognized the naked blond sleeping next to me. It was Eric Reed's girlfriend Samantha, so I was pretty sure that the guy lying on top of me was Eric. What I wasn't sure about was what I was doing there; or how I'd even gotten there and what exactly happened last night when smells in the room started to assault my senses – stale cigarettes, some kind of alcohol...whisky maybe...and sex.

Suddenly an onslaught of unnerving memories triggered by those smells flooded my mind and I immediately began to panic. My heart started beating faster and my breath quickened. I started to feel sick. My instincts and a small voice that I often relied on to get me through difficult times, told me that I needed to get out of there so I had to try and keep it together and deal with whatever happened to me later. I was having trouble moving. I was sore and stiff and everything hurt. My body felt heavy. It was like I was being held down to that one spot by something other than just half of Eric's body.

I carefully maneuvered my way from under him, crossed over Samantha without waking either of them up and got out of the bed. Luckily the bathroom was only about ten feet away from the bed because I was feeling dizzy and nauseated. I entered the bathroom and ran my fingers along the wall just inside the door in search of the light switch. The first switch I found and flipped nothing happened. The second switch lit the lights above

a shower lined with marble and mosaic tile large enough to throw a party in. The final switch illuminated the rest of the bathroom spot lighting the double sink vanity with gray and white marble countertops, an extra large jetted tub, floor to ceiling storage and a separate water closet.

Finding my target, I ran and crouched over the toilet where I became violently ill; and where I remained for a while. When I wasn't throwing up, I was lying naked on the floor of a bathroom that I'd never even seen before. I should have been cold lying naked on the marble tile floor but I felt as though I was lying on a warm blanket. It seems the first switch I flipped activated the heated floors. I was really scared – in spite of the luxuriousness of the en suite bathroom – and not sure what to do next.

I don't know how long I'd been in that bathroom but after making several deposits into the porcelain bank, I decided it was time to try and find my way out of that nightmare. I pulled myself up off the floor and tried to clean up. I used some toothpaste that I found on the sink and my finger to clean my mouth. I splashed my face with cold water and that's when I noticed in the mirror that I had a bruise under my right eye, my lips were swollen, my bottom lip was split and I had scratches on my neck. Shocked, I took a step back and looked down at myself and saw that I had bruises all over my body; my upper arms, both wrists, my chest and inner thighs. I looked and felt like I'd been in some kind of accident.

I started trembling as I tried to focus and remember what happened last night but my head was still too foggy to recall things clearly. The quick, violent images that surfaced weren't something I was ready to deal with yet, so I pushed those thoughts out of my mind and concentrated on getting out of there.

I returned to the bedroom to look for my clothes and purse. I could use my cell phone to try to find a ride home. The green lace Poison Ivy costume that I wore to the Halloween party was ripped down the middle and lying on the floor next to my torn stockings and heels. I had nothing to put on, so I carefully and quietly searched the dresser drawers for something that I could wear.

Fortunately, one drawer had some women's clothing in it. I decided to borrow the first thing I put my hand on, a dark blue BeBe running suit. It was new; it still had the tags on it. In fact, everything in the drawer

looked new and I hated to take it but I didn't have much of a choice. I had to put something on. Since my underwear had been ripped too I had to go without.

With my purse and shoes in hand, I dressed quickly and put on the pair of flip-flops sitting on the floor next to the door and ran down the stairs of what turned out to be a garage apartment behind a mini mansion.

As I ran past the three-story main house and the luxury vehicles in the driveway, I realized that I had no clue as to what part of the city I was even in. I thought about turning around, going back and knocking on the door of the main house in hopes of finding an adult that could help me – someone more of an adult than me, somebody's parents maybe. I decided against it. After last night I wasn't sure what else I might be getting myself into.

I could see that I was in an upscale neighborhood and since it wasn't a very cool morning for November and I had on a warm-up suit, I thought I would just keep walking until I came to a main street or highway I recognized. Once I did, I would call my roommate Connie and ask her if she would come pick me up and take me home. No matter how bad I felt physically, fear and adrenaline kept me moving forward.

As I walked, I tried to keep my mind busy so memories from last night wouldn't break through my consciousness. I needed to focus on getting home. With nothing but an endless row of houses in my wake, I started thinking about just how different my life had become since last summer's trip to Los Angeles...

Introductions

The pilot on the loudspeaker announced our descent into Los Angeles International Airport. Immediately I started to have butterflies in my stomach. Not because for the first time I was about to meet the guy I'd been talking to over the phone for the past two months, but because I was doing so wearing a tight strapless light blue leather mini-dress and four-inch stiletto heels that my best friend talked me into buying.

My name is Kristine Alexander. My best friend Linda Gray and I grew up together in an upper middle class community in a small town outside of Houston, Texas. We'd been best friends since my father retired from the military when we were in junior high school. We first met when I stopped a group of girls from bullying her in the girl's bathroom. She claims it was the other way around and she saved me. Oh well, she has her version and I have mine. We've been friends ever since and she knows me better than just about anyone.

Linda thought that since we were going to Los Angeles, we should look like we belonged. This was coming from a girl who'd rarely left Texas and got most of her style ideas from fashion lingerie magazines and questionable cable TV shows – which is also where she got the bright idea that it was okay to wear leather in the summer time. Linda has an interesting fashion sense; she could give singer Jesse J or fashion designer Betsey Johnson a run for their money.

We wanted to freshen up before we met the guys so we found a ladies room that wasn't crowded with passengers.

"I look like a hooker...high-end...but definitely a hooker." I said with a mix of sarcasm and seriousness as I gazed at my reflection in the mirror.

"I think you mean prostitute." She corrected.

"Whatever, I still look like one."

"You look amazing and really hot." Linda replied while admiring her own thin five foot five frame in her two-piece red leather short set with shoes identical to mine in the airport's bathroom mirror.

The red looked really good against her fair skin and shoulder length reddish brown hair.

We made our way through the airport with a minimum of stares.

We collected our luggage and headed out the double doors leading to the parking lot. Just as I cleared the doors I caught sight of him. He was leaning against a pole looking absolutely gorgeous. He stood over six feet tall and his smooth fair skin had a light brown almost golden tint to it. It looked like he'd been tanning all day but I knew better; that was all him. He had muscles everywhere, hazel eyes, long black eyelashes, a sexy five o'clock shadow and thick dark brown hair with bronze streaks. He wore a white long sleeve button down shirt, blue jeans and black cowboy boots. He took my breath away; he was so handsome.

"Hello lovely lady, I thought you'd never get here." Dennis said smiling showing a perfect set of white teeth as he bent down to kiss me on my cheek.

His scent was intoxicating. I actually felt dizzy. "Hi...neither did I." Was all I could manage to say without sounding like an idiot. The butterflies in my stomach now had nothing to do with my outfit.

"Your description and pictures don't do you justice." He said with a slight grin on his face.

"You...too." I said sounding like an idiot.

"Thanks." He replied laughing.

I smiled as he took my bag grabbing my hand and spoke to Linda who was saying "hello" – standing on the tips of her toes passionately kissing someone that could have passed for a male model – to her boyfriend Davis whom she hadn't seen since our graduation two months earlier. He too

stood over six feet tall, had fair skin, hazel eyes, was just as built as Dennis with sandy brown hair.

“Hello Dennis.” Linda replied after taking a breath. “Nice to see you again; don’t my girl look good?” She asked while wiping the lipstick from Davis face.

“Absolutely!” He responded with a devilish smile that set my heart on fire.

“Let’s get out of here before we get a ticket for illegal parking or doing something else in public that we shouldn’t.” Davis said as he pulled Linda in for another passionate kiss.

Dennis rolled his eyes. “Can you two at least wait until you get in the car?”

We followed him to a black Ford Mustang. It reminded me of the white Mustang that my mother had when I was younger. Dennis held the front passenger door open for me and helped me into the car while Linda and Davis got in the back seat from the driver’s side.

They didn’t waste any time trying to make up for lost time. I tried not to pay attention to what they were doing but the sounds coming from behind my head were hard to miss even with Michael Jackson’s “Beat It” blasting on the radio.

“How was your flight?” Dennis asked, trying not to laugh at the obvious discomfort I was feeling about what was going on in the back seat.

“Fine, bumpy there towards the end.”

“How’s your stomach? Can you eat? We were hoping to take you two to this really cool supper club we know to eat and hang out before we head back to our place. That’s still the plan, right, Davis?” Dennis asked without glancing to the back seat.

“Hell yeah that’s still the plan. Did you not see how fine my girl looks? I want to show her off.” I glanced back in time to see Linda’s face light up like a Christmas tree.

“Well how about you? You up for it?” Dennis asked while we waited for the traffic light to change.

“Sure, I’d hate to waste the outfit.”

“Trust me, the outfit’s not wasted.” He flashed that devilish smile before he leaned over and kissed me gently on the cheek at my jaw line.

My heart jumped at his touch and I was instantly craving more. I reached for his face to give him a proper kiss but he caught my hands, kissed my palms, smiled and pulled away just as the light changed.

I wasn’t sure what to make of his response. Was the attraction suddenly one sided? Had he changed his mind about all the plans he’d made for my visit? Why was he keeping his distance? Was Mary a bigger issue than I’d realized?

As he drove I thought back on everything and every conversation that had occurred over the two months leading up to this visit...



Dennis and Davis Langford were budding singer-songwriters from an extremely wealthy southern family in New Orleans, LA. Dennis played the piano and guitar, and Davis played the trumpet and saxophone. They came to Los Angeles to play the local club scene and try to break into the music industry. They formed a band that they called D&D and asked Linda, who had been dating Davis for about ten months at the time, if she wanted to come out to Los Angeles for a while to sing on a few tracks. Linda, who was an amazing singer in her own right, jumped at the chance. While Linda loved to sing, she really just wanted to be with Davis.

Linda grew up as an only child in a small old-fashioned family with very strict beliefs about right and wrong, and her parents had high expectations for their daughter’s future. Linda’s a beautiful girl with a big personality. She loves life and is very tough but there was no way her parents would ever be okay with her traveling thousands of miles from home to join a singing group, legal adult or not. Especially since one of the group’s founding members was her nineteen-year-old college drop-out ex-boyfriend – at least they think he’s an ex-boyfriend. They didn’t care how rich he was or whose family he came from. They wanted their daughter to be with a college graduate, a professional. Linda however had her own plans for her life and she wouldn’t be stopped in pursuit of it.

Linda knew she couldn’t get her parents to go along with the idea of her spending time away from home for any reason if she was going to be

alone or if there would be no adult supervision where she lived. While she didn't need it – nor would she ever admit it – Linda desperately wanted her parents' support. Lucky for her she had a best friend with family in Los Angeles who would be more than happy to have them stay at their house.

“Your aunt and uncle are missing your graduation. The least they could do is to allow us to stay with them while we pursue our dream,” she said, trying to be persuasive but actually sounding pretty rude.

“Our dream, since when did this become our dream?” I asked sarcastically.

“You know you've always wanted to sing. You need to stop tripping and grab the opportunity before you.”

“This is more of an opportunity for you to be with Davis than it is for me to give my singing a shot.”

“An opportunity is an opportunity,” she sang, smiling smugly knowing that she had me.

Gaining my parents' support for an extended visit with my aunt and uncle in Los Angeles was relatively easy. We were a disciplined military family that spent most of my childhood traveling all around the world. My parents taught my sister and me to be independent and experience life to its fullest. They gave us every opportunity to ensure that they were raising well-educated intellectuals with a capacity for making smart decisions. Even after my father retired from the military and opened his own print shop and my mother started teaching kindergarten, we spent every summer traveling. A number of my summers had been spent in California with my childless aunt and uncle.

Since I was paying my own way to California, my parents' only condition was that I return home before September. That would give me a couple weeks with them and my younger sister before I had to leave for school. I had taken so many advanced courses in high school that I officially graduated a year earlier than expected, but I elected to stay and be a part of my classes' graduation. I spent my “senior” year taking college freshman level courses so in the fall I'd be entering the University of Texas in Austin as a sophomore. While my going to college was a given, leaving home was something my parents and sister were still getting used to.

Linda wasn't really sure what she wanted to do yet, but in an effort to gain her parents' support for the trip, Linda promised them that if her singing hadn't gone anywhere after a year she would give college a try. So after being reassured by my aunt and uncle that we would be safe and well supervised, Linda got her parents' blessing.

What no one knew was that our new guardians didn't expect us to arrive until a week later than we actually did, so they made vacation plans of their own. My aunt had already given me the alarm code and told me where to find the extra house keys and since the neighbors knew me from previous visits our early arrival wouldn't be suspicious and keeping it a secret wouldn't be hard.

Linda would have seven uninterrupted days and nights to play house with the man she knew was the one. I, on the other hand, was not looking forward to being the third wheel but I was sure I could find something to keep me busy in Los Angeles when we weren't singing and recording with the band. However, Linda had her own plans for me.

"You really didn't think I'd let you go all that way and be by yourself did you?" She asked with a puzzled look on her face.

"What are you talking about?"

"You remember Davis's really fine twenty-one year old brother Dennis, the one who graduated from college in three and half years? It's hard to believe someone that fine can be crazy smart too. Anyway, he's kind of single and since I know how you like them smart and older..," she said smiling widely.

"What did you do and what do you mean...*kind of* single?"

"Well apparently he and his girlfriend have some kind of deal. He can do whatever he wants while they're apart as long as he never falls in love with anyone else, she never has to see or hear about it and she remains number one in his life."

"What?"

"I know. Crazy as hell isn't it? Davis says it has something to do with their two families. I think they just have been together for so long it's comfortable...safe. They do have some pretty big trust funds to protect. Any way I told him about you and he wants your number," she explained nonchalantly.

“You didn’t give it to him did you?”

“You know me. I wouldn’t do that without talking to you first,” she said with a guilty look on her face.

“I do know you. You did...didn’t you?”

“Just talk to him. You never know. You two might hit it off and he’ll kick that crazy girl to the curb and you two can run off and get married,” She said laughing.

I frowned but before I could respond to her crazy comments, she held up her hands – palms facing me as if she was surrendering.

She took a deep breath and rolled her eyes. “Chill Kristine, he’s just something to do while you’re in California. We both know you’re going to college to find your Mr. Right. Dennis could simply be your Mr. Right *Now.*”

I shook my head and exhaled slowly. She made me so tried.

I had to admit I was a little intrigued. I’d seen several pictures of both Dennis and Davis and I have to say that’s one good-looking family. I’d met Davis a few times and he has perfect manners, very smart and is completely devoted to Linda. When they’re together, which was quite often in spite of the fact that they lived thousands of miles apart, he treats her like a queen. Could there really be two good guys in the same family? Considering the wealth and social status of that family, I really didn’t think so.

The Langford’s were extremely wealthy, old money wealthy. They were an oil family that socialized with government officials, diplomats, royal families, politicians and even some movie stars. They owned land, oil wells, tankers and refineries. If it was related to the oil business, they owned it. The guys’ parents were business-oriented high society types with artists for sons. That couldn’t have been easy for any of them. They may be supporting their son’s musical dreams for now but their ultimate goal is for them to run their company one day. It had to be; after all it is a family business.

Several days had passed and I thought I’d dodged a bullet since I hadn’t heard from Dennis yet. However when I got home from work, I noticed that there was a message waiting for me on my cell phone. I spent twenty hours a week working at Diana’s fashion boutique helping women pick out formal attire for different events. It was better than going to work

for my father at his print shop and having to deal with all the nepotism jokes I was sure I would have to endure.

I sat on my bed and checked my messages.

The voice coming through the phone was very sexy. *“Hi Kristine, this is Dennis Langford, your friend Linda Gray gave me your number. I know you’ll be joining her when she comes out after graduation and since we’ll be spending a great deal of time together, I thought we should get to know each other better. So if you have a moment, please give me a call after six Pacific Standard Time.”*

He thanked me, left his phone number and hung up. He was every bit as polite as Davis.

I wasn’t sure if I really wanted to waste my time calling and getting to know a guy long distance that already had a girlfriend when I had a boyfriend of my own.

I had been dating Mitch Richardson, who lived across the street from my parents’ house, off and on for a couple of years. Mitch was a sophomore majoring in engineering at Rice University. He was handsome, extremely smart, and very sweet and he loved me more than anything. Mitch would be escorting me to my prom and all the other customary graduation rituals my family had planned so why should I complicate things for myself?

It was always a gamble following Linda’s advice. While she might be right about it being nice to have someone to hang out with while I was in Los Angeles, she was wrong about my reason for wanting to go to college. I wasn’t going to find a husband. I was going so I could figure out what I was going to do with the rest of my life. Finding a husband was the last thing on my mind. Besides, if that’s what I wanted, Mitch was the perfect candidate. I wasn’t even sure we should still be tied down to each other right now. I thought I should be free to enjoy the college experience.

It was a few minutes to eight my time and I was saying good night to Mitch when my phone rang. I wasn’t expecting any calls so I decided to let the machine pick it up. Just as Mitch was about to kiss me goodnight, I heard the sound of a male voice leaving a message. If I heard it, I know Mitch did too. I also knew he would never question me about it. He loved and trusted me more than I deserved.

I excused myself and quickly ran to grab the receiver before he could complete the message and hang up.

“Hello, hello, I’m here,” I said trying not to sound too eager and not understanding why I suddenly was.

“Kristine its Dennis Langford, Davis’ brother, your friend Linda gave me your number.”

“Yes, I know nice to meet you.” I guess that’s the right thing to say even though we weren’t meeting in person. “Can you hold on for just one second?”

“Sure.”

I made my way back to the front door where I found Mitch waiting patiently for me to return. “Sorry about that Mitch. I was expecting a call about our trip but it was a wrong number.”

I can’t believe how easy it was to lie to him and for what? Some guy I don’t even know. I felt really bad but not bad enough to tell the truth or to keep Dennis waiting. I made an excuse about feeling a headache coming on. Of course he offered to stay and take care of me, but I told him that I was just going to take a couple of aspirin and go to sleep. I gave Mitch a quick kiss good night and ran back to the phone.

“Sorry I took so long,” I said again, a little too eagerly.

“No problem. How are you?”

“Good. And you?”

“I’m good too, thanks for asking. So my brother tells me you can sing.”

“I can hold my own.”

“Sing something for me,” he said with a quiet laugh in his voice.

“I don’t think so, maybe some other time.” I was way too nervous to sing. I’d just sound like a chicken being choked to death and he’d start to wonder why the hell I was coming to Los Angeles in the first place.

“Okay, then describe what you look like.”

“I’m five feet five inches tall, I have fair skin until I get in the sun and then I become a more caramel color. I have light brown eyes, long dark brown curly hair that hangs to the middle of my back and I weigh a hundred and two pounds...give or take a pound or two.”

“Sounds nice.”

“Thanks, I think so.”

“Don’t you want to know what I look like?” he asked, sounding surprised I hadn’t asked immediately.

“I already know what you look like.”

“Oh...Linda, right?” He guessed.

“Yes, you are in a few of the millions of pictures she has of Davis.”

“Well?”

“Well what?” I said, cutting him off before he could ask some version of the “don’t you think I look gorgeous question?” which I did but there was no way in hell I was going to admit it.

“Well, tell me about yourself. You know, what kind of music do you like? Are you excited about graduating? Where are you going to school? Stuff like that.”

Oh, I might have been wrong about him. “Technically, I’ve already graduated but I’m very excited about the actual graduation ceremony and walking across the stage with my friends. What else...I’m going to the University of Texas in Austin in September where I’ll be majoring in Education...at least for now. I do a lot of charity work. I like all types of music: Maroon 5, Jay-Z, Carrie Underwood but when I want to chill out I go old school with artists like Luther Vandross and Teddy Pendergrass.”

“Carrie Underwood?” he questioned skeptically with another quiet laugh.

“Yeah, a little pop country never hurt anybody.” I said laughing.

“Cool. So where does your singing fit into your plans for the future?” He seemed surprised I hadn’t mentioned it.

“I’ve always loved to sing but I never really thought about making a career out of it.”

“Don’t you think your good enough?” he asked, suddenly very serious.

“That’s not the issue. I absolutely think I’m good enough. It’s just that I’m a pretty practical person and I like stability. My parents say I’m an old soul...that I was born at the wrong time.” I said laughing. “I want a successful career and family of my own someday and I was raised to believe that a college education should be central to that plan.”

“You must not love singing. If you did, you wouldn’t be able to not

pursue it no matter the personal sacrifice.” He said with a strange catch in his voice.

I decided to let it go because I didn’t want to keep defending my position so I changed the subject. “I know your following your musical dreams... tell me...how’d that happened considering your family’s business?”

“To my family’s dismay, I’ve always been interested in music; playing, singing, writing, producing you name it. There was never any choice for me. So when the opportunity came up for us to come to Los Angeles, I jumped at it. Our parents are being supportive but I know they’re just waiting for us to “come to our senses” as my father puts it. Following your dreams isn’t easy but it’s worth it. I’ll never look back and think what if?”

It sounded like he was sending me a subliminal message. I let it pass.

“Can I ask you a personal question?” he asked.

“Sure.”

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“Sort of.” I wasn’t really sure how to answer his question. I didn’t know just how honest I should be.

“What does that mean, either you do or you don’t?” He seemed irritated by my answer.

“I do but things are changing on my side and I just haven’t worked up the nerve to address it.”

“Really? You don’t seem like the type to be afraid to say what’s on your mind.”

“I’m not, it’s just...some things are harder to say than others.”

“I can understand that.”

My turn. “Can I ask *you* a personal question?”

“Sure.”

“Linda told me about some deal you have with your girlfriend. Will you tell me about it?”

He seemed surprised by my question and hesitated before he spoke. “My girlfriend Mary and I have been together since we were freshmen in high school. Her family owns several companies that my family does business with all over the world. Our fathers are best friends. Mr. McGill

– that’s Mary’s father – has two girls and since my father has two sons the same age...”

“Let me guess,” I interrupted. “He’d hoped one or both of you would hit it off with his daughters.”

“Something like that...however, Mary understands my need to pursue my musical career and I understand her need to stay home to attend school – she wants to be a doctor and work in our parish. Neither one of us is interested in making our father’s dream of creating some...oil dynasty anytime soon. We have our own individual dreams and goals we want to pursue first but we plan to be together in the future. Mary is...where I’m headed.” His voice was low and soft when he made that last statement.

He was silent for a moment before continuing with his explanation. “Long distance relationships are hard and we both know how things can happen when you’re not able to be with the one you love.”

“Love the one you’re with, I guess.” I said sarcastically.

“Something like that. We’ve just decided to give each other some space when were not together. When we do see each other there are no questions and no guilt.”

“What about the people you both bring into this little arrangement? How do they fit into your agreement?” I asked trying to control this sudden surge of anger that I didn’t understand.

“We make the boundaries perfectly clear. We make sure everyone involved understands that we’re not looking to fall in love. We’re already in a relationship and all we can offer is friendship.”

“What about sex? Are you saying you’re really okay with the idea of your girlfriend having sex with someone else? Is she? Really?”

“No questions and no guilt...remember?” He reminded me.

“You can’t always control who you fall in love with you know.” Especially women: he could be in for a rude awakening one of these days. I decided to keep that little observation to myself.

“True but you can try,” he insisted.

“And if you can’t?”

“I guess, we’ll find out.” His voice was serious again.

I had several more questions but I suddenly felt like I too was bound by this no questions and no guilt rule so I dropped it. Not that it mattered

to him but I didn't want him to have an out-of-control phone bill so I suggested that we end our call on that note. He agreed but asked if it would be okay for him to call me the same time the next night. While I knew I shouldn't, I said yes.

After that first conversation, Dennis called me every night and we would talk for hours. We spent the next couple of months really getting to know each other. We talked about our likes and dislikes from foods – we both had a passion for seafood – to his strong views about not showing too much affection in public. He had some sweet but old-fashioned opinions of male and female roles too, specifically the man's responsibility for protecting and providing for his family. The love of family meant everything to him. We tried to talk about religion and politics but even the areas where we could agree caused heated debates however never to the point where one of us would want to end the call. We'd have a few moments of weird silence and move on to safer subjects.

We talked a lot about my family dynamics. It fascinated him how a family "of means" as he put it chose to live a reasonably normal life. Normal in comparison to the world he grew up in; a world where money, power and social status were the dominant factor in how they lived and who they associated with. I grew up surrounded by family and close friends while he grew up around nannies, servants and business associates. While he knew his family loved and supported his choices so far, he also knew that they expected him to eventually take his rightful place beside his father and run their family business. Whenever I'd ask if that was even a possibility, he simply changed the subject. I just assumed he didn't want to talk about disappointing his father.

We discussed my expectations of college. It had surprised him that I was pursuing a degree in education and that I wanted to teach. He was sure that I would seek to do something along the lines of Marketing or Public Relations. He thought I had the personality for it not to mention all the charities that I helped plan and promote events for. He even sent me flowers – a dozen yellow roses – congratulating me on my success after each of my fundraising events.

We talked about how and why he chose to graduated college early, his love of music and the role he expected it to play in his future. Dennis

played samples of the songs he was working on, and he seemed to value my opinion and input. He even got me to sing for him. We exchanged emails daily and when we weren't on the phone with each other we were texting. The one thing we never did was talk about our current relationships with Mary and Mitch.

We made plans for my trip to California and Dennis promised to show me the time of my life. I found myself counting down the days until our trip. I didn't want to admit it at the time but our relationship was already well beyond a simple friendship. It even started to take us longer and longer to end our calls with the "no you hang-up first" ritual we'd started.

The sound of Dennis' voice announcing our arrival at the supper club broke my concentration.