

Best Friends

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Twilight in July
Dark shores,
black midnight

You and me by
a waterfall

Friends and lovers
Hand in hand
Until we die...

D.K. Ward "The Pledge"

Best Friends

Prologue

"Check the kids, Sally," Margery Warren requested as she towed a large covered dish from the depths of the oven. Her mouth was dressed in a quirky little smile. It wouldn't be your typical turkey feast this year. No, for once Margery Warren decided to let loose her rigid concept of the standard Christmas dinner.

She baked a roast.

Sally Vorean drew the curtain aside and spied Adena and Tyler still pattering about on the porch. She smiled, as she always did watching them. Tyler, the taller of the two, wasn't of her own flesh and blood, but for the love Sally felt for the child, she may as well have been born of her own loins. Tyler had been a breech baby, Margery told her, and Sally quickly followed with, 'But the best things in life never do come easily'.

Tyler's eyes were of a cerulean blue, an unexpected contrast to her dark features and hair. She had an easy smile, but used it rarely. Sally had once overheard Adena ask Tyler why she didn't smile much. Tyler had simply replied, "my heart smiles all day so my mouth doesn't tire out." To her mother, she was an extraordinary child, a gift to the world, not much unlike her companion, Adena, who was about two inches shorter than her friend, with eyes a sparkling, emerald green, and hair that lustrous red-gold only begotten by endless days in the sun.

The girls were similar in their friendship and affection, with no perception of real love and its highs and lows, or of its coveted heartaches. But, they knew when they were together they were like two bodies with one soul. And though they had not one ounce of concept what a soul was either, to them, that was a minuscule fact.

Sally released a tiny breath of pleasure watching them; two lovely little girls who were going to be two beautiful women one day.

Herb strolled into the kitchen with an empty beer can, giving his wife a pat on the ass and a kiss on the cheek before making a toss at a nearby wastebasket. After missing the imagined three-pointer, Herb mumbled a perfunctory curse then headed straight to the fridge to grab a couple more "cold ones" for himself and Charlie. Margery looked after him as he passed, then at Sally to see if she caught the act. No, Sally was absorbed in what their children were doing.

She waited until Herb fulfilled his mission and returned to his own ritual of sitting in front of the television set with Charlie until the hypothetical dinner bell rang. "Sal?"

"Hmm? Oh." Sally smiled, letting the curtain fall as she looked at Margery. "They're fine, still playing, just like always."

"They'll be best friends forever, you'll see."

"Oh I know, Margery. I know. It's the look in their eyes when they're together."

Margery was nodding exuberantly. "Yes, I've seen it."

"Just like us, hm?"

"Just like us..." Margery beamed before going back to her dinner preparations.

* * *

"Did it hurt?" Adena asked, eyes transparent in the light of the sun. She was staring up at Tyler, who stood over her, needle poised, blood already dripping from her own thumb.

Tyler shook her head, black hair whipping in the wind. "Not at all. Here, gimme your hand."

Adena focused on the one drop of blood pooling at the tip of Tyler's thumb. She watched it grow in size until it was too bulbous to just sit there on that tiny digit. Finally it made its suicidal decent, plopping onto the weathered wood beneath their feet. She stared at the smear on the boards for a full minute, agonizing not only for her own pain to come, but also for the infinitesimal loss of life Tyler had undergone in the name of friendship. The only other time she could remember blood involved in her young life was when she and Tyler had been down at the beach and she'd stepped on a broken shell, cutting the tender skin between her first and second toes; that

had hurt. Hesitantly, Adena offered Tyler her hand and turned her head, then squeezed her eyes shut as tight as she could, waiting for Tyler to prick her finger.

"Ok, scaredy-cat, you can look now. I'm all done."

Adena whisked her head around. Her eyes were wide open, the iris' green saucers as she stared at Tyler, then her finger. "Wow, it didn't hurt!"

"I told ya." Tyler mashed their fingers together. "Now we're friends forever, no matter what."

"Always?"

"Mm-hmm. No matter what."

Adena confirmed her agreement with a bob of her head. "No matter what," she echoed and stood, pulling Tyler into a clumsy eight-year-old hug. She then pressed her small lips to Tyler's, wiggling her tongue until it was inside Tyler's mouth as they'd seen their mothers do on occasion when they thought no one was looking.

"Forever," Tyler promised, staring into the clear green eyes of her friend.

"Forever," Adena repeated, staring back into the clear blue eyes of her friend.

Present Day

I

January passed, leaving bitter winds and ten-foot snow drifts in its wake. The small town where Tyler and Adena had been born, grew up, now worked and eventually planned on being laid to rest, was coated white from

one end where the old broken down cemetery still stood, to the other, now a thriving one-story mall. February followed just as furiously and March came up fast behind nipping at winters' heels. In the middle of this frigid scene two women walked the deserted downtown streets, huddled close together for warmth.

"I'm going back tonight, Adena." Sari Bailey kept her eyes locked straight ahead, but managed to squeeze Adena's hand tightly as they made their way through the streets in the square. There was stillness about and around them. It was an odd tranquility, interrupted only by the crunching of their heels on the snowy pathways. The downtown shops were all closed for the night. A wide array of tempting goods lined the storefront windows taunting the occasional passerby with treasures unavailable to them-- at least until the next morning, when shopkeepers would slide up their metal doors, set their signs on the front walk and welcomed a new day.

The late night wanderers were good friends, though not as close as Tyler and Adena had been growing up. Sari knew no one was as close to Adena as Tyler Warren, but their friendship had a different intimacy; Sari and Adena could talk about and do nearly everything without "unrealistic emotions" always getting in the way.

Sari had moved out west at the age of 18 when the smothering affect of small town life grew too suffocating to bear. She came back every other year to visit friends and family. This was one such visit, but suddenly, the burden of sadness was weighing down her shoulders. This wasn't just any "until my next visit" stroll downtown; it was a goodbye.

"Why don't you come back with me this time?" Sari blurted out just as they passed Tristan Pharmacy, startling Adena as well as herself. "I could show you the time of your life, Dena." The slender brunette spoke with a lilt, in a conscience effort to conceal the air of desperation swirling within her previous question.

"I can't..." was Adena's simple, tempered reply.

"I knew you'd say that." Sari rested her head on Adena's shoulder, her amber eyes glazed in sadness.

"I would go back with you, Sari. I'd love that more than anything. But I can't just up and leave."

"Yes, I know; it would be unexpected of you." Sari chuckled and leaned them into making a right on Bartlett Street. "There's not one compulsive bone in your body."

"That is a bold face lie!" Adena vehemently objected.

"So... how is Tyler?" Sari didn't wish for another useless debate on the practicalities of Adena's lack of spontaneity.

Her feathers obviously ruffled, Adena pouted. "I don't know; I've been avoiding her."

Sari looked up at her, watching the light and shadows play on Adena's face. "You are single now, Dena. Maybe Ty-"

Adena wiggled her hand loose and hopped up onto the stonewall surrounding the park. She walked a few paces and then sat. Sari came and stood between her legs, giving her those pleading eyes that Adena could never seem to resist. "You stop that."

Smiling at her momentary triumph, Sari continued. "Ok, then you tell me what you're going to do now without Rory?"

"I'm going to continue on with life," Adena answered, curling a tuft of Sari's hair between her gloved fingers.

"Alone?" Sari asked, dubiously.

Adena nodded slowly. "I'm fine with that. You know I don't mind solitude, Sari." She wrapped her legs around the smaller woman and applied a gentle hug.

"And sex?" Sari's voice wavered slightly with Adena's sudden display of affection. "What are you going to do about that?"

Adena smiled wickedly, "Well, if you really cared..."

"That's not funny." Sari tried to look severe but failed miserably and joined Adena in a chuckle, then leaned against her, absorbing her warmth. "I know you want her, Dena."

"Sari." Adena warned firmly. "There's no need to go assuming. You want to know anything, just ask. I'll tell you the truth."

"I know." She leaned back and smiled sweetly up at Adena. "It's ok to deny it for my benefit, but you really shouldn't do it for your own."

"I'm not denying anything, Sari."

"No?"

"No. You just inferred I wanted her. You didn't ask me if I did, and I didn't say I did or didn't, therefore I fail to see any denial."

"So you're admitting it?"

"Admitting what?"

Sari slapped her arm, glowering at Adena's chuckle. "You really know how to mess with people's minds, don't you?"

"Yeah," Adena admitted readily.

Sari shook her head. "What are we going to do with you?"

"Well, for starters, you can forget about match-making. Okay?"

Sari pursed her lips and shook her head. "I will not agree to any such thing. I want you to be happy."

"I'm happy."

Sari rolled her eyes. "Oh yeah, that was convincing. No you're not. You want to sleep with Tyler, and you haven't, so obviously that's not happiness."

"Lovemaking isn't my only enjoyment in life."

"There, you just admitted it." Sari smirked.

"No I didn't." Adena argued.

"Did so." Sari countered.

"Did not." Adena re-counterered.

"You baby." Sari gave her a poke. "Ok, Adena, do you want to sleep with Tyler?"

"Absolutely."

Sari pulled away. "So why haven't you?"

"Well, for starters, I don't know if she wants to sleep with me."

"How do you know what she wants if you keep ignoring her?" Sari asked, sneaking in the barb.

"Things will work out a lot better if I ignore her." She jumped down off the wall and they continued strolling along. "Maybe then she'll stop taking all my girlfriends away."

"I think you're making a big mistake, Dena."

"Drive carefully tonight, Sari."

"You're so mean."

"No, I just don't want to talk about it anymore."

Sari walked through the entrance to the park, turned and goaded, "And I know you want to sleep with me, too." She squeaked and ran when Adena came after her. She didn't go far, the threat of anyone in pursuit of her always freaked her out causing her to stop dead in her tracks and roll up into a self-protective ball. Adena didn't see Sari's hedgehog maneuver coming and crashed squarely into and over her, somersaulting a few times and finally coming to rest on her back near a hill of plowed snow.

Sari giggled, walking over on her knees and she sat beside Adena, brushing snow off her head and shoulders. "I'm sorry."

"I should bury you in this mound of snow." Adena sat up, whipping a handful of freshly fallen snow into Sari's face. And that was enough to start a war.

* * *

Tyler Warren was lying along the sofa listening to the stereo when Adena came in. She opened her eyes at the sound of the key and watched with a bemused expression as Adena strolled in covered with snow.

"How sweet, you brought the blizzard inside for me to see."

Adena, surprised Tyler was there, quickly masked her astonishment, gave her a clouded look and headed straight for the bathroom. She was changed and sitting in front of the computer not more than ten minutes later. Tyler stood in the doorway and emitted a sigh.

"What are you doing here, Tyler?"

"I came to beat you at chess again."

"Maybe later."

"Famous last words."

Adena smiled at the screen but did not turn. The intent to continue ignoring her friend was there, but the perseverance was rapidly faltering. She clicked with her mouse a few times and heard the front door open and shut. Cursing under her breath, Adena hopped up to go after her.

"Why is it every time *you* screw up, *I'm* the one who ends up apologizing?" she asked, catching up to Tyler's long-legged stride.

"There are instances of knowing it's far better to be friends than enemies, Adena. This is one of those instances."

The elderly woman in the next apartment to Adena's opened her door when she heard their voices in the hall.

"Evening, Mrs. Pendleton," Adena greeted, adding a smile for effect. "The hall's checked. You can feel safe in the knowledge that Ty and I are on the job." Adena took Tyler's arm and they walked back to the apartment door and shuffled inside containing their laughter until the door was closed.

Adena plopped down heavily on the sofa next to Tyler, her hand dropping onto Tyler's knee for a fleeting moment before she pointed out her newest girlfriend, grinning sheepishly.

"What do you think of Trudy, Ty? Is she something or what?"

Tyler's eyes had been following Trudy for a while as she'd been going from guest to guest, offering drinks. Trudy was aware of the attention.

Adena elbowed Tyler in the ribs. "Stop staring, girl, and tell me what you think." She looked at Tyler, and added, "Or is that your answer?" It wasn't the first time Tyler had been attracted to one of her girlfriends, and it wouldn't be the last.

"She's ok, I guess. I don't like blondes." She shrugged, and turned her head to look into Adena's eyes. "How do you feel about her?"

Adena noted the abrupt question, the sharp tone and drawl of Tyler's voice, and became immediately watchful. "Now what's the matter, Ty? If you're interested in her at least tell me this time."

"I've already said I didn't like blondes. You've known that for years, Adena."

"That hasn't stopped you yet." Adena had to forcefully pull her gaze from Tyler's, and once she had, she felt her breath releasing. Ok, time to ease up on the wine, she ordered herself. "Well, I swear, you aren't getting this one." She leaned her forearms on her thighs and glanced back at Tyler to see her reaction. When Tyler's eyes met hers, something inside Adena tightened. She quickly looked away from Tyler and back at Trudy, still making her way from guest to guest.

It was a large bash, where they each could introduce their new partner to one another's friends. Adena decided Trudy's friends were pretty neat, and from Trudy's animated expression, Adena ascertained Trudy was pleased with Adena's clique.

"So, what's going on with you and Rory?" Adena asked, not looking back at Tyler.

Tyler's expression was that of surprise. "How did you know about Rory and I?"

"You think I don't keep tabs on you, buddy?" She took a quick look at Tyler, her gaze forced to remain and she leaned back, her shoulder touching Tyler's. Their thighs pressed one against the other, muscle to

muscle. "I know every move you make." Her eyes dropped to Tyler's slightly parted lips and lingered. Suppressing a strong urge to kiss her in front of everyone, Adena looked back up into Tyler's eyes.

Not every move, Tyler thought with amusement, and her look intensified, drawing Adena in, making her sway closer. "Are we going to the beach Friday evening?"

"Friday?" Adena mentally went over all the excuses she could use on Trudy, whom she had promised to take to the Opera Friday. "I have a date with Trudy, Ty."

"So break it." Tyler shrugged. "It has been a tradition with us every year... The last day of march-"

"Damn it, Ty..."

"Elevenish?"

Adena sighed deeply. She didn't know why she hadn't just said yes in the first place; she always wound up bending to Tyler's will.

"Carpe diem, Adena."

Yes, Adena thought, 'make use of the present day'. The phrase reminded Adena of her college years when Tyler was rarely a part of her life, even if never far from her thoughts. But once she returned home, their friendship had resumed as if time itself had stopped, holding its breath until they were united again. So why was she feeling so guilty about not agreeing right away to go off with Tyler? And what about Tyler's attitude? This was a new twist. It was almost as if she didn't want Adena with Trudy, or was insulted that Adena could even think of considering Trudy's feelings first. Of course this could all be a part of Adena's over active imagination, with a sprinkling of wishful thinking thrown in.

Even so, she smiled for Tyler's inquiring stare and gave her a definite, "Ok."

"Good." Tyler was pleased. "I like it better when you're single."

"I'm not single this time, Ty."

"Scis quod dicunt... hodie adsit, cras absit."

"You know I don't believe that 'here today, gone tomorrow' shit, Ty."

"Que sera, sera."

"Abeo!" Adena stood and made to go, but Tyler restrained her with a simple touch on the thigh, and Adena sank back into the couch, letting Tyler capture her eyes once more.

Face close to Adena's, Tyler whispered, "You're beautiful, Adena."

Flushing at the compliment, Adena managed to drop her gaze for one fleeting moment. Okay, so it wasn't wholly 'wishful thinking', there was definitely interest on Tyler's end too. But before she could comment, if she were going to, Trudy was there with platter in hand, knocking her knee into Adena's.

"Want something, Sweetie?"

Tyler released Adena's gaze and turned her head slowly, eyes lifting up to lock onto Trudy's. Trudy involuntarily shivered and glanced away, to Adena.

"Nah, I'm fine." Adena jumped up, took the tray from her with a kiss. Tyler closely scrutinized it with a frown.

Adena smiled at Trudy, offering, "Why don't you and Ty get acquainted and I'll make a few rounds, hm?" She turned and walked off with the tray without noticing the abject look of panic on Trudy's face; she was the embodiment of fear.

Tyler stared after her best friend, admiring her in her crisp white shirt and blue jeans. The black loafers she wore made her step quiet as she wound her way through the clogged bodies. Tyler already knew each and every lean line of the redhead's body but looked anyway for the simple pleasure of the act. She watched her friend until she knew Trudy couldn't possibly take it any longer.

Adena's women were getting lovelier every time, although Tyler had indeed preferred Rory over all of them with her raven hair, and light hazel eyes that were always seeming to flare at everything. She'd been a challenge to Tyler, but Tyler had been confident, persistent and she'd conquered Rory just as she had all the rest--just like she knew she could have Trudy any time it pleased her. And she would have Trudy; there was no doubt in her mind about that.

Trudy felt it would be safer to go and join Adena, but she had to take one last glance at Tyler. It was the wrong choice. Tyler captured her within her sky blue stare and wouldn't release her, no matter how hard Trudy tried to get free. The blonde's pupils dilated, goose bumps lined her prickling flesh and she felt her legs begin to go weak. *Oh, God, I'm going to faint.* Trudy felt the room begin to spin and she fervently prayed that her legs would continue to hold her quaking body upright.

If anything, it was the blank expression in Tyler's eyes, on her face, that scared Trudy the most. Tyler was beautiful, incredibly beautiful, her face a deep mocha, intensifying the lightness of her eyes. Trudy had been

curious when Adena said Tyler was a body builder, and she had felt *something* she couldn't name when they spotted one another that very first time. But, on this night, Trudy couldn't bear the vacant looks as those cobalt eyes searched her out, expressionless, yet somehow intense, growing more so throughout the night. And now--again--Trudy was a victim of Tyler's stare, and she knew it, just as she knew her body was reacting in a sexual way to Tyler's. And then, unexpectedly, she was free; suddenly released. Tyler had moved her gaze onto something else. Trudy stumbled backwards. Pressing a hand to her forehead, she closed her eyes to hopefully get back her balance and not heave her dinner right on Adena's new beige rug.

Tyler stood, all six foot two of her, towering over the smaller Trudy, who barely hit 5'3. She thrust a hand out onto Trudy's elbow to steady her. "Are you ok?"

Trudy snatched her arm away, brown eyes glaring at Tyler. She stood very, very still, as if waiting for the scattered pieces of her shaken mind to settle. "Don't even try it. I know what you were doing to me, and don't think you're going to get away with it either." Trudy spun around and hurried off, disappearing into the crowd. She found Adena and told her everything from the moment she had first caught Tyler staring, to what had just occurred.

"Maybe she likes looking at you? You are incredibly beautiful; who wouldn't stare at you?" Noticing heads turning their way, Adena presented a charming smile, but her eyes pleaded with Trudy, begging her not to make a scene and ruin the party.

The comment, and the sincere look in Adena's eyes, calmed her, but Trudy still wanted Tyler out. "I would like you to ask her to leave."

Adena frowned. "Leave? I can't ask her to leave. Ty's been my best friend for years. You can't expect me to throw her out of my home!"

"Then *I'll* go."

Adena gritted her teeth when Trudy slammed the front door in her face. She turned back to her party and sighed in relief noticing that no one seemed to care about Trudy's angry parting; no one except Tyler, of course. Adena met her stare as she made her way back to the couch, her focus never wavering to look at anyone or anything else. She stood before Tyler, heart slamming, hands sweating, and knees about to buckle, when Tyler patted the sofa next to her and Adena gratefully dropped onto it.

Once their visual connection was broken, Adena kept her gaze away from Tyler's, reminding herself to be more careful. Something strange was

happening between them. It had been occurring over the last six months, and was coming to a head, whatever it was. More than anything, Adena was sure she was not ready to face it. So she quickly shifted her train of thought. "Where's Rory?"

"Home. Sick. She sends her regards." Tyler stared hollowly down at her entwined fingers.

"I'm not mad you stole her from me, you know; I just wish you would have forewarned me. I was starting to really like her."

"I know."

III

Trudy lightly traced a sleeping Tyler's jaw with her fingers until she opened those shocking blue eyes to the blonde's smile and slow kiss.

"What are you doing awake?" Tyler asked. "It's three in the morning."

Trudy lay back and pulled Tyler up and on top of her. "I want you again." Trudy laughed at her own lust, and her eyes burned with a need for Tyler's loving kisses. "Fuck me, Ty."

Trudy's climatic screams reverberated throughout the house until nearly dawn, when everything went quiet.

* * *

Adena stepped out of her jeans, her bathing suit on under her clothes, as usual. But she wasn't prepared for what Tyler apparently had planned.

"Strip," Tyler said, pulling her own jeans down strong, naked thighs while Adena stood captivated.

To Adena it sounded more like a command, but she found herself pulling her shirt off anyway, and then her suit, slowly revealing her own lithe body for Tyler, who was totally nude, her tall form playing a shadow across Adena's.

Tyler watched her with glowing eyes, trying not to appear too hungry for Adena, after all, the last time she'd seen her totally undressed was when they were fourteen.

"You're keeping yourself looking well," Tyler complimented.

Adena was sure she blushed down to her toes. She folded her arms over her stomach and stood there shivering, acutely conscious of her nudity, and Tyler's silent appraisal of that nudity. "I didn't know you had skinny

dipping on your mind, Ty. Maybe this isn't such a good idea; I'm freezing already."

"Nonsense. Come on, it'll be fun, Adena." She took Adena's hand, the back of her own lightly brushing against the smaller woman's nipple, and the thick thimble promptly responded. Adena was glad Tyler hadn't noticed, as she followed behind.

"Been keeping yourself looking well, too, I see."

Tyler stopped at the water's edge and turned, a smile waiting for Adena. She looked appreciatively at the woman she held in her grasp. "Do you realize it's been more than a decade since we've seen each other naked."

Adena blew out a breath from the side of her mouth then laughed. "I guess getting older kinda changes things."

"I want things back to the way they used to be, Adena. We see each other maybe once a week. We talk on the phone only twice a week; that's not the friendship we used to have."

"Yeah." Adena nodded. "Well, days are out for you, nights are out for me, so what's left? I'm sure you could play hooky once in awhile; I have for you. I'm here ready to freeze my ass off because of you. You could return the favor sometime."

"Let's not bicker. Let's swim before it gets too cold." She yanked on Adena's arm and sent her tipping forward into the chilly water.

After some play, with their bodies close, they waded into deeper water, just their heads poking out of the surface. Adena was growing ever more lost in Tyler's eyes.

Something brushed against Adena's thigh. She shrugged it off thinking it was floating seaweed, but when it happened again and the touch remained, Adena realized it was Tyler's fingers splayed out on her hip.

Tyler floated around to the back of Adena, her other hand coming to Adena's right hip. She pulled Adena through the water and up against her body.

"What are you doing, Ty?"

"Do you like it?"

Two hands came up to her breasts. Adena inadvertently moaned pleurably at the contact. Tyler held Adena like that; nipples between her fingers, applying just the slightest pressure.

"That's not pertinent, Ty." She shook off the feeling of wanting to remain in Tyler's embrace for eternity. "Why you're doing it is." She turned

and came face to face with Tyler, immediately losing herself in two deep pools of cobalt.

Tyler's legs pumped hard in the water, keeping them both afloat as she gripped Adena's ass, maintaining her hold on those dashing greens. "Oh, I think it's pertinent, Adena. Everything in life is." She released Adena, swam away and turned back, eyes twinkling.

Frowning, Adena swam up to the sand and pulled herself out of the water. She walked with heavy legs to their towels. She had just sat when Tyler appeared, staring down at her, body dripping water. Adena couldn't help watching two drops that fell from Tyler's dark nipples, her eyes staying with them as they made their speedy descent to the sand below. Her eyes lifted, and she slowly followed the muscular lines of Tyler's long legs to her waist.

"What do you want, Adena?" Tyler asked. Maybe it was in fact time. She would see.

"I wanna know if you stole Trudy, too?"

Tyler's eyes told the truth. Then her mouth followed. She recanted the whole affair for Adena.

That was more than Adena wanted to know and the anger, hurt and guilt came at her without mercy. Without a word, she hurriedly dressed, snatched up her belongings, and headed for home.

The next morning didn't find her in a better frame of mind so she called her boss at work and said she was sick and would be in later if she felt up to it. She felt sick all right. She felt like a fool.

Tyler called the office for Adena and promptly went to her apartment when she learned Adena had stayed home for the day.

When she would not release the bell, ringing it for ten minutes to the sloppy tune of "jingle bells"-- the building's superintendent hadn't changed it since the past Christmas-- Adena flung open the door and glared up at her. Tyler smiled in return and pushed her back in, kicking the door closed behind them.

Adena didn't know where to put her eyes, anything but the direct hit of Tyler's stare. She turned to find a pair of jeans to throw on. Her nightshirt was feeling far too flimsy for the argument she was almost certain would commence.

"I'm sorry for anything my actions put you through, Adena. I had hoped..." Tyler fell into memory – her last memory of Adena's hurt expression at the beach was impossibly clear.

"The time for excuses, or even of acceptance of those excuses is over, Ty. I'm trying to live my life, find a partner and be happy. Why do you keep interfering in that dream? Just because we were the best of friends," Tyler noted the were, "closer than most, doesn't give you the right to decide my fate, or even attempt to."

"And what about us Adena? Do you think, in that muddy little brain of yours, that what's been going on between *us* the past few months is nothing?" Tyler glowered at her.

"Nothing has been going on between us," Adena knowingly lied, "Besides, you seem awfully occupied these days, what with taking Rory and Trudy back-to-back."

"Well, dear heart, things change- become clearer over time. I never belonged with either of them- with any of them." Tyler's face seemed to puff up as she looked down at her hands, which were clasped tightly to the back of the chair she stood behind.

Adena watched Tyler struggle with too many emotions. She was fighting to keep her composure. Adena had seen Tyler like this before, biting back the pain. Adena felt herself soften. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

Tyler shrugged, feeling foolish, but answered anyway. "I'm just tired of feeling like women are doing me a required service. Like they've suddenly realized I was there and somebody had to love me."

Adena stroked her fingers through Tyler's hair, her own expression reflecting Tyler's pain.

Tyler took her hand and pressed it to her cheek. "Sharing each others hurt, just like we used to do..."

Adena let her hand fall to rest on Tyler's shoulder. She was beginning to tighten up. Tyler was getting closer to those emotions that she was still not yet ready to explore.

Tyler eyed her, getting a clear indication of what Adena feared. "There's nothing for you to be afraid of here, Adena. I don't believe this is a coincidence- you and I coming to be friends again even after the four years when you went away to college. We can have friendship, and more, if you allow it. Can you honestly say that you and I-

Adena swallowed involuntarily, feeling like a cartoon character from the obvious noise her tight, dry throat made. "What's the difference does any of this make? If I can't trust you, how are we supposed to go anywhere from here? Do you think it's that easy for me to let go of the past? It's all

very fresh and real to me. You don't realize what it's like to keep having your heart broken Ty, and by your best friend no less-" she broke off, having no desire to let Tyler see her cry, she moved across the room.

Tyler went to her, but did not touch her. She simply stood behind her, close enough to breathe in the subtle scent of her hair. "Then tell me what it's like. If you think I don't know, then tell me."

Adena turned and stared blankly at her. Then she stated flatly, "I need to get to work, I'm late." She tried to move toward her room.

"Liar, you called in sick." Tyler stood firmly in her path. "Don't ignore me, say something-- say anything. Just let me know you heard me."

"I heard you, Ty." Adena walked around Tyler and into her bedroom, closing the door between them. She stood at the edge of the bed, wanting to hurt Ty, wanting revenge. But she couldn't do it, not to Tyler, not this way, not any way. She came out and saw Tyler just stepping out of the front door.

"Wait!" she called with tired urgency. She went to her and guided Tyler back inside, closing the door. They each stood, staring at their feet, until Adena gathered herself.

"Look at me Adena," Tyler's soft whisper came like a sudden crash in their silence. She took Adena's hands in her own and held them.

Adena's eyes, full of hurt and confusion, met Tyler's.

"What do you see?" Tyler asked with a hint of reservation.

"You."

"Tell me what you *see*," Tyler demanded.

"Everything. I see – too much." It was in fact far too much for her to bear-- the raw passion on Tyler's otherwise blank face, in her eyes. It was all too confusing for Adena. She couldn't comprehend such emotion.

"Yes, *too* much. Now think about what you see when you look at other women and what's in them when they stare back. Don't you think you deserve to be with someone who feels just as much as you're seeing here now?"

Adena took her hands away and held them, looking at them, not able to hold their eyes in such honesty. There was something about Tyler, in her, that deep down in Adena's conscious she knew she was not able to handle.

"I need time, Ty."

"That's all I have Adena, is time." She lifted Adena's hands to her lips and placed a gentle kiss upon the supple skin there. "Were you as soft as this when we met?" Her words hung in the air between them.

Adena could but only smile.

"The spirit of heaven is naked when glimpsed in your smile," Tyler whispered close to her face. She abruptly dropped Adena's hands and left.

IV

"So, when are you going to get off your ass and make Adena yours, Baby?"

Tyler watched her mother sifting her hands through a thick pile of dirt, only to find a large stone, lift it out and toss it over her shoulder. Margery looked up at Tyler when she took too long to answer.

"Soon, Mom, soon." Tyler's eyes were on the joists just above her head, her nose filled with the musty odor around her and the fresh smell of new dirt. One bulb hung beside her, swinging gently from the bump of her shoulder as she passed by it. Shadows were gray and dark, floating in every available space. Tyler remembered her own boring basement. Well, what were basements supposed to look like? she mused.

"There, that should do it." Margery stood, brushing her hands off on her black jeans. Tiny veins of perspiration flowed down her long neck, then disappeared into the fabric of her black sweat-jacket. "Was Sally still upstairs?" She dropped an arm around Tyler's waist.

"Mm-hmm."

"So, how soon is soon?" Margery pulled the light cord above her head. They uneventfully made their way through the sudden blackness to the stairs.

"I'm working on her, Mom. I should have started years ago."

"Hey, you two!" Sally circled her arms around Margery and pulled her closer for a kiss. Tyler watched them, her gaze becoming detached, her mind traveling elsewhere.

"It's a damn mess down there, Sal; we really have to clean that place out."

Sally winked at Tyler's smirk. "I know, Marge, we will, soon as we clean out the attic, and finish planting the flowers in the yard, and trimming the hedges..."

"Okay. Okay. Don't remind me." Margery held her head, feeling a migraine coming on, thinking of all the work they still had to do on the old Victorian. After both their husbands had passed away years ago, it had taken them only a few months to realize they were free and to decide to sell their houses and jointly purchase the large dwelling. Restoration had been part of the deal, but wasn't that supposed to be the fun part?

"It's late, I gotta go."

"So soon? But you just got here, Honey." Margery complained, filling a kettle for tea. "At least stay and have tea with your mother. How long has it been since she was here, Sal?"

"Oh, about a month I'd say." Sally grinned up at Tyler and indicated a chair. "Sit."

Tyler turned the chair around and straddled it. "Are you happy now?" she asked them both.

"No, not until you and Adena are together."

"Sometimes things have to be taken slowly."

"You're *too* damn slow, Ty. Your mother and I made the decision to be together the very first night, and here we are, twenty some odd years later perfectly happy and content with each other, as you should be with Adena by now."

"I'm working on it. If I rush it'll be false, and I want her to truly want to be with me."

"Oh hosh-posh," Margery waved her hand at her daughter, using the other to pour the steaming water in the cups.

Sally giggled at her lover's reaction. "Yeah, hosh-posh!"

Margery gave Tyler a firm look. "You listen to me, girl, stop dragging your ass. You've let that girl nearly get away from you, so get with the program, kiddo."

"Yes, Mother."

V

Adena parked her Blazer in the empty parking lot and grabbed her duffel bag. In it were the running shoes she would slip into before hitting the track. Running after her shift ended at 2 a.m. was a release she looked forward to at least once a week. Upon cresting the hill overlooking the bleachers, the silhouette of a runner rounding a curve of the track below floated into view. Adena felt a flutter in her heart as she recognized the darkened figure. She sat on the top bleacher to pull on her shoes; mentally acknowledging the action was merely an excuse to just sit for a few minutes in admiration of the grace and athleticism of the runner. Tyler was the only person Adena knew, beside herself, who loved jogging at night.

Happily, but with a worried rippling growing in her stomach, Adena jogged down the steps between the bleachers and opened the gate. The spring action of the metal closed the opening behind her as she stepped onto the track, waiting for Tyler to catch up.

"Evenin', Adena," Tyler greeted when she fell into step beside her friend. "Don't you usually come jogging on Wednesdays?"

"Mm-hmm. I was restless, I guess." Adena remained silent as they ran around the track twice. With more urgency than intended, Adena asked, "Why haven't you come over?"

"You were angry at me." Ty answered without missing a beat.

"It's been three weeks, how's screwing Trudy going?"

Ty released an exasperated snort. "Don't be crude."

Adena laughed and shoved Tyler into an outside lane with a hearty push on the shoulder. "Crude? Who's being what, hm? It's not me that steals every girl you've ever dated, now is it?" She let Tyler fall back into stride beside her.

"You two wouldn't have made it anyway; she's a dog lover."

Adena just shook her head as she jogged onto the grassy field in the center of the track. Chest heaving, she fell onto her knees, then rolled down

on her back, breathing out white clouds in the glare of the last spotlight the bored teenagers in town hadn't broken.

"Come over here," Tyler invited, dropping onto a darker spot of grass where the lamp's light didn't quite reach.

Adena obeyed, didn't even consider not to. She lay down beside Tyler, rolling onto her side to look at her profile: such a strong, chiseled face, taut jaw, straight nose, and steely blue eyes. Adena loved her friend's face, her body, the way she talked, how she sounded. She reached a hand up and touched Tyler's jaw a moment, then touched her bottom lip with a shaky thumb.

"What do you need, Adena?" Tyler asked, turning her head to meet Adena's desiring eyes.

"To kiss you."

"Like when we were eight?"

"No, like two adults." She leaned closer, half her body resting on Tyler's, and they kissed for the second time in their lives. It was much smoother than the first time, and it lasted a lot longer. At some point, Adena pulled her body onto Tyler's. She was now laying totally on Tyler, her legs intertwined in Tyler's. In a fevered whisper, Adena said, "Well, now I know how you keep them away from me, so why don't you tell me how you get them away from me?"

"Let's continue this first." Tyler had a hand cupped around Adena's neck, and she pulled Adena down, meeting her mouth with a searching caress. She rolled over onto Adena, chills wiggled up and down her chest as Adena let out a moan of pleasure. "Yes, Adena. It's good, right?"

"So good, Ty." She held both sides of Tyler's face in her hands, keeping her still as she moved her mouth over Tyler's, pulling deeply on it, sucking in Tyler's hot tongue.

Tyler pulled free, staring deeply into Adena's eyes, mesmerizing her with their cerulean glare. "Tell me you want me, Adena."

"I want you, Ty."

Tyler kissed her again, so passionately Adena came. When Tyler broke their connection, Adena lay there staring up into her eyes. Her stupor was obvious. "How did you do that?"

"I can do it again, Adena. I can do anything your heart desires if you want me to; all you have to do is say you'll be mine."

"But I don't understand, Ty. You just made me come with only a kiss; that's not possible."

Tyler smiled, brushing Adena's hair from her eyes as a subtle wind blew around their clasped bodies. "Anything's possible; just tell me you'll be mine, Adena."

Adena stared up at her, confused. "Why now? Why not a year ago, two years ago? Why not my first? Why not your first?"

"I wasn't ready then. I'm ready for you now, Adena, and you're finally ready for me."

"We'd ruin our friendship, Ty; remember, we vowed."

"Yes," Tyler agreed, nodding. "And it was also a pact that no matter what, we would stay friends."

"Sex breaks up friendships, Ty."

"Not this friendship, Adena, it's sealed in blood, in a kiss. You're mine, and I'm yours."

"Friends, you mean?"

Tyler's eyes darkened. "Not only friends, Adena, *lovers*, mates-- soul mates. You'll never be with anyone else; I won't let you."

Adena shifted, but couldn't move far, so she lay there staring up at Tyler. "Is that why you've been taking all of my girlfriends?"

"That's one reason, the main reason." She leaned on an elbow, fingers stroking Adena's lips, blue eyes gently caressing green. "I love you, Adena..."

Adena fell into her, and a smile caressed her lips as she watched Tyler's mouth coming closer for another kiss. "Let's go to my place, Ty. I want to be more intimate with you."

"We will, Baby, we will. Just tell me you want to be mine and you'll have me, and I'll give you your every desire."

"I want to be yours, Tyler."

Tyler's lips came down on Adena's softly. She kissed her chin, her lips, grazed her mouth over Adena's eyelids, until finally she buried her mouth in the crook of Adena's neck and shoulder.

Epilogue

"Are they playing nicely?" Sally asked, looking over her shoulder at Margery.

Margery chuckled, pulled the curtain aside and watched their daughters sitting on the porch steps kissing.

"They're fine, still kissing up a storm. Just like always."

"I'm so glad they'll be partners forever," Sally swooned, idly spinning a spoon through the soup.

"Yes, just like us."

"Just like us."

* * *

"You ready yet?" Tyler asked, pulling back.

Adena was trembling. "Will it hurt?"

"Not at all, I've done it dozens of times. Here, cock your head, let me see your neck."

Adena tilted her head, exposing the fine cords to her friend. She squeezed her eyes shut, waiting.

"Beautiful... So beautiful, Adena," Tyler whispered, closing in on Adena's neck. She smoothed her tongue over the warm flesh, licking upward, ending with a kiss behind Adena's ear.

Adena's stomach surged with excitement, and she leaned into Tyler's caress as Tyler stroked her cheek softly, a calming gesture she never used with anyone else, not even Rory when she took her.

Tyler dragged her lips over Adena's smooth skin, reveling in its feel, impassioned in the act alone. She felt her canines sharpen as she bore down on Adena's flesh gently, just scratching the surface.

Adena was calmed by Tyler's breathing; deep, raspy, uneven, and she knew of Tyler's passion for it was of the same breed as her own: pure want.

Abruptly Tyler stood and held out her hand. "Come on, come with me."

Adena didn't ask where, she just went, smiling when they reached Adena's bedroom and not the coffins below in the basement. Maybe Tyler still wasn't going to do it, maybe they were just going to make love again. Adena hoped for both, her body missed Tyler's passionate ravaging.

Tyler lay with her in bed, body half on Adena's, as she brushed the hair away from her neck. "I wasn't comfortable downstairs," she explained as she tilted Adena's head for her, leaning forward, breath becoming hotter as she drew nearer to the sinewy cords pinpointed in her vision.

Tyler ripped Adena's shirt open, circling her hands around the voluptuous breasts, bending to take a nipple between her teeth, teasing it with her tongue, taunting it with the tip of one canine directly in the center.

Just knowing how badly Tyler wanted her made Adena's chest ache, and she shivered as Tyler bit down a little harder, yet there still wasn't any pain, only the impression of a very sharp point. She watched Tyler sucking

her nipple, and that was enough to cause a surge between her thighs--thighs that Tyler's long fingers were gripping as she came up for a kiss. Adena opened her mouth wider under Tyler's, felt her strong tongue coil around her own, a jolt of desire burned through her. She could feel the canines, but as of yet had not seen them. She tried to pull back to see them, but Tyler held the nape of her neck, locking their mouths together. Adena gave up on the urge and offered herself to Tyler's avid kiss.

Their eyes locked as Tyler slowly moved her tongue in and out of Adena's mouth. She held Adena's wrists to the bed on either side of her head, her hips moving discreetly from side to side, her want obvious, and her intention clear.

But first... She brought her lips again to Adena's neck, smoothing her long teeth over the prickling skin, letting Adena get used to their feel.

Adena closed her eyes again, having already prepared herself for this moment two months ago, but still Tyler had hesitated. Adena knew she was worried. She'd done her best to assure Tyler that she, Adena Vorean, wanted to be with her forever, wanted Tyler's kiss of everlasting life. As she reflected, Tyler's teeth sank into her flesh, her warm blood spouting into Tyler's mouth as she drank of her best friend, draining her of her life.

* * *

"You can open your eyes now."

Adena smiled inwardly at the memory of her expression as a wide-eyed 8-year-old little girl, 'Wow, it didn't hurt!' And of the response from her best friend, 'I told ya.'

Adena opened her eyes, lifting them to rest on Tyler's mouth and the smear of blood on her ruby red lips. The tips of the canines made tiny indentations in the fuller bottom lip. A while before, Tyler's pallor had reminded Adena of what she really was, but now, after having taken in Adena's nourishing blood, her face glowed with health. She was the most beautiful woman Adena had ever seen.

"No regrets?" Tyler asked.

"No regrets."

"Ad infinitum, Adena."

"To infinity, Tyler..."