

“Dana”

By Dirty Dawg

Shopping for her that Christmas had become quite a problem. She was my best friend, and in a perfect world, we'd be dating. But as anyone can tell you with a quick look around...this world ain't perfect. I lusted after Dana with the lust only the truly infatuated and completely unsatisfied can. If I were to open my personal mental dictionary and look up the word 'perfection', Dana's smiling face would be staring right back at me.

And, if you listened to her personal definition of 'perfect man,' I fit the bill completely...except for one crucial detail. She wanted someone “Funny, warm, sensitive, caring, not afraid to show his emotions...” And then, always, she would add, to my chagrin, “...oh, and sexually attractive.”

Well, if you haven't guessed by *now* in which category I'm deficient in, let's just say that I *am* funny, warm, sensitive, caring and not afraid to show his emotions. GET THE PICTURE? What I did have was an absolutely undying love for this woman, a love that was fueled by lots of late-night and early-morning fantasies. She once asked me if I fantasized about 'us,' and if so, what were my fantasies.

I told her quite honestly that I *did* have sexual fantasies about her, but in the overall scheme of things, that was only about one-tenth of the total fantasy/sex content ratio. The rest of the time, it was about dumb, romantic things like walking down the beach hand in hand, having dinner in some classy restaurant together, doing the dishes together, having people over to 'our' apartment...dumb, adolescent stuff like that, stuff I

craved with every fiber and nerve ending of my being. And I knew with the deepest, most moral and emotional certainty that if we ever *did* get together, she would be popping her head against a brick wall for taking so damn long.

I'm one of those guys who's always on the outside looking in; a little smarter than the rest of the people around me, a little funnier, a little more 'hip', in a weird, Nick-at-night kind of way. When it came to answering the questions on Jeopardy!, I had no equal. When it came to playing Trivial Pursuit, everyone wanted to be on my team. When a female friend bought a new VCR and had no idea how to program it or get cable channels, they always, invariably called me. Manual? Who needed a manual? I'd scoot down in front of it, pushing my glasses back up my nose as I instantly decoded what the problem was and fixed it. If it was electronic and had some way of interfacing with the world, I could figure it out.

It was the flesh and blood computers, the one with the two large disk drives in front and the core memory underneath that I could never reverse-engineer and decode. They spoke in a language as foreign to me as binary is to most people. I swear to God, if I heard the “Let's Just Be Friends,” speech one more time, I was going to kill something.

But Dana was different. She knew on some private mental plane that I was hopelessly in love with her, but didn't make me feel bad about it, didn't ridicule me about it. She rejected my affections without making me feel bad, and in my own private hell, that earned her high marks. So we remained friends, good friends, the kind of friend that will call you last thing at night and first thing in the morning...just to talk. Just to hear the sound of each other's voice, the sound of each other's laughter coming over the line. We had private jokes, inside little comments that we threw back and forth like a personal, private code that only we could understand.

If it were possible to have a love affair without the sex, Dana and I did. We were closer than most boyfriends and girlfriends, and we reveled in it.

But, as with all things of this nature, there were invisible lines drawn, unspoken but understood limits that we could never cross. Or, actually, that *I* could never cross. You see, it was somehow OK for her to call me and tell me about her latest boyfriend and what a stud he was between the sheets, and how he treated her like a queen. But it was *not* ok for me to talk about the women in my life (what few there were...) because that hurt her feelings. I know, this sounds incredibly masochistic, but those were the rules, and I stood by them and tried to quell the little flutter in my heart and the twisting knot of agonizing pain in my gut I felt every time Dana started dating someone new. That's not even mentioning the times I'd call her first thing in the morning and some man's voice would answer. Those times absolutely fucking sucked.

Or the times she would regale with me tales of her sexual activity. Like the time she and one boyfriend flooded out the bathroom because of some bathtub gymnastics. Or the weekend she spent in front of a fireplace with another guy, twisting their bodies into impossible positions for hours on end.

I know.

Love's a bitch.

So here I was, Christmas shopping for the most important woman in my life, and there were still rules I had to follow: Nothing too personal. Nothing even vaguely sexual. Safe things, like sweaters and books and videos. Possibly a CD or two. But nothing personal, private...nothing that she could cherish and treasure for the rest of her life as having come from my hands and heart.

Oh, sure, I'd broken the rule once or twice. Like the time I sent her a vibrator as a joke. She told me that there was a dearth of male action twixt her sheets, and I helped her out with this glow-in-the-dark, plug-into-the-wall latex vibrator that was huge. She loved it, and we nicknamed it "Glow Worm."

I'd given her a priceless Japanese porcelain mask to hang on her bedroom wall. It'd cost me almost six hundred dollars. It was a birthday present. You know what she gave me that year?

A keychain.

In the shape of a guitar.

I don't even *play* guitar!

So, anyway, being the miserable, self-abusing asshole that I am, I was shopping for Christmas and trying to figure out what to get her. The mall had shown me everything it had, and I had one of two reactions to every possible gift:

Reaction #1 : Not personal enough.

Reaction #2 : Too personal.

I hate Christmas. What did I have to look forward to? My parents were long since dead, my sister had her own thing going with a husband and two kids and her husband's entire family. She'd made it more than clear that as long as I sent her a check every month, she'd be happy if I stayed away. My brother was off in some far-away country with the Navy SEALs, and so was not going to be celebrating Christmas this year, unless it was to stick a Bowie knife in his mouth, sneak up and slit the throat of some unsuspecting guard somewhere. Dana was spending it with her new boyfriend, Ralph.

He was ten years younger and looked like a male model, and if you could believe Dana, had this thing between his legs that would make Mr. Ed hang his head in shame. So much for *my* Christmas Eve.

Anyway, I was passing through the lingerie department when something inside me snapped. I wasn't going to be sorry for my feelings anymore. I was going to give this fucking woman a real

gift, a gift from the heart. Something classy and sexy at the same time, something beautiful and precious and wonderful, just like the way I saw her.

I spoke to a salesclerk and explained what I was looking for. She smiled at me and asked Dana's size. I had all that information in my address book, under "D." I read off all of Dana's measurements, obtained by going through her closet when she was in the bathroom. (It always amazed Dana that I managed to get everything right without asking....hehe...)

She brought it out and wrapped it in front of me. It was a teddy, emerald green with black lace trimming. I'd seen it on a mannequin, and knew immediately that Dana's long curly blonde hair and sea-foam blue-green eyes would do that outfit *justice*. A little part of me was sad that I'd never get to see her in it. A couple of years ago I was planning to get her another present along those lines, and she somehow found out about it and was kidding me on the phone.

"Hey," I'd said, "I won't buy you *anything* I don't get to see you in." And that had been the end of it; she hadn't had a response to *that* statement.

But this time it was different. I asked the salesclerk for a small card, like the one you send with flowers. I thought for a moment, and then remembered a little ditty from Willy Shakespeare:

*"To me, fair friend, you never can be old
For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
Such seems your beauty still."*

I wrote it on the card and taped it to the outside of the box. It was three days to Christmas, and I planned to drop it off at her apartment that night. But I got paged by work, and had to go in and rewrite some system utilities, and that turned into a forty-hour programming marathon. It was Christmas Eve, about noon, when I finally emerged from my office and told my secretary that I was calling it a night.

I walked in the door to a ringing telephone.

"Hello?"

"Rick!" The voice was Dana, and she was crying.

"What's the matter, honey?"

"That bastard Ralph! He broke up with me today!" She started crying again, long wracking sobs that tugged at my heart and made me wish evil things to happen to Ralph. Things involving anthills and honey.

"I'll be right over," I said, and hung up. The drive to Dana's apartment took six minutes. I walked in, as I always did when I knew she was alone, and found her on the couch, feet curled under her, crying into her hands. I went to her, sat on the couch, and gathered her shaking form into my arms, doing my wonderful best friend/Dutch uncle/good buddy routine.

She felt wonderful in my arms, like she belonged there. I was just over six feet, and Dana stood five-nine. Five-eleven in heels, so when we danced on those rare occasions, her head fit wonderfully on my shoulder. I chased those thoughts out of my head as I stroked her back.

"What happened?" I asked softly.

"He c-c-called me, and t-t-t-told me that he d-d-d-didn't w-w-want to s-s-s-see me anym-m-m-more," she sobbed. "He s-s-said that he m-m-met someone else!" She dissolved into another round of crying, and I let her get it out of her system. We had this routine down pat. Dana would cry, I would hold her, I would tell her what a bastard he was and that he didn't know what he was giving up (and thus saying without saying that *I* knew what he was giving up and was ready, *anytime*, to take up the slack...but that's part of the dynamics of the relationship...)

So we went through the script. Neither of us flubbed a line. Finally, all cried out, she asked, "What are your plans tonight?"

"I don't have any," I said.

"Oh, Good. I'd hate to be alone." It sort of annoyed me that she automatically assumed that I'd spend the night with her, but there wasn't much I could do about it now. So, we made dinner, ate it, did the dishes (just like in my fantasy,) and sat down to watch "It's a Wonderful Life" on TBS. She loves that movie, and as usual, was in tears by the end. I must admit, I was also a little damp around the edges, and she knew it. I didn't care if she did or not.

We sat in silence, with her head on my chest as the credits rolled, and then the screen went to commercial.

We started talking about Jimmy Stuart, and what a great actor he was, always playing sweet, warm, sensitive men.

"Now why can't I meet someone like that?" Dana complained. "Someone kind and sweet and warm and funny and sensitive?" I'd heard this perhaps a thousand times before, and each time had kept silent. My arm was around her shoulder, and my hand reflexively closed, gripping her tightly, so great was my sudden anger.

Keeping my voice even so as not to let on, I finally said what I'd been waiting to say for as long as I can remember. "Yeah, it must be pretty tough to find someone like that. I mean, someone so funny that you can just call them on the phone whenever you're sad and he'll cheer you up. Someone so warm that whenever something happens to him, either good or bad, the first thing he wants to do is call you and share it with you. It's so hard to find someone sensitive, someone who cries at the end of "Wonderful Life." Someone so sweet that they write poetry to you for your birthday." I had done all of those things, and I knew she knew it. Sarcastically, I added, "Yeah...must be *real* tough finding someone like that."

She didn't say a word. I dropped my hand from her shoulder and walked into the kitchen to get another beer. I was disgusted with myself for finally saying it...at ten to midnight on Christmas Eve.

"Oh!" Dana said, sitting up. "Your present! I almost forgot!" She ran into her bedroom and returned with a box. It had polka-dotted wrapping paper and looked like a huge dice. (die?) I took it and opened it carefully, smiling at her.

I pulled out a coffee mug. It said "Bestest Best Friend" on it. I exclaimed that it was *just* what I needed, and that I loved her for the sentiment. I kissed her on the cheek and she smiled at me with shiny eyes. I told her I'd be right back, and retrieved my present from my car.

Suddenly, I was scared. She was going to freak. I knew it.

I handed her the box and watched carefully as she opened it, ready with an excuse or an explanation as soon as she saw it and went ballistic.

Amazingly enough, that didn't happen. She read the card and smiled at me. (I'm sure that I'd have to explain it to her later...she was never a Shakespeare fan...) Then she folded back the tissue paper and saw what it

was. Squealing, she lifted it by the straps and held it in front of her.

"It's gorgeous," she breathed. "And my favorite color!" (Actually, her favorite color is *forest* green, not emerald green, but I wasn't going to correct her at *this* point.) She suddenly leaned over and kissed me straight on the lips.

Let me make something clear at this point. The entirety of our physical contact over the past six years had been two wonderful hugs, some slow dancing at a mutual friend's wedding, several kisses on cheeks here and there...and this kiss.

It was over in an instant, but it was an instant that would be burned into my mind forever.

She jumped up and ran into her bedroom, slamming the door behind her. I knew that she was trying it on, and I wondered if she remembered what I'd said about giving her sexy clothing. I turned my attention to the TV and tried hard not to imagine Dana stripping her clothes off to try this new present on. I flipped around and found some choir singing "Joy To The World" on cable and watched the sopranos reaching for those high notes. My mind began to drift and fantasize, and in my dream I imagined us married, on Christmas morning, watching our children opening presents and giggling, me standing behind Dana, my arms around her waist, the both of us in comfortable, fuzzy bathrobes as we watched our prodigy open their gifts. I got lost in that comfortable fantasy, turning it over and over, looking at it from different angles, the way a film director might, looking for the best shot.

And then, as always, that sad little tug at my heart as the fantasy machine ran out of steam and told me that it would never be, that I was chasing rainbows again, that I should be happy with things the way they stood, and that I should find someone to love, someone that would love me as much as I loved Dana.

The idea that there might actually *be* someone like that was, of course, ludicrous.

Snorting to myself, I changed the channel to HBO. "Ghost" was playing, and I watched Demi Moore and Patrick whathisname make slow love after smearing clay over each other. That closeness, that physical intimacy that was made so much better by the already-established emotional intimacy made me teary eyed. And as always, when I watched two characters in love kiss on screen, I felt like I was having a heart attack. This little pain starts in the middle of my chest, about heart-high, and then makes a sharp left and descends...and then slowly fades away. I'm not sure what that is, but I feel it. The most intense I ever felt it was when I saw Dana kissing her boyfriend in the mall. She didn't see me, didn't know I was there, and I watched them osculate hungrily, tongues meeting to play on that silken field, and I wanted to kill that man with my bare hands. I heard the door open behind me, and I noticed the clock on the VCR. It was 12:30am...Christmas Morning. Dana had been in her bedroom for forty minutes. I wondered if she'd brought Glow Worm out to play.

"Ghost is on," I said, without looking. I knew that it was one of her favorite movies. There was no response, and I detected that she was standing in the doorway to her bedroom. Curious, I looked over my shoulder and felt my heart seize and the breath lock in my chest.

Dana was standing in the doorway, leaning against one arm held above her head, all her weight on one leg, the other bent slightly and held forward of the other...a model's pose. And she was modeling my teddy.

"Like it?" she said. Her voice was a husky, deep-throated whisper. I was speechless. I nodded softly. "I remembered what you said a few years ago...about not giving me anything you couldn't see me in. And then I remembered what I said tonight about looking for a nice guy. And then I finally listened to what you had to say, Rick. I really heard you this time."

Still speechless, all I did was nod.

"C'mere," she said, softer still. I stared at her, my mouth dropping open. Surely, she couldn't mean....could she? My question and prayers were both answered when she crooked her finger at me.

On shaking legs I stood and walked to her. She dropped the arm that had been on the jamb and let it fall on my shoulder. She curled her fingers, and she was suddenly scratching the back of my neck lazily, as one might scratch a cat behind the ears. Believe me, if I could have, I would have purred. Her touch on my skin, this first electrical, sexual touch sent bolts of passion shooting

through my body. I wanted so desperately to feel and smell and taste every inch of her that I shook with desire.

Dana stepped in and molded her body against mine. I could feel the dual pressure of her breasts against my chest and the hot, burning pressure of her vulva against my abdomen. She levered my neck, bringing my face to hers, closer...closer.

And then we kissed. Really kissed, for the first time. Her lips were soft and hot and slightly moist, just as I'd always imagined them. It was a soft, friendly kiss at first, scared and slightly tentative. As the passion grew to overtake us, the pressure increased in little leaps and bounds until we were kissing hungrily, trying to consume each other through our mouths. My arms went around her, crushing her body against mine. Six years of accumulated passion and denial welled out of my body, transmitted to hers through the kiss. She could feel my need, my hunger for her, for every soft, sweet, tender inch of her, and she responded, grasping my shoulders with her hands, pulling me closer. As Groucho once said, "If I were any closer, I'd be behind you!"

And suddenly, it was clear. As clear as a mountain lake on a cool spring morning. Still kissing her, I bent and swept her legs into the crook of my arm and carried her into the bedroom. The only light on was the bedside table lamp, and it had a red handkerchief draped over it, giving the room and eerie, ethereal glow. Gently, like she was made of porcelain, I laid her on the bed and stood above her, admiring.

Dana's hands were by her side, and she slowly trailed them up, over her ribs, shoulders, and then into her hair. She lifted it away from the pillow, arranging it beside and behind her, imploring me with my eyes.

"Hurry," she whispered. "Oh, please hurry."

I started to take my shirt off, a heavy flannel workshirt that I loved because it was so warm and soft. Dana shot to her knees and slowly made her way to the edge of the bed.

"Let me," she said. Locking her gaze with mine, she undid the first button and spread the shirt, kissing the part of my chest that was suddenly visible. Her kisses were light and kittenish. Slowly, she unbuttoned the entire shirt, exploring the muscles and skin she found, slowly and gently licking each nipple until it throbbed in her mouth.

Returning her gaze to mine, she tugged the tail of the shirt out of my jeans and worked it down my arms, tossing it over her shoulder. I sat down on the bed, my back to her, and started to work my cowboy boots off. Dana wrapped her arms around my neck from behind, slowly and softly running her silk-covered breasts across my back. I could feel the twin hot, hard points of arousal digging into my back. I moaned softly, deep in my throat, still trying to get my mind in gear.

The boots came off with a little tugging, and then my socks followed. I could feel the tension in my groin, a hot, bulging hardness, a staff of pure passion and hunger, all emotional and physical appetite that would not be denied any more.

Standing, I turned to her and slowly unbuckled my belt. Dana sat back on her haunches, sexily biting her lower lip, her eyes focused on my hands as I worked. The belt opened, then the button, and the fly. I don't wear underwear, and the hot, hard tip of my staff peeked out.

"Ooooh!" Dana said, her features melting into an expression of pure desire. I shrugged my hips and the jeans fell straight to my ankles. I stepped out of them, and she could finally see me, all of me, presented for her inspection and approval.

She smiled, and I suddenly felt proud that I could display my hunger. Dana reached out a tentative hand and grasped me softly. Her hand was almost unable to enclose my girth, so aroused was I. She began a gentle stroking motion, sending electric shocks up and down my spine.

"I had no idea," she whispered. "No idea at all!" Then with a giggle, she said, "Is that *all* for me?"

"All for you, always and forever," I whispered. With shining eyes she looked up at me, and then leapt from the bed like a jungle cat, wrapping her arms around my neck and dragging me back to the bed, crushing herself with my weight. I tried to shift myself off of her so as not to crush her, but she held on.

"I want to feel you against me," she said in between kisses. I settled on her body, running my hands through her hair, returning her kisses with all the passion I felt. We stayed that way for a long time, eagerly devouring each other's mouths, lightly rubbing against each other, my erection lightly teasing her silken mound.

Slowly, I began to expand the scope of the operation. Kissing Dana's neck, I removed the shoulder straps and moved to the skin there, lightly, dryly kissing her, taking my time. A little voice in the back of my head was patiently lecturing that this might be my one and only chance with the woman of my dreams and fantasies, and I was going to do it right. I had always professed to getting my own greatest satisfaction from my partner's satisfaction; it was now time to put rhetoric into practice.

I worked her body softly, always touching, always stroking, taking my time to taste every single inch of her, never rushing, never hurrying. I spent a good ten minutes on her shoulders, neck and face before removing the silk cups that surrounded her soft, snowy peaks.

When I finally revealed her breasts, I noticed that the nubs were already hot and tight with arousal. Her taste was sublime, better than the ultimate sorbet; I worked each orb slowly, gently, patiently working towards the ultimate conclusion. My hands were busy, stroking here, lightly touching there, always gently exploring, like a blind man might.

She began to writhe beneath me, the combination of my touches gathering momentum in her center, drawing her ever closer to the inevitable. I could feel her moist heat underneath my hand, and I gently rubbed her pleasure center, looking for the right mixture of pressure and motion. Her hands clutched my shoulders and she gently rode my probing digits through a wave of climax, sobbing softly so great was her pleasure.

Returning to the land of the living, Dana attacked my mouth, kissing me with an animal desire that I didn't know she had, but always suspected she possessed. I removed the teddy, and we were finally together, naked, bodies touching in the soft red light of her bedroom, staring into each other's eyes as my hands gently touched her chest and legs and her hands stroked my buttocks and back. There was a long moment where we did nothing but stare at each other, each thinking silent, private thoughts.

I have never felt closer to another human being than I did to her at that moment. Her skin was warm and soft and smelled slightly of lilacs. Under that, at a more primal, pheromonal level was the scent of her arousal. It filled my nostrils and made the thoughts in my head turn from the soft, loving encounter I had planned (!) to more animalistic, passionate "taking"...dismissing those thoughts from my head, I slowly lowered my head and kissed Dana again, savoring the taste of her mouth as our tongues gently entwined.

Two hands pushing against my chest filled my head and heart with sudden panic. Looking at Dana's face, I did not see reproach or anger, only passion. She wanted me to turn over, not leave. Heaving a mental sigh, I did as she wished, and then underwent the staggering pleasure of having her repeat to me what I had done to her only moments ago, a gentle touching and feeling of my entire body, centering around my pleasure centers for instants at a time, only to move on to less...dangerous place, lest I spend too quickly and break this most magical of spells.

She was kissing my knees, and then the inside of my thighs as she approached the towering monument of my manhood. It twitched, trying to both encourage and repel her slow, feline attack. And then her mouth was around me, enveloping the head, bathing my most sensitive skin with hot, moist saliva. I struggled, trying to think of anything but the incredible pleasure I was feeling. I thought of calm lakes and still ponds, sunsets over a gently crashing ocean. I thought of horseback riding across a grassy field, the sun at my back, the scent of wildflowers-

And then it was too late. With a lunge and a staggering gasp, I spent, casting my seed upon her. Dana did not let up, but redoubled her efforts, intense on retaining as much of my essence as possible, wanting so much to keep this gift I had offered her. In my dealings with her in the past, I knew that this had been a sticking point with a previous lover, her inability or lack of desire to fulfill to completion this most intimate of kisses, and I was warmly touched by her efforts to satisfy me in this way.

Finished, she crawled up my body and settled into my arms. Knowing that it would both surprise and amuse her, I kissed her mouth, tasting the brine of her most recent activities in my own mouth; if asked previous to that moment, I probably would have denied any desire to do this, but with Dana it was an intimate, special moment that sealed the passion between us better than any mere words ever could have.

She was tentative at first, unsure that I knew what I was doing; as she realized that I not only knew, but welcomed it, the kiss intensified and we shared the remnants of my generous liquid. Rolling over on the bed, I returned to tasting her body, eager to give her the same pleasure that she had given me. I worked my way down her torso, stopping to French tickle her navel, listening to the responding giggle and thinking that the songbirds in the trees would be jealous could they hear Dana's laugh, and then continued on to her legs, all the way down to her petite feet, taking each toe in my mouth and sucking gently, rubbing and touching seemingly everywhere at once.

Returning northward again, I slowed as I approached her center, wanting to draw out the agonizing tease, wanting her to be shuddering with need and desire minutes before I arrived.

And then I had a sudden thought. I knew something about her that no one else did. Years ago, scant months before we first met, there had been another man in her life, a so-called friend that had taken advantage of my Dana one night, a night spent with too much liquor and not enough common sense, until she was in no position to refuse his advances, until he took from her that which should always be given. My outrage and murderous impulses towards this man were only compounded the night Dana tearfully admitted that not only had he committed that atrocity against her body and soul, but he had left something with her, something that would always be with her, a little horrid something that would appear in times of stress and linger for days. We called it "The 'H'" between us, and there was always an understanding that it made no difference to me one way the other, and it was about to be proven in the most intimate way there was.

I'm sure she expected me to swerve, lest it be the wrong moment. I knew that if she knew, she would tell me so that we would take the proper precautions, so I continued ever upward. I was willing to take the chance, and not stop and spoil the mood by asking. I wanted my absolute disregard of personal issues to be another gift to her, another way of telling Dana that I loved her no matter what...forever and always.

And then I was upon her, tasting her arousal and excitement, following it up by rubbing her pleasure center with my nose, gently, like a kitten might bump noses with you. Dana's hips responded like a young colt's driving herself into my mouth again and again as I tried to keep her still so I could concentrate on giving pleasure. Her slickness aroused me to no end, and I tried to capture and taste as much as I could, knowing and believing that it was ambrosia. Her hands were

in my hair, nails scratching my scalp. Little feral moans, animal sounds really, started emanating from deep within her body, and I rode her slick “V” through two monumental climaxes, grinning to myself and feeling myself grow closer still.

Finally, I separated from her vulva and made my way still northward, again sharing a kiss with her. She sucked hungrily at my mouth, eager for her own taste, her own scent. We stayed that way for several long moments, enjoying the glow of pleasure and satisfaction between us.

A hand reached down below my waist and gently circled me. “My, my,” Dana said. “Is this all for me? And so soon?”

“Always and forever,” I whispered again. Dana smiled at me and tugged at my waist, pulling over on top of her. I felt myself nudging at her entrance, and then I was penetrating her, filling her with me. She was mercurially warm for me, a silken vise coated in slick, hot honey that covered every inch of my passion and bathed it with hers. We began to move together, gently at first, softly, two friends exploring the dimensions and limits of passion together, trying to find a rhythm, a pace that we could call our own and dissolve into, losing our separate identities and becoming a spiritual ‘one.’

Slowly, in stages, our passion increased until we were rutting like animals, sweat pouring between us, our skin sticking on each stroke. Our breathing intensified, and we moved closer and closer to the ultimate, mutual release point. My view was filled with the sight of Dana's face, her eyes closed in enjoyment, concentration and passion, sexily biting her lower lip, her upper lip covered with a fine sheen of perspiration, her incredibly soft and firm breasts jiggling with each stroke, her soft, guttural moans of enjoyment filling my ears. I could feel my own impending release arriving, and I waited for her, exercising a control I wasn't aware I possessed, until I felt her clutch at me, inside, drawing my semen from me, into her, until we completed...together, collapsing against each other as the waves of release and passion washed over us, drowning us both in their unstoppable waves.

Slowly, our breathing returned to normal as we held each other and talked and laughed quietly.

“My God!” she enthused, smiling like a woman who had just discovered a very delicious secret. “I had no idea, Rick!”

“I did,” I said seriously, a half-smile on my face. “I always knew it would be like this...between us.”

A little frown crossed her face. “Really? How?”

I shook my head, eyebrows raised. “I don't know 'how' I know...I just did. I've been thinking about this moment for six years.”

“Since when?!”

“The day we met. I looked up at you, and I knew at that moment that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you.” She opened her mouth to respond to *that*, and I silenced her with a finger across her lips. “That's not what I meant, Dana. Even if nothing else ever happens, it will be worth it, because I have this perfect pristine moment, holding you in my arms after we made love. I've wanted nothing but that for the longest time, just the chance to show you what we can be like together. Let's just leave it like this for now, honey. I'm not expecting anything from you. I just want to spend tonight in your arms, holding you, feeling you next to me. As far as *tonight* goes, I don't want to let you go. When the bright, rational sunlight of morning is filling this bedroom, we can discuss all the other issues. But for tonight...just let me hold you.”

She dissolved into my arms, sobbing either with happiness at this newfound joy, or sadness because she suspected it was only for tonight.

I didn't know which, but you know what? As we slowly, softly fell asleep that Christmas Eve, I didn't care. I knew that I had given her something only one person on the Earth could give her; I'd given my all to her, given of myself to her, and she had taken it gratefully, with love and warmth and tenderness. Whatever arctic winds waited in the wings for tomorrow, ready to blow what we had out to sea, I knew I would be happy and content.

We fell asleep in each other's arms. I woke first, almost half an hour before Dana did. I spent the time watching her sleep, the sun cutting in from the window, split into prison-bar shadows by the blinds, perpendicular to her body. Dana was on her stomach, her face towards me, her hair a glorious mane of disarray on the pillow. I could see the flattened weight of her breasts against the mattress, and the gentle sloping curve of her rump. The sheets were down below her waist, low enough so I could only see the beginning of the cleft of her behind. Breathing slowly, evenly, her face the innocent mask of an angel, I toyed with her hair and brushed it away from her face, content to just look at her as she slept. In my fantasies, I always used this special time to whisper sweet nothings to her, to tell her sleeping form how much I loved and adored her, how I would never, ever leave her, things like that.

"Dana," I said softly so as not to wake her, "I'm not sure what today is going to bring for us, let alone tomorrow. But I want you to know...that I always loved you, and I will always love you. You're the first person I want to talk to every morning, and the last person I want to talk to at night. I want to share every aspect of my life with you. I know that it may not be what you want...but I want you to know that it's here for you if you want it. All you have to do is ask me, and I'll be yours...always and forever."

Dana opened her eyes and smiled at me, and I knew with a sudden, embarrassed certainty that she'd heard my entire spiel. Kissing me gently, she asked, "Always?"

Kissing her back, I said. "Forever."