

## *Chapter 6*

“So let’s talk about the jerks who dumped you,” Dave said. “Did they have names?”

“Yeah, Allen, Clive and Neil,” Dei turned toward the fort again. “Can we at least sit down for this?”

Dave followed her.

“Like I said before, they couldn’t deal with the aftermath of what had happened to me. They left for ... warmer pastures.”

“I don’t understand,” Dave sounded genuinely puzzled.

“They found women who could give them what they wanted,” Dei explained patiently, “and I accepted that I’d spend my life alone.”

“Surely you don’t mean forever!” Dave was shocked.

“When Clive dumped me, I finally admitted that marriage isn’t for me,” Dei shrugged.

“But why?”

“I’m damaged goods,” Dei breathed very carefully, trying to keep her

emotions in control. Of all the things that had happened to her, this was the one thing that still hurt intensely. “I have nothing to bring to the marriage bed.”

“Oh bull!” She was shocked at Dave’s intensity.

“What do you mean, ‘bull’?”

“You’re a passionate woman, Dei. Someday you’re going to make some man a wonderful wife.”

“You don’t understand, Dave,” Dei choked back tears as she stared at the ground. “I tried with Clive. I told you about Neil and Kathy. Well, Allen had a pregnant fiancée within six months of breaking up with me. I didn’t want to lose Clive too, so I decided I’d go all the way for him. The whole waiting thing obviously wasn’t working for me. We were in his room and it was intense and he was more than ready and I freaked out. I started shaking and screaming for him to get off of me. He called me ... well, the nicest part was ‘frigid ... witch’ then he stormed into his bathroom. We were done after that night.”

“He was wrong Dei,” Dave’s voice was hard and angry. Dei didn’t want to look at him. “He should’ve never treated you like that in the first place, like some two-bit prostitute who didn’t deserve anything better. You’re a child of God. You deserve to be treated with love and respect, not made to feel like you’re defective if you don’t do what the world says is okay but your heart tells you is wrong.”

“I don’t ...,” Dei shook her head slightly. “I want to believe you.”

“Believe me!” Dave said emphatically. “There’s *nothing* wrong with you!”

Dei looked up at the stars, trying to open the door to the hope that was knocking at her heart.

Suddenly Dave wrapped his hand in her hair and pulled her toward him. His eyes glittered in the streetlight just before they disappeared as his lips covered hers and her eyes fluttered shut.

It was a kiss that Dei felt all the way to her toes. Her arms snaked up around Dave’s neck. Suddenly she realized he was standing, wrapping her in his arms, pressing her to his chest. Their hearts beat wildly at cross-purposes but somehow in perfect rhythm.

They were both trembling when he broke off the kiss and almost dropped her to her feet.

“I’m sorry,” Dave groaned. “I shouldn’t have done that.”

Dei stiffened. She thought it had been perfect.

Dave captured her upper arms with his large warm hands.

“Don’t even think about misinterpreting what I just said!” he hissed softly. “If you do, I’ll kiss you again.”

She tried to figure out why that would be a bad idea.

Nothing came to her at the moment. She stared up at him with misty eyes.

“This was wrong for a number of reasons,” Dave answered her unspoken question, “but not because there’s anything wrong with you. In fact you’re too perfect.”

Dave gently cupped her face in both his hands. “But we barely know each other, Dei. I haven’t earned the right to ask you for a kiss, much less take one without permission. I just couldn’t bear the thought of you thinking something was wrong with you. I couldn’t think of any other way to show you. But it backfired on me.”

Dei felt Dave’s hands tremble. She knew it took great effort for him to drop his hands and step back from her.

“I’ve never experienced a kiss like that before,” Dave said in awe. “I’d marry you tomorrow if you promised to kiss me like that again. But we’re not even friends yet, Dei. And now we might not ever be. Now this is between us. It was too powerful, too incredible to ignore. It’ll color every conversation we have. Will I gloss over issues, refuse to be honest, just because I want to get to the place where I can ask you for another kiss? Will you pretend that the pain you’re still hiding isn’t that important, just because you’re afraid it’ll keep me from ever kissing you again?”

He was right. She was sorely tempted to throw all caution to the wind. She wanted Dave to kiss her again.

“Now that I’ve way jumped the gun, we’ve got to figure out a way to go back. Not exactly start over, but certainly go back to when we didn’t know that .... Well, that we were capable of that. I don’t think you have much more experience in that direction than I do. How do we do it? How do we overlook this? I met you two days ago and I didn’t even like you. Now I know Dad’s right, but it’s even worse than he said. I’m going to have to marry you or find a new best friend.”

“Excuse me?” Dei stared at him in shock.

“Can we really be ‘just friends’ after that kiss?” Dave stepped closer again.