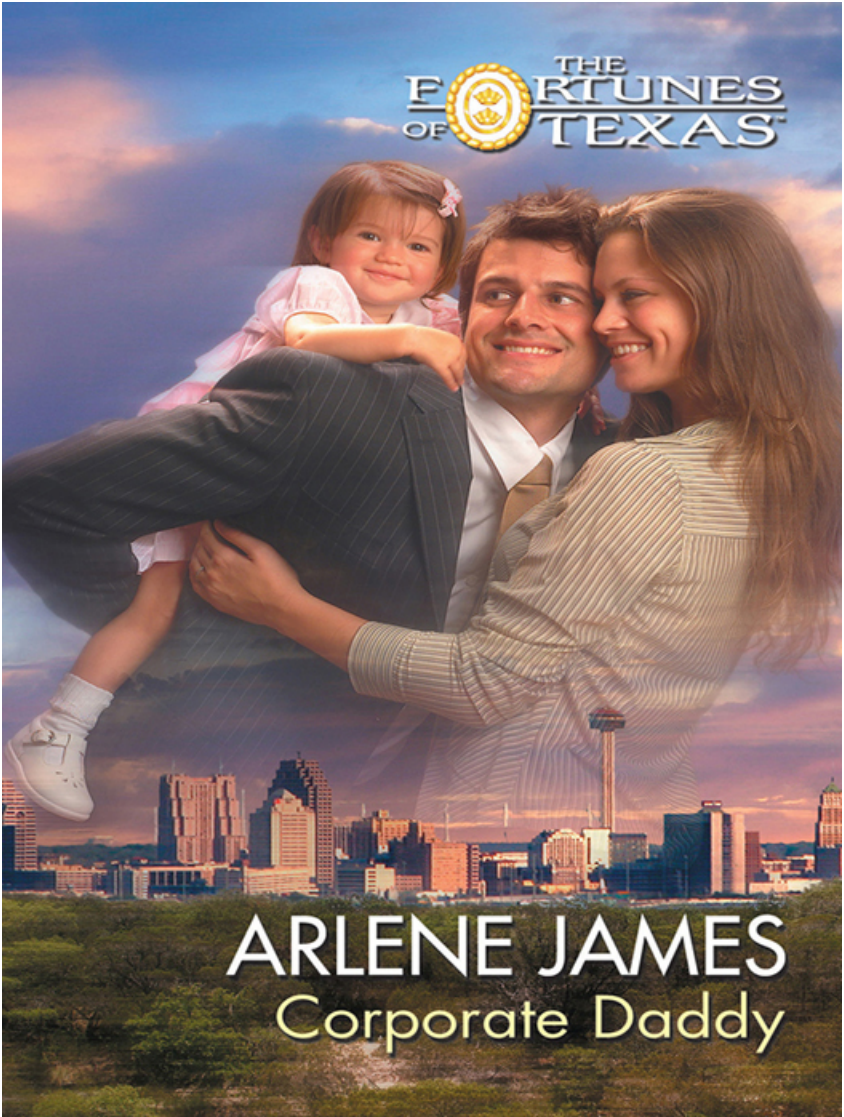
THE FORTUNES OF TEXAS
ARLENE JAMES
Corporate Daddy

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Corporate Daddy

Аннотация

Logan Fortune is all business, although he's indulged in his share of pleasure, a fact made abundantly clear when he meets the new lady in his life: his toddler daughter.Admittedly out of his league, he turns to Emily Applegate, his no-nonsense assistant, perhaps the only woman in Texas who can resist his charms. Deep down, Emily's crazy about her boss, but playboy moguls are definitely out of her league. Tasked with hiring a nanny, she soon discovers none of the candidates is good enough for the little girl she's coming to adore.With her hair down, her glasses off and smiles aplenty for his daughter, Emily is suddenly so desirable to Logan, leaving him feeling a little unsteady. Now he's got to pull off the biggest merger of his life, convincing a woman with no illusions that his heart–and his daughter–belong to her.

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THE TEXAS TATTLER

All the news that's barely fit to print!

DNA Tests To Prove Paternity of Tiny Fortune Heir

Males in the Fortune clan are reluctantly rolling up their sleeves this week to give blood samples for a DNA test that should solve the mystery surrounding who fathered abandoned child Taylor Fortune. Insiders report a virtual mob of nervous tycoons outside Red Rock's criminologist office—now that's a bread line with a lotta dough!

But it's the ladies who are lined up and clamoring for the attention of Logan Fortune. The marriage-elusive executive's latest "acquisition" is a gal he's been spotted hugging, kissing… and burping. Seems that when darling daughter Amanda Sue appeared on his doorstep, Logan promptly promoted his devoted corporate assistant to live-in mommy. Rumor has it Girl Friday Emily Applegate still fetches Logan's coffee—but now she does it in her nightie!

Don't miss next month's Fortune update exclusively in The Tattler!

About the Author

ARLENE JAMES

grew up in Oklahoma and has lived all over the South. In 1976 she married “the most romantic man in the world.” The author enjoys traveling with her husband, but writing has always been her chief pastime. Arlene is also the author of the inspirational titles Proud Spirit, A Wish for Always, Partners for Life and No Stranger to Love.

Corporate Daddy
Arlene James

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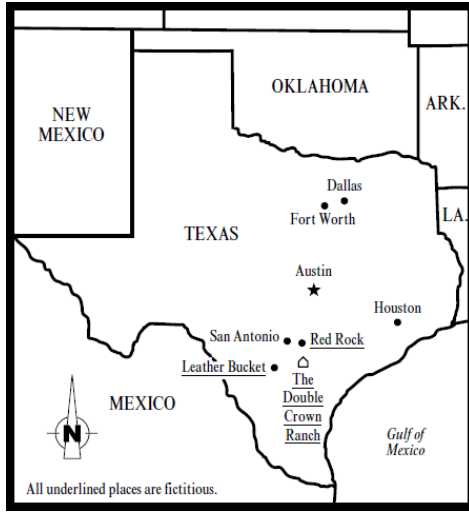
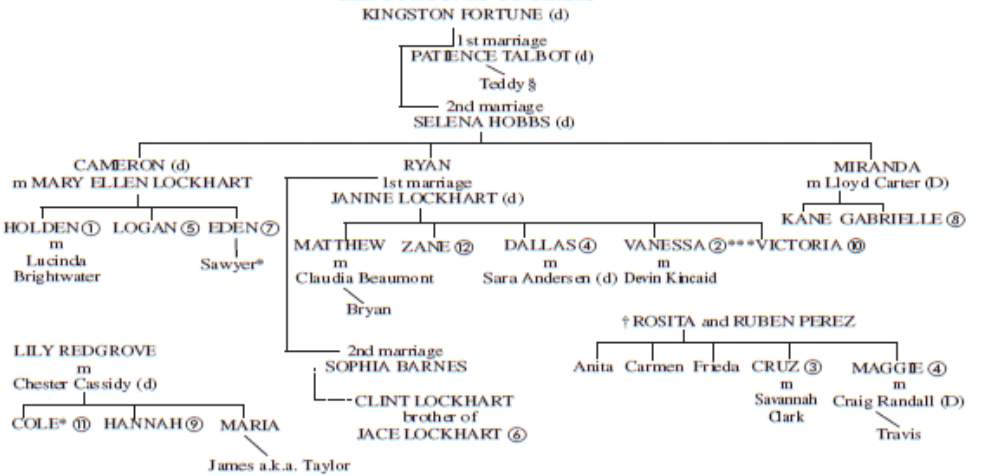


THE FORTUNES OF TEXAS



* Child of affair
d Deceased
D Divorced
m Married
*** Twins
---- Affair
† Loyal ranch staff
§ Kidnapped by maternal grandfather

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12. HIRED BRIDE

Meet the Fortunes of Texas

Logan Fortune: When the powerful CEO inherited his motherless daughter, he enlisted the help of his capable assistant. Would time spent in Emily's arms have Logan looking for more than just daddy lessons?

Emily Applegate: This plain-Jane secretary's heart melted when she saw Logan cuddling his newfound baby girl. Could she convince her handsome boss that there was no need to hire a nanny…because he had a potential wife and mother for his child right outside his office door?

Baby Taylor: The identity of the recovered baby is still a mystery. But rumors were running rampant among the Fortune family about his true parentage, especially since the adorable child has the Fortune crown-shaped birthmark.

Jace Lockhart: Ryan Fortune's brother-in-law recently returned to Texas for a hometown visit. And this globe-trotting journalist might just find love where he least expects it.

To MJ, the best of editors. Much thanks. DAR

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One

"So she's really ours."

Mary Ellen Lockhart Fortune tucked her thick, wavy red hair behind her ears and made a silly face at her wriggling granddaughter who smiled, yawned, rubbed her eyes and flipped over onto her belly, quickly crawling toward the end of the couch. Mary Ellen and her tall, handsome son, Logan, both made a grab for the child. Logan reached her first, coming off his seat on the ottoman at his mother's knee. Holding his daughter at arm's length—much like an escaped piglet that had found the mud hole—he gingerly carried her back to the original spot and sat her next to his mother. Sixteen-month-old Amanda Sue promptly flopped and flipped, emitting a shrieking grunt in the process, as if warning him not to interfere with her plans again. Mary Ellen chuckled. Logan quivered. The battle of wills his surprise baby daughter had been waging with him these past two hours was wearing on him.

"She's a Fortune, all right," he muttered, capturing his daughter again. Amanda Sue twisted and screamed, then went limp and put back her head in a dramatic sob for release. "That temperament confirms it, as if the blue eyes, hereditary crown-shaped birthmark and the blood test didn't. Plus, her hair's almost as red as yours, a little darker, maybe."

"She looks like you and Eden," Mary Ellen said wonderingly.

"I'm not sure my sister would appreciate being lumped into the same category of looks as me," Logan said, struggling to put his daughter back on the couch, "but I did notice that Amanda Sue looks like some of Eden's baby pictures, discounting the hair, of course."

"Was her mother red haired?" Mary Ellen asked gently.

Amanda Sue stopped wriggling and looked up alertly. "Mama," she called. "Mama?"

"Poor darling," Mary Ellen crooned, gathering the child against her. Amanda Sue crammed her hand in her mouth and waited, as if listening for her mother's voice.

Logan sighed. "Her m-o-t-h-e-r was a blonde." He spelled out the word to avoid causing his bewildered daughter to ask for what she could not have, ever again.

"Her name was Bailey, wasn't it?" Mary Ellen went on. "Donna Bailey?"

Amanda Sue's ears seemed to perk up, but she made no sound. Mary Ellen eased the pacifier pinned to Amanda Sue's T-shirt into the child's mouth. The baby sucked absently.

"Yes," Logan said, wishing he could avoid the subject, knowing he couldn't.

"What was she like?" Mary Ellen wanted to know.

Logan tried to keep deep regret from sounding like bitterness. "I remember her as adventurous, full of life, independent. She was a military brat. She told me that both of her parents were lifers. So, naturally, she followed in their footsteps. She learned

to fly helicopters in the army and got a small plane license after."

"So our Amanda Sue gets that fierce spirit from both ends," Mary Ellen said, petting the baby's head. Amanda Sue looked up somberly at the stranger who was her grandmother, the lilting curls springing up in the wake of Mary Ellen's touch.

"It would seem so," Logan admitted. "The way I understood it, Donna's parents died trying to set a record in a hot air balloon. I'd say the need for adventure was ingrained."

"What about Donna? How did she die?" Mary Ellen asked.

He swallowed, remembering the tall, shapely blonde with whom he'd enjoyed a few weeks of fun and games. Of all the women he'd known, Donna was the last with whom he'd expected to have made a child. He wasn't surprised, though, that she hadn't contacted him after discovering that she was pregnant. The Donna he had known was fiercely independent and proud of her ability to take on whatever life threw at her. She had followed, quite literally, in the footsteps of her parents.

"She was piloting an experimental glider," Logan explained succinctly. "It crashed."

"Poor thing." Mary Ellen sighed. Amanda Sue leaned against her, porcelain eyelids drooping over bright blue eyes. "I deeply regret the tragedy, but I can't say I'm sorry to have this little one in our lives. How did the authorities know to contact you?"

"Donna left instructions."

"Well, thank goodness for that, at least."

Logan nodded, watching his daughter slip off to sleep. She'd

been fighting it tooth and nail from the moment he'd picked her up at the airport in San Antonio. The social worker who had accompanied her had predicted that the child would drop off to sleep in the car, but instead Amanda Sue had squirmed and kicked and fought the seat belt, working out of it several times. The drive down to the ranch had been a nightmare. He'd never felt so inadequate. But he had to admire her fighting spirit.

She was innocence personified, impish and cherub cheeked with ivory fair skin, curly, reddish-brown hair, and eyes that sparked pure blue fire, and in addition, she possessed the mind of a warrior. Even as he took a perverse pride in her spirit, however, he couldn't help thinking that fatherhood was going to be problematic enough without it. God knew he didn't have the slightest idea how to go on.

His own father had been a washout as both a parent and a husband, so much so that Logan had always figured his safest bet was to avoid both states fervently. He'd thought, briefly, in the first moments of shock, about refusing custody of his unexpected daughter, but he'd quickly rejected the idea. Amanda Sue was a Fortune; she deserved to be raised as one. Thank God for his mother.

"How are we going to handle this?" he asked, suddenly wanting it all settled.

Mary Ellen studied the small hand curled around her forefinger. "What do you mean by this?"

"Her. Amanda Sue. How are we going to work it?"

Mary Ellen looked up then. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Well, obviously she has to live here,” he pointed out impatiently, waving a hand to encompass the luxurious eight-bedroom, contemporary Colonial house with its many amenities, including pool, tennis courts, decks, balconies and spacious guest quarters. Even with his brother Holden and his wife Lucinda in residence, the place had more than ample room. Still, Mary Ellen shook her head.

“She belongs with you, Logan. She’s your daughter.”

His daughter. The words still brought a shock of unreality with them. “I don’t know anything about being a father!” he countered, and the sound of his voice jerked the baby awake. She took one look around and wailed. He bounded to his feet. “See! She’ll be miserable with me!”

Mary Ellen made an exasperated sound and gathered the child into her lap, bouncing and cuddling her. “There, there, darling. He didn’t mean to shout. There, there.” She poked the pacifier into the cupid’s bow mouth, and the piercing wail shut off instantly.

Logan pushed a hand through his wavy, dark brown hair. “I don’t know how to take care of a baby,” he said in a level voice that in no way conveyed the panic he was feeling.

Mary Ellen chuckled. “Logan, no first-time father—or mother, for that matter—knows how to take care of a baby. You’ll learn as you go, that’s part of it.”

“My father didn’t,” Logan grumbled.

Mary Ellen looked up at him with implacable blue eyes a shade paler than his own. “He did the best he could, Logan. So will you, and I’m quite sure it will be more than enough. In fact, I think you’ll make a wonderful father.”

“Just let her stay until we get used to one another,” Logan pleaded shamelessly, but Mary Ellen was at her reasonable, logical best.

“And how will you do that with her living here at the ranch and you living fifty miles away in San Antonio?” she asked. “No, son, there’s only one way to do this, and that’s to dive in headfirst. Besides, I want to be a grandmother, not another parent. I’ve raised my family, and I did it pretty much on my own, as you well know. I want to concentrate on other things now. It’s only fair. And your uncle Ryan really needs my help with the business right now. This kidnapping mess and the divorce are enough for any one man to handle on his own.”

Guiltily, Logan sat down again. His own world had spun so out of control that he hadn’t even thought of Ryan or Baby Bryan and his parents. “You’re right. What’s the latest news concerning the kidnapping?”

Mary Ellen looked at the child drifting off again in her arms. “It’s the most confounding thing. Bryan disappears, the wrong baby is returned, and he turns out to be a Fortune, too.”

Logan shook his head. “How are Matthew and Claudia holding up?”

Mary Ellen sighed. “It’s hard to say. In one way, having Taylor

with them is a comfort—that's what they're calling the other baby, you know, Taylor—but in another way, it's a definite problem. I mean, what if Matthew turns out to be his father? Claudia will be destroyed."

"You don't really think that's possible, do you? I mean, Matt's always been such a straight shooter."

Mary Ellen looked down meaningfully. "I'd say just about anything is possible, wouldn't you?"

Logan looked to his newfound daughter. "Obviously."

"Right now, though, I think the priority for Ryan and the whole family is getting Bryan back."

"That's understandable," Logan said, and Mary Ellen nodded, looking at her granddaughter.

"Life is so strange, isn't it?"

Strange didn't begin to describe his life right now, Logan mused, looking again at the cause. His now peacefully slumbering daughter busily sucked her pacifier for a few seconds, then pushed it out with her tongue. She smiled at something in a dream, showing tiny white teeth, and just abruptly frowned, her bottom lip pouting. She was amazing, alarmingly so, and Logan knew, deep down, that he was very lucky to have her. He only hoped that he was up to the task of raising her.

"What am I going to do with her, Mom?" he whispered.

Mary Ellen's gaze was loving and wise. "You'll figure it out, dear. I have every confidence in you."

But Logan wasn't so sure. Mary Ellen was his mother, after

all. She had always believed in him, found the best in him. Even now when she had every right to blast him for his irresponsibility in conceiving a daughter out of wedlock, a daughter he had only recently learned existed, she merely smiled and trusted him to do the right thing. It was because of her that he'd worked his way to the Executive V.P. position of Fortune Tx, Ltd. He could have played on the Fortune name and the Fortune influence to get where he wanted to go, but Mary Ellen had expected him to earn his way honestly, and he had taken pride in doing so.

Business was second nature to him, though. It was part of who he was. Most of what he had achieved was the product of sheer instinct. Fatherhood, on the other hand, was like a strange planet where nothing was as he expected. Up was down and in was out in this eerie land. He had no idea of his own worth here, his own power, but he had no choice except to step out and endure whatever came, making up solutions as he went along. He took a deep breath and stepped out.

"We'll head back to San Antonio right after lunch."

Mary Ellen smiled. "You'll be fine. Both of you. Once you get her settled in and find someone to watch over her while you work, life will be rich and sweet again, just in a different way."

He hoped that she was right. He prayed to God that she was right. For his daughter's sake.

Emily Applegate, like everyone else in the building, heard the screams even before the elevator doors opened. Logan's executive assistant lifted her head, absently smoothed the heavy,

sandy-brown bun on the back of her head, and listened. The cries obviously belonged to a child, a very angry, desperate child. She couldn't imagine who would have brought a child into the office, but she would shortly know. They all would. Office doors were opening. People were stepping out into the hallway.

She stayed at her desk, gold-framed reading spectacles perched on the end of her nose, and watched the stir through the glass wall of her office, thinking that Logan had picked a good day to be out on personal business. He'd left a cryptic message on her voice mail sometime last night, informing her of his change of plans. She'd been shuffling appointments and standing in at meetings all day and desperately needed about two hours to catch up on her weekly report.

Thoughts of the weekly report had been supplanted by curiosity, however, when the wails had first reached her. What caught her attention now, though, were the looks on people's faces as the wailing drew nearer. They were stunned, all of them, stunned speechless, apparently. And suddenly she knew why as Logan Fortune himself stepped into view, a squalling bundle of auburn curls and flailing arms and legs caught against his chest.

Emily stood, chin dropping, in a complete state of shock as Logan turned, maneuvering briefcase, child and—wonder of wonders!—diaper bag to push through the glass door. He stumbled into the room, yanking free the diaper bag as the door closed against it. Inside the closed room, the sound was deafening, shrill enough to split eardrums if not shatter glass.

Logan looked at her as if she was the one making it, then he juggled the child in her direction.

"For pity's sake, Applegate, take her!"

Emily scrambled forward. "Mr. Fortune, what—"

He shoved the child at her, threw her almost. Emily caught the wailing bundle and clasped her tight. Suddenly she was looking down into an astonishing pair of bright blue eyes rimmed with thick red-brown lashes and sparkling with diamond-bright tears. Emily pulled back, taking in the angelic face and tousled curls. The little one shuddered on a sob, and Emily's heart turned over.

"Well, hello there," she said softly. "What's wrong, sweetheart?"

"Ba-ba-ba-ba," the little one cried, bottom lip quivering. "Ba-ba-bobble."

Emily looked at Logan. "What's wrong with her?"

Logan lifted his chin, stretching his well-muscled six-foot frame. "She hates me, that's what's wrong with her," he grumbled, plunking the diaper bag on top of her desk.

The baby suddenly lunged for the bag, crying, "Baba-ba! Babable!"

Emily spied the top of a bottle protruding from an end section of the bag. "I think she wants a drink."

The little one shook her head wildly. "No!" She reached again, opening and closing her little hand pleadingly. "Ba-a-ba-ob-ba!"

Emily suddenly understood. For a child this age, a drink must be something taken from a sippy cup, a bottle was nourishment.

“She’s hungry. She wants her bottle.”

Logan looked as though he’d been dragged through a keyhole backward. His strong, aristocratically sculpted features were haggard, his full mouth turned down at the corners, his dark brown hair rumpled rather than waving back sleekly from his high forehead. He wrenched open the diaper bag and started tearing through it with broad, long-fingered hands.

“It’s right there on the end,” Emily pointed out.

He turned the bag on its end and plucked the pink bottle from its pocket. The baby reached for it, making a sound somewhere between a relieved laugh and an accusing sob. He jerked off the nipple cover and thrust it at her.

“You should check it first,” Emily advised as the child snatched it out of his hand. “The milk could be spoiled.”

“Mother filled it before we left the ranch,” Logan muttered, “and with the outside temperature in the fifties, it isn’t likely to have spoiled yet. I just didn’t know where Mother had put it.”

The baby had already guided the nipple to her mouth and now put her head back, nursing strenuously. “Let’s get your sweater off, little lady,” Emily crooned, carefully slipping free one arm and then another while the child nursed industriously, passing the bottle back and forth from hand to hand.

Logan leaned a hip against the desk, folding his arms. “She’s been screaming for the last half hour,” he said. “I tried the pacifier, but she spit it at me.”

“Wouldn’t you spit out rubber if you wanted milk?” Emily

mused, lifting her chin as the baby reached for her glasses with one hand while holding the bottle with the other.

Logan sighed resignedly. “I just don’t know how to read her. She’s like an alien life-form! How am I supposed to deal with that?”

Emily tossed the sweater onto the desk and shifted the little one in her arms, sweeping a well-practiced censorious glance over curious faces beyond the glass. People quickly shifted away, moving back into their offices. Emily looked at the man whose executive assistant she had been for the past two years. “Want to tell me what’s going on here?”

He straightened and took a deep breath. “Emily Applegate,” he said wearily, making it a formal introduction, “I’d like you to meet Amanda Sue Fortune. My daughter.”

Emily nearly dropped the child on her head. “Your what?”

Logan nodded grimly. “Yeah, how’s that for a kick in the pants?”

Emily could only stare, first at him, then at the child quickly emptying her bottle. Almost as long as she’d known him, Emily had harbored a secret crush on her philandering boss, knowing perfectly well that she had no chance with him and was better off for it. The thought, however, that someone else had borne him a child made her voice unusually raw. “Who’s her mother?”

Logan winced as the child jerked the bottle from her mouth and cried, “Ma-ma-a-a!”

“Now you’ve done it,” he grumbled, reaching for Amanda

Sue.

She jerked back, clinging to Emily and crying, “Mammm-mmma!”

Trying to hide his hurt at her rejection, Logan patted her back ineffectually. “It’s all right, baby. She didn’t mean it. It’s all right. Drink your bottle. Okay? Drink your bottle.” He glowered at Emily. “Watch your mouth, okay?”

“All I said was—”

“She’s dead, all right? It just happened, but Amanda Sue can’t possibly understand that. All she knows is that her ma-m-a is gone and I’m here. She doesn’t understand that I’m her father. She doesn’t know where she is. And believe me, she’s not happy about it. She’s made that much perfectly clear.”

Emily was still struggling with the concept of Logan Fortune as a father. Amanda Sue shifted in her arms, and a suspicious warmth spread across the front of her diaper. Emily turned her around, holding the child’s small back to her chest in an effort to spare the jacket of her tan wool suit. Amanda Sue laid her head on Emily’s shoulder and whimpered, then stuck the bottle nipple in her mouth and went to work on it again.

“I—I didn’t know you had a daughter,” Emily finally managed to say.

“Neither did I,” he replied dryly, “not until the authorities contacted me after the accident.”

Emily let that sink in. “My goodness.”

“To put it lightly.”

The implications were astounding. She shook her head. “What are you going to do?”

He straightened his tie and smoothed back his hair. “Right now, I’m going to go into my office, sit down at my desk and look over your notes on this morning’s meetings. After that, well, I’ll take it as comes.”

She stared at him. “And Amanda Sue?”

He smiled. “She’ll be with you, of course, getting settled into her new home.”

“Me?”

“Who else?” he asked. “You’re the only executive assistant I’ve got.”

Emily wanted to do some screaming herself. Considering how she felt about this man, she was looking at a prescription for disaster. Her light brown eyes narrowed. “Now, wait just a minute. I’ve gone way above and beyond the job description for you in the past. I’ve lied to your many women, juggled your affairs, ordered gifts to salve wounded pride and snatched your cookies out of the fire more than once in the process, but baby-sitting your unexpected daughter is taking the term ‘executive assistant’ just a little too far!”

His expression turned pleading. “Come on, Em. She likes you, and she’s had all she wants of me right now, and vice versa, frankly. Who else am I going to count on to help me out here?”

Emily held Amanda Sue out to him. “Obviously, you’ve tried your mo—”

“Don’t say it!” he warned frantically.

Emily grimaced. “All right, fine. If your you-know-what can’t help you, why not try one of your many conquests? There’s got to be one willing to make points with you by baby-sitting your child.”

“Have you got any idea what a can of worms that would be opening?” he retorted.

“That’s not my problem,” Emily said. Apparently entertained by the exchange, Amanda Sue sat atop Emily’s arm and swung one little foot absently, slowly drinking her milk. Emily stubbornly stuck to her guns, despite the fact that she was weakening.

“Emily, I need someone I can trust,” he argued smoothly. “This is my daughter we’re talking about. I can’t leave her to some scheming female more concerned with dropping a marriage noose around my neck to get at my money than Amanda Sue’s welfare.”

Emily sighed inwardly. Without committing herself, she asked. “How old is she?”

“Sixteen months.”

With that uncanny ability of all children, Amanda Sue knew she was now the topic of conversation. She laid her head back against Emily’s chest and grinned up at Emily around the bottle nipple. Emily found herself reluctantly in love. “She is a little doll.”

“Don’t let the looks fool you,” Logan warned dryly. “That little

doll has put me through sheer hell today. She can get out of a seat belt faster than—"

"A seat belt!" Emily echoed. "You had her in a seat belt, not a car seat but your standard, adult-type seat belt?"

He blinked at her. "Every car seat has its own seat belt, Emily. You know that."

She couldn't believe he was that uninformed. "Every infant safety seat has a belt, too, and it's designed to keep the child safely in place. Riding a child in a car without one is so dangerous that the State of Texas, and nearly every other, has made it illegal to do so. You're lucky you weren't pulled over—or worse!"

He put his hands to his hips. "See? See! That's what I'm talking about! I don't know this stuff. Why would I? I've never had to think about what kids need!"

Emily found her chair with her foot and pulled it over to sit down, Amanda Sue's weight beginning to wear on her. Amanda Sue immediately tossed her bottle aside and bucked out of Emily's grasp, sliding to the floor, where she momentarily crouched, looking around her. "Where's her stuff?" Emily asked resignedly.

"Right here," Logan said, indicating the diaper bag.

"That's it?"

"The social worker couldn't bring more on the airplane."

Emily rolled her eyes. "Well, we have a lot of shopping to do, then."

"You have a lot of shopping to do," he said pointedly.

"And who's going to watch the baby?"

"You'll take her with you, naturally," he said brightly, edging toward the office door. "Just take my house key from the lockbox. I'll meet you both there when I'm through here."

Emily frowned. "You're going to owe me big-time for this, Fortune."

"Absolutely," he said convincingly.

The lower drawer of Emily's desk suddenly rolled out, Amanda Sue at the handle. Recognizing nothing of interest there, she toddled around the end of the desk and out of sight, ignoring Emily as she called to her. Emily jumped up and went after her. Sensing pursuit, Amanda Sue began to run as fast as her little legs would carry her. Before Emily reached her, she'd knocked over the trash can and a potted plant. The sound of Logan's office door clicking shut came just as Emily reached Amanda Sue, who giggled as she was scooped up, then immediately howled to be let down again.

Emily laughed. "Okay, kiddo, first order of business is a dry diaper. Then we'll order you an infant safety seat. Thank God for department stores that take telephone orders. Meanwhile, we'll get acquainted. How does that sound?" For reply, Amanda Sue stuck her fist in her mouth and kicked both feet. Emily couldn't help herself. She hugged the baby tight and kissed her chubby cheek, laughing at the idea of the great Logan Fortune cowering behind his office door in fear of his toddler daughter. Poor guy. Poor kid!

The whole city was in for a shock when the news got around, but maybe, just maybe, this little bolt of greased lightning would put a kink in her clueless daddy's nocturnal activities. God knew it was time that Logan Fortune learned there was more to life than business and willing women. Much more, for those lucky enough to understand it.

Two

It was after seven o'clock when Logan let himself into the three-bedroom town house that was his private residence. As part of one of the most exclusive planned communities in San Antonio, it afforded him privacy, luxury, and a number of useful amenities such as indoor pools, gym, game rooms and sauna, all with twenty-four-hour staff. He hadn't seen Emily's sensible compact car in the drive, but it was not beyond possibility that she was here.

"Emily?"

Silence. He was unconcerned, however. Emily Applegate was nothing if not efficient and dependable. In the two years that she had been his executive assistant, his life had been sublimely simple—until now. Until Amanda Sue. Desperately, he put his young daughter out of mind, as he had done all afternoon.

Taking the mail out of his jacket pocket, he flipped on the overhead light in the entry and began to thumb through it as he moved down the cool hallway. Bill. Bill. Solicitation. Advertisement. Advertisement. Bill. He stepped into the living room and looked up, more to get his bearings than for any other reason. What he saw there, however, brought him to an immediate halt. It looked like a baby store warehouse!

Mouth ajar, he surveyed the bounty. He identified a crib, a high chair, a stroller and a playpen before turning to the rocking

chair heaped with colorful fabrics in the center of the floor. His gold, butter-soft leather couch was piled with toys. Tiny articles of clothing covered the matching chair. The ottoman held stacks of books. Bottles, tubes and jars littered the end tables. Setting aside the mail, he picked up an unfamiliar object and examined it. The labeling proclaimed it the latest in digital fever thermometers.

Before he could take in the rest, the door opened at the end of the foyer and a series of bangs and grunts alerted him that even more was coming. He moved in the direction of the noise. Emily was struggling to get Amanda Sue, her diaper bag and a couple of plastic sackfulls of groceries into the foyer.

"Here, let me help," he said, taking both bags. No sooner had he set them down in the living room than she informed him that more waited in the car.

He hauled in jars and jars of toddler food, boxes of dry cereal, milk and diapers. "Where do you want it?"

Emily had collapsed onto the sofa among the toys, Amanda Sue in her lap. A long lock of sandy-brown hair had pulled loose from Emily's ubiquitous bun to lay across her shoulder and chest. He hadn't realized that her hair was so long or shiny. As he watched, Amanda Sue reached up and absently coiled the silky lock around one little hand, rubbing her eyes with the other fist even as she wriggled in an attempt to get down. Though bedraggled and exhausted, Emily, nevertheless, held on. She stared at him for a moment, sans glasses, then sighed.

"I assume you know where your own kitchen is."

"What about the diapers?"

"Upstairs with the rest of this stuff," she said, waving a hand wearily.

He wondered where upstairs he was supposed to find room for a department store but wisely kept the thought to himself. After carrying the bags into the kitchen, he stowed the milk in the refrigerator and left everything else on the counter.

When he returned to the living room, he found that Emily had kicked off her shoes and closed her eyes. The look on her face as she flexed her toes might have been pain or pleasure. He noted with unexpected interest that she wasn't wearing stockings. Her straight, knee-length skirt had hiked slightly, giving him an excellent view of her long, slender legs. Funny, but now that she wasn't groomed to within an inch of her life, she was surprisingly appealing. Rumpled suited her. Usually, it was the other way around with the women he knew. She seemed to sense his presence and opened her eyes.

"You've certainly been busy," he began, only to find himself being shushed.

"Don't wake the baby," she whispered, tucking the escaped lock of hair behind her ear and nodding down at her lap. Amanda Sue lay sprawled across her, eyes closed, bottom lip protruding in a perpetual pout. "She can't sleep long or she won't sleep tonight," Emily went on, "but if she doesn't get a short nap she's going to be too wound up to sleep at all. And God knows I could use a

few minutes peace."

He lowered his voice to say, "Why don't we put her down in another room?"

Emily rolled her eyes. "We can't do that. She could fall off a regular bed or wake up and climb down, in which case the room will be wrecked before we even know it, providing she doesn't break her neck first, of course. You have to put together the crib."

Logan knew she was right. He'd never seen a kid who moved as fast or was as determined as this one. He took off his coat, stripped away his tie and rolled up his sleeves before reaching for the big, flat box containing the crib parts. "Where should I put it?"

"Upstairs, the bedroom farthest from the landing."

Grimacing, he began dragging the unwieldy box up the stairs. Putting the crib together took hours and every tool in the house, or it seemed so, anyway. When Emily came upstairs with Amanda Sue on her hip and a stack of linens tucked under one arm, she took one look at the as yet lopsided crib and the pieces still littering the floor and quipped, "Want me to call a rocket scientist?"

"Yeah, would you?" he retorted. "I'm thinking of exploring outer space."

She laughed. "It's not as daunting as it seems."

"I know. I've almost got it. Won't take a minute more."

She dumped the linens on the dresser. "I was talking about parenthood."

Unconvinced, he said nothing to that.

"I took the liberty of making us some dinner," she said.

That was good news. "Great! I'll be right down."

She nodded. "I'll start feeding the baby."

He quickly finished up, put away the tools and carried them back downstairs. Emily had set the table in the kitchen. He'd had it made to match the planked fronts of the cabinets and countertops which were accented with black wrought iron.

"It isn't much," she said, "just sandwiches and salad."

"Sounds good to me," he assured her, eyeing his baby daughter. "What on earth has she got all over her?"

"Squished carrots and beef weiners," Emily answered offhandedly.

A fat plastic spoon with a short, curved handle lay on one corner of the high chair tray. He was about to ask why Amanda Sue wasn't using it when she picked it up, banged it loudly against the tray and threw it to the floor. Emily calmly picked it up and carried it to the sink, washing it while Amanda Sue dug into the food on her plate with both hands and crammed it into her mouth.

"Why is she doing that?" Logan asked, disgusted.

"Amanda Sue prefers to feed herself," Emily explained mildly, pulling out a chair and sitting down. "It's typical behavior for children her age."

He walked around the table and took his own place, eyeing his messy daughter warily. As he devoured his meal, he marveled as Emily ate her own dinner and still managed to get some

of Amanda Sue's inside her with the clean spoon, all without relinquishing the utensil to Amanda Sue's stubborn grasp or getting covered in mush herself. Moreover, her sandwiches were tasty and the salad crisp. Best of all, though, was Emily's iced tea.

"You'll have to show me how you make your tea," he said, sated and content.

She shook her head. "My mama wouldn't like that. It's a—"

"Ma-ma!" Amanda exclaimed, suddenly struggling to get out of her chair. "Mammma!"

"Secret," Emily finished, grimacing sheepishly. "Sorry." She worked with Amanda Sue for several minutes, offering her first the spoon and then the cup before the cries subsided. Logan sighed. How was he going to raise this little girl without her mother? There was so much he didn't know or understand.

"Kitchen or baby?" Emily asked, interrupting his thoughts.

"Huh?"

"Do you want to clean up the kitchen or the baby?"

A no-brainer. He was clearing the table before Emily could get to her feet. She stripped the baby, wiped her face and hands with her filthy shirt and helped her out of the high chair, carrying her away. A few minutes later, Logan had loaded the dishwasher —a relatively new experience for him as he usually left his dishes in the sink for the housekeeper—stowed the leftover salad in the refrigerator and tackled Amanda Sue's high chair with a roll of paper towels. When he was done, he wandered out into the living room and looked around him in dismay. Resigned, he started

moving everything upstairs.

He made the last trip, then wandered down the hall to the bathroom. The door was open, and Emily's patient murmur, overlaid with sounds of splashing and squeals of glee, was clearly audible. Logan leaned a hip against the frame, his hands sliding into his pants' pockets and observed.

Emily knelt beside the tub, a towel draped across her upper body, for all the good it had done her; her skirt and sleeves were soaked. A naked Amanda Sue was strapped into an ingenuous plastic seat with suckers on the feet that fixed it to the bottom of the tub. Her wet hair plastered to her head, she was happily smacking the surface of the water with her hands and forearms, splashing walls, floor, herself and Emily.

"She really seems to like the water," he commented.

"So long as you don't wash her hair with it," Emily replied wryly.

Amanda Sue squealed and splashed at the same time, filling her mouth with water. She gagged, spat, decided it was all in fun and laughed. Logan felt a moment of concern there, but followed Emily's lead and remained calm. The kid really was having a ball, and he couldn't help laughing at her antics. After a few minutes, Amanda Sue quit splashing long enough to rub her eyes.

"Time to get out, sweetheart," Emily said, loosening the belt and sliding her hands under Amanda Sue's arms. Amanda Sue immediately started to buck and kick, screaming in protest. Emily wrapped the towel draped across her shoulder around

Amanda Sue's wet body as she rose. Suddenly she thrust the wriggling child into Logan's arms and turned back to drain the tub of what little water remained.

"Whoa!" He almost dropped her, as her slippery little body twisted and bucked with surprising strength. "Hold on! Calm down!" A little fist smacked him under the chin, and his teeth clamped down on his tongue. "Ow! You little hellion!" He literally juggled her, trying to get a decent hold on the slick little body. Amanda Sue laughed and tried to throw herself upward. The next instant she was squirming and pushing and straining toward the tub again. "Do you never give up?" he asked in exasperation.

"Here." Emily thrust a tub toy into Amanda Sue's hand. It went immediately to her mouth. "The tub is empty," Emily said, as if Amanda Sue could understand every word. "It's time for bed."

Amanda Sue whimpered a moment and put on a great act of clearly feigned heartbreak.

"You little faker," Logan said. "Where'd you learn this stuff?"

"It comes naturally," Emily told him, chuckling.

He frowned as she slipped past him and down the hallway. Amanda Sue bit her tub toy and laid her head on his shoulder. Logan turned and followed Emily. "Are you saying she inherited this tendency toward theatrics from me?" he demanded.

Emily tossed him a look over her shoulder. "I'm saying that all children are natural actors. It's part of learning to communicate."

She turned into Amanda Sue's bedroom, and Logan followed with the baby.

"Oh."

Emily took a piece of fabric from the dresser and shook it out, revealing a small, fitted sheet, which she began putting on the mattress in the crib. "Think you could towel-dry her hair?"

"Sure." How hard could it be, after all? He stood Amanda Sue on the end of her dresser and pulled the towel up over her head. She shoved it off so hard that she nearly toppled onto the floor. "Hey!" he cried, grabbing her at the last instant.

"Try the rocking chair," Emily said, shaking out blankets and tucking them into the bed.

He sat in the rocker, balanced Amanda Sue on his knee, and pulled the towel up over her head again. She tossed herself backward and slid down between his legs. Catching her with his legs, he trapped her there between them and rubbed the towel over her hair. She fought him with screams and shrugs. Finally he pulled her up into his lap again. She promptly tried to climb him like a tree. Emily extracted a cotton-knit nightgown from a pile of clothing and reached for the child, literally pulling her off Logan's head.

He smoothed his hair down with both hands, saying, "This kid must be part mountain goat."

Emily sent him a loaded glance. "Maybe she inherited that tendency, too."

"Just for the record," he snapped, "her mo—uh, Donna was

as crazy about rock climbing as I am. That's how we met, you know. She was working for the guide, flying parties to climbs by helicopter."

"No, I didn't know," Emily said, pulling the gown's short sleeves over one of Amanda Sue's flailing arms. "Why should I? It was before my time."

"Oh. That's right, but just before." Odd that he'd just come back from a month in the Rockies with Donna as his climbing partner when he'd hired Emily. His previous assistant had set up half a dozen interviews for him, and Emily had been the very first. He'd hired her on the spot and never been so glad as now.

Emily quickly diapered Amanda Sue, who was rubbing her eyes again and beginning to lose her fight. Then she removed a tattered teddy bear from the diaper bag and handed it to the child before clipping her pacifier to her shoulder. Amanda Sue made that odd half-laugh, half-sob sound as she hugged the stuffed bear, babbling, "Sur-bay, sur-bay."

"What's she saying?" Logan asked.

"I think she's calling the bear by name."

"What would that be, Sir Bear, maybe?"

Amanda Sue shook her head violently, answering his question herself. "Sur-bay," she said, "Sur-bay." She started kissing it, making loud smacking sounds, then bit its nose.

"Sugar Bear?" Emily suggested.

Amanda Sue kicked and laughed. "Sur-bay!"

Logan shook his head. "How do you do that?" he asked Emily.

“How can you understand her?”

Emily shrugged. “Practice,” she said, picking up Amanda Sue and replacing the bear’s nose with her pacifier. “I have several nieces and nephews.”

He hadn’t known that but was suddenly reluctant to admit it. She’d worked for him for two years, after all, and he hardly had any secrets from her, depending on her to help him balance both his business and social schedules—and now his domestic life. He should know more about her.

“Turn on one of those monitors,” Emily said, nodding toward what looked like a pair of plastic walkie-talkies on the dresser. Logan did so. “Now turn off the light, but leave the door open.” He did that, too, while she sat down in the rocking chair with Amanda Sue, bear, and pacifier.

He leaned a hip against the end of the dresser and watched as Emily engaged the baby’s attention by first talking to her, then whispering to her as she rocked gently back and forth. Soon his rambunctious daughter’s eyelids began to droop and she settled into the crook of Emily’s arm. Minutes later, she was lolling peacefully. Rising carefully, Emily carried the sleeping child to her crib and gently tucked her in, being sure to keep the bear next to her. Turning away, she picked up the extra monitor and tiptoed from the room. Logan followed.

When they were several yards away, Emily turned on the monitor and carried it down the stairs, where she placed it near to hand on the coffee table.

“You’d better take that to bed with you,” she instructed, stepping into her shoes. “She’s liable to wake up several times during the night, and you’ll need to reassure her. But don’t worry, it’s perfectly normal under the circumstances. She’ll settle down before long.”

He barely heard what she was saying, his attention completely focused on the fact that Emily was obviously leaving. “Where are you going?”

She sent him a surprised look. “Home, if you must know.”

Sheer panic descended. “You can’t go home! I need you here. Amanda Sue needs you.”

Emily sighed and folded her arms, fixing him with an implacable look. “Listen, I understand that you’re concerned, but you’ll be fine. Just do what I did.”

“B-but what if she cries?”

“Calm her down. Just remember that the key is to stay calm yourself.”

“She could want something, and I wouldn’t know what!” he protested.

“Yes, you will,” Emily assured him. “If she wants a bottle or her bear, she’ll ask for them. You’ll figure out the rest by just paying attention.”

“Emily, I insist that you stay!”

She gave him a look he’d seen before. It clearly said that she could find another job anytime she wanted. Unaccountably, he was hurt. This wasn’t work, this was…personal. And Emily

was an employee, not a friend. He bit his lip, feeling extremely foolish.

"You're right. I'm sure we'll, uh, manage."

Emily nodded crisply. "I'll be in the office early in the morning to take care of a few things I didn't get done today, for obvious reasons. I took the liberty of calling an agency and setting up a few interviews with prospective nannies, so you'll want to bring Amanda Sue into the office with you. I thought that was preferable to doing the interviews here, all things considered. But take your time in the morning. I know how hard it is to get a baby changed, fed, dressed, packed and out of the house. First appointment is at ten."

"Ten," he echoed numbly, wondering how in blue blazes he was going to get through this.

"I moved the safety seat to your car earlier while you were putting up the crib," she said. "Just be sure the restraining belt is clipped before you leave. She'll fight you, of course, but she won't win unless you let her."

He nodded, but he didn't mean it. He wouldn't tell her that the curly headed little moppet upstairs had already won the battle of wills between them a dozen times that day. He'd never been so exasperated as when driving her to and from the ranch. It was like trying to travel with a caged tiger, one smarter than him. He'd groveled all he intended to for one day, however. If Emily was determined to go, well, that was that.

When she moved toward the foyer, he almost let her go

without another word, but then he thought of all she'd done for them that day and knew he couldn't. Gritting his teeth, he hurried after her. "Emily."

She paused and turned, obviously expecting more entreaties. "Yes?"

"I just wanted to thank you for everything."

She smiled wearily. "No problem. I realize you were desperate. Glad I could help."

"I still don't know what half the stuff you bought is for, but I'm sure I'll need it," he told her. "I—I just wish I could handle her as well as you do."

"You'll learn," Emily promised. "Now, if you don't mind, I just want to go home and soak in a hot tub before I fall into bed."

Logan suddenly found himself assailed by an unexpected vision that left him struggling for composure: Emily, naked and soaking in a tub of bubbles, her long hair piled loosely on top of her head. He shook himself. What was wrong with him? The Emily he'd always known was buttoned down and bunned, totally efficient, all business. He'd never wondered before what her hair looked like down or if she wore stockings or how she might pile up her hair for a bath.

"By the way," she said briskly, bringing him back to the moment, "you'd better sleep upstairs until you hire a nanny. Otherwise you're going to be running up and down all night long, and she's going to work herself into a real temper by the time you get to her. Just thought I'd better mention that. See you

tomorrow."

She walked out the door and closed it behind her. Logan collapsed against the wall, groaning. He hadn't realized until that moment how much he'd been looking forward to collapsing into his own bed. No doubt about it, his first day of fatherhood had been a day of hell, and now he was reduced to the position of a guest in his own home, while fantasizing about his personal assistant! He couldn't help wondering if anything about his life would ever be the same again.

Emily heard the wails the instant she got off the elevator. Turning right, she walked swiftly past the reception/clerical area and down the long hall to the spacious corner office suite belonging to the Executive V.P. of Fortune Tx, Ltd. The wails had subsided, which hopefully bode well for her employer's developing relationship with his newly found daughter—and Emily's own day.

She pushed through the glass door into the outer office and stowed her things in the corner cabinet. The boss's door was open, allowing his irritable voice to be clearly heard. "Amanda Sue, no! Don't bend… Damn!"

Huffs of protest quickly became screams of outrage. Emily took off the jacket of her navy-blue suit and folded it over the back of her chair. Steeling herself for what she might find inside, she strolled into the inner office.

Logan Fortune sat at his desk in jeans and a rumpled T-shirt, a day-old beard darkening his lower face. He wrestled

with the little body in his lap, trying desperately to clean ink-stained fingers with a wad of Baby Wipes from an open container on the desk. Papers, some in shreds, others splattered with indigo ink and still others covered with huge scribblings, were scattered across the blotter. Amanda Sue fought him tooth and nail, kicking, twisting, bucking, screaming. To his credit, Logan tried mightily to stay calm while holding her tiny wrists in one hand and dabbing and swiping at her fingertips with the other.

"Amanda Sue, please. Just let me clean your fingers. Be still just a minute, baby. If I let go you'll get ink on your pretty face. You don't want ink on your pretty face, do you? Amanda Sue, for pity's sake!"

"Rough morning?" Emily asked.

Both Logan and Amanda Sue froze. Logan's head snapped up. "Emily!" The relief in his voice was both touching and disturbing.

"Mimy!" Amanda Sue cried, struggling upright. Logan quickly took advantage of her momentary calm to finish cleaning her fingers. The pale stains that remained would eventually wear off without transferring noticeable traces to other objects. Quickly, Emily moved across the room and around the desk.

"Did she just say my name?"

"Believe me, it's not the first time," he confirmed. The instant he let go of the child's wrists, she reached for Emily, who hoisted her into her arms, heartstrings singing. The baby was dressed only in a red T-shirt, lopsided diaper and pink socks.

“At first I thought she was asking for her you-know-who,” Logan said. “Then I realized she was asking for you.” He pushed a hand through his hair. “I guess I don’t do things as well as you do. I don’t rock as well. I don’t do breakfast as well. I sure don’t diaper as well.” He sighed and laid his head back against his chair. “We’ve been up since 4:00 a.m.”

“And in all that time you didn’t get a chance to shave—”

“Or shower,” he finished for her. “Or eat or brush my teeth or anything else except cover my butt with the first thing that came to hand.” He sighed and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. “At least we have that much in common, my daughter and I.”

Emily laughed. She couldn’t help it. Amanda Sue, meanwhile, was bending herself into a pretzel trying to reach the papers on the desk.

“Someone’s been drawing pictures,” Emily said, dipping down so Amanda Sue could snag one. The child immediately crumpled one corner of the paper in her fist and carried it to her mouth. “Don’t eat it, sweetheart. Let Emily see it.” She gently pulled the paper from the baby’s hand and shook it out. It contained nothing but wiggly, curving lines and one small rip. It was, nevertheless, a treasure. She handed it to Logan, while speaking to Amanda Sue. “Did you draw a picture for Daddy? How sweet. Daddy’s first picture from Amanda Sue.”

Logan looked at the scribblings and chuckled. “I had no idea she even knew what to do when I pulled out the paper and pens.

I was just desperate to keep her happy for a little while. But she sat right down and got busy. She even holds the pen pretty well, considering her fingers are about an inch and a half long."

Emily smiled, wondering if he knew that he was beginning to sound like a proud papa. "You should tuck that away somewhere for safekeeping," she advised. He continued to stare at the scribbles a moment longer, then opened a drawer and dropped the paper inside. When he looked up, she knew he wasn't even going to mention the "picture" again.

"I brought as many of her things as I could grab. Would you mind dressing her? She puts up a terrific fight when I try."

Emily nodded. "Why don't you run home and change? If you hurry you can be back before the first nanny applicant arrives."

He didn't argue, just pushed back his chair and got up. Emily hid a smile when she saw that he'd put on his athletic shoes without socks and hadn't even tied the laces. "I won't be long," he said, heading for the door.

"Oh, by the way," she called, following him. He paused, but it was almost as if he was afraid she'd changed her mind about watching the baby. The poor guy had really jumped in over his head this time, but she felt sure he'd keep his lungs inflated long enough to learn to swim. "Bring the playpen with you—unless you have a better idea how to corral this one from time to time."

"Playpen," he repeated. "Right."

"And some crayons," Emily suggested. "I bought a small box yesterday. She'll break them all in short order, but they don't

stain."

"Playpen and crayons."

Before he could turn away again, Emily lifted Amanda Sue's arm and wagged it in Logan's direction. "Say, "Bye-bye, Daddy. 'Bye-bye.'"

"'Bye-bye, Daa!" Amanda shouted, pleased to show off.

Logan beamed. "'Bye-bye, Amanda Sue."

Emily brought the baby's hand to her own mouth, kissed it and blew across it in Logan's direction. "Blow Daddy a kiss," she said, and Amanda Sue immediately smacked her hand over her own mouth, removed it, then pursed her mouth in a kiss and blew at Logan.

Logan laughed delightedly, so she did it again, showing her teeth in a gurgle of laughter. "'Bye-bye, Daa!"

"'Bye-bye, Amanda Sue," he said again, waving at her. Everyone was smiling when he pushed through the glass door into the hall, and it was precisely then that Amanda Sue actually realized her father was leaving. Her face registered shock, then dismay, and she screamed as if she'd just taken a bullet. Logan whipped around and shoved back inside, clearly worried. "What?"

"Daa!" she screamed, reaching for him. "Daa!"

Logan looked as if he'd been poleaxed, but then his entire being softened, and he hurried toward her, holding out his arms. "Don't cry, sweetheart. Daddy won't be gone long." Amanda Sue went to him with a false sob of delight. Emily rolled her eyes.

Logan was eating it up, however. “Don’t you want to stay with Emily? She’ll take good care of you till Daddy gets back.” He rubbed her cheek with the back of one finger. “You play with Emily. I’ll be right back, I promise.”

Emily reached for Amanda Sue, and the baby came right to her.

Logan stroked her cheek again. “I’ll be quick as I can, princess.” He looked at Emily with eyes so devastatingly blue in their happy brightness that they took her breath away. “I guess I did better than I thought, huh?” He all but tiptoed to the door, despite the fact that Amanda Sue was watching him calmly now. He hurried away smiling.

Emily chuckled and hoisted Amanda Sue a little higher in her arms. “You little tyrant,” she said laughingly. “I wonder how old you’ll be before he figures out you’ve been playing him like a lute?” Amanda Sue dug a finger into the scarf knotted beneath the Peter Pan collar of Emily’s white cotton blouse and babbled about chins or something similar. “Well, that’s all right,” Emily went on thoughtfully. “Daddies ought to be vulnerable to their daughters, especially this one. God knows he’s broken enough hearts of other fathers’ daughters. Who’d have thought that when he finally met his match she’d be little more than two feet tall?”

Amanda Sue chuckled as if she understood every word, and then she abruptly kicked, stiffened, and tried to slide down to the floor. Emily laughed, catching her more tightly against her. “Oh, no, you don’t. We’re going to get you changed and ready to meet

everyone. We're going to find you a nanny today. Yes, we are. A nanny for Amanda Sue."

It never occurred to her as she carried the child toward her father's office that it might not be as simple as it sounded.

Three

The woman clutched her handbag beneath one arm and patted the steel-gray helmet of her hair even though not a strand had moved out of place. It wouldn't dare, Logan decided, for fear of being plucked and banished. She looked down her lengthy nose at Amanda Sue, who sat in her father's lap, his tie once again clamped firmly between her teeth despite all his efforts to prevent it. She looked like a pink-and-white puppy with a favorite sock in its mouth. Logan had seriously tried to interest her in something else, but she was nothing if not determined, this child of his, and she looked so downright happy and adorable that he didn't have the heart to make her cry again. Some of the other candidates had laughed, but this woman's disapproval was palpable.

"I've dealt with many an unruly child," the woman said smugly, "and my methods have proven successful in nearly every case. Believe me, I know how to bring a child to heel quickly."

It had been a long, disappointing morning, and Logan was feeling the strain. Despite his own mental canine comparisons, he rolled his eyes and snapped, "Dogs are brought to heel. I hope you aren't saying you'll treat my daughter like a dog."

The woman narrowed her eyes to black slits. "Please do not put words in my mouth. I'm merely stating that a willful child requires a strong, firm hand."

Logan pinched his nose, trying to hold on to his temper. His daughter, meanwhile, was continuing to ruin a perfectly good silk tie by gnawing and slobbering on it. Emily had suggested that she was cutting teeth. But he was more concerned about the granite-jawed prison matron sitting across from him. "You do understand that my daughter has been through a terrible loss and trauma, don't you?" he asked.

The woman inclined her head. "All the more reason to provide a strictly scheduled routine. The structure will give her security and teach her self-control."

"She's sixteen months old," he pointed out. "How much self-control can she have at this age?"

"More than you might realize," the woman said complacently. "Turn her over to me, and we'll soon have a different child."

Logan wanted to smack her. How dare she imply that there was something wrong with Amanda Sue! True, she was strong-willed and much too intelligent for his own good, not to mention adventurous enough to scare the pants off him at times, but she was a Fortune. Of course she was strong-willed and intelligent and adventurous, even quick-tempered. She was also beautiful and charming and perfect just as she was. He wouldn't have her changed, but he couldn't help wondering what this hyena in a middle-aged woman's guise might know that he didn't.

"Just exactly how might you accomplish this transformation?" he asked.

The woman readjusted her seat on the chair and lifted her

chin. “I know the so-called experts counsel against breaking a child’s spirit,” she began, “but frankly my experience shows otherwise.”

Now he really wanted to smack her. He set his back teeth. “Is that so?”

She seemed unaware of his censure. “I believe the old ways are the best ways,” she said sagely. “My mother believed children were to be seen and not heard. She made very sure that my brother and I were well-behaved, well-groomed and well-thought-of. If we broke the rules, we were harshly dealt with, let me tell you, but privately. Publicly, she made sure we were a credit to our parents.”

“Uh-huh. And what about your own children? Are they a credit to their parents?”

“Oh, I have no children of my own,” she said dismissively. “I decided long ago to dedicate myself to the children of others, and one thing I realized early on is that modern parents are too emotionally attached to their children to see what it is they really need.”

He couldn’t quite believe he’d heard her right. Emily appeared at his elbow, saying brightly, “Okay, I think that’s enough. Don’t you, Mr. Fortune?”

“Quite enough,” he agreed, sending her a loaded message she couldn’t help interpreting correctly. She moved around the desk to the woman’s side and literally seized her by the arm, pulling her to her feet.

“Thank you for coming,” she said briskly, propelling the woman toward the door. “We’ll be in touch with your agency.”

Amanda Sue made roaring sounds around a mouthful of his tie and smacked her hands aggressively on the top of his desk, as if bidding the woman good riddance. Logan smiled. Even she had sense enough to know that woman didn’t belong anywhere near a child. He wouldn’t entrust an animal to that woman. Unfortunately, he hadn’t found anyone else to whom he could comfortably give over care of his daughter, either.

A couple of the candidates were mere children themselves, just teenagers, really. Two others were in the U.S. only temporarily, one with only weeks left on her visa, and the last thing Logan wanted to do was let Amanda Sue get emotionally attached to someone guaranteed to leave her soon. One woman, while a citizen, didn’t speak English well enough to properly interview. Given the circumstances, he felt Amanda Sue would be too confused to respond well. Another woman had seemed mildly impaired mentally. She was very pleasant, and he liked her a great deal, but he felt uncomfortable leaving her alone with Amanda Sue for days at a time when he was traveling. This last one was the topper on the cake, however, a real brute in support hose.

Emily steered the woman out of his office and her own, then returned, closing the door behind her. “Charles Dickens wrote books about idiots like her,” she said, dropping down onto the corner of his desk. Amanda Sue started crawling up onto the

desk to get to her.

Logan let her go. What could it hurt with him and Emily sitting right there? Emily seemed to agree. She reached out and took Amanda Sue's hands in hers, helping her stand from a crouch, then drawing her forward carefully. "Maybe I should call another agency," she said, fingering a curl on top of the baby's head.

"Do that," he agreed, smoothing a grossly wet, rumpled tie. "This one sure didn't send over any winners."

"Still want to schedule the interviews here?" Emily asked, and he sighed. Interviewing nannies wasn't exactly conducive to business, but he didn't want any strangers knowing where he lived. The kidnapping of his cousin's infant son Bryan had taught them all the folly of not taking every precaution. He nodded.

"Yeah. I don't want anyone I don't completely trust in my house."

"I understand," Emily said. "So tomorrow we start over. Now what?"

He looked around him, wondering if he could keep Amanda Sue here and actually get anything done, but he knew the answer to that. "Why don't you take her on home," he said finally. "I'll try to get through early here so you can get home at a decent hour. Uh, unless I can persuade you to spend the night?"

She sent him a look that said, Please don't ask. He ignored it.

"I could really use a good night's sleep myself," he went on, "and I have so much work to do. And you wouldn't have to cook or anything. I'll pick up something."

"I don't know. I really prefer—"

"I understand," he said, "but I'm desperate here. I haven't even checked my voice mail today."

"All right," she said, capitulating reluctantly, "but just tonight."

He nodded, deeply relieved. "Surely we'll find someone tomorrow."

If the smile she gave him wasn't quite as hopeful as it might have been, he chose not to think about it. He was covered for a few precious hours, and that was enough for the moment. Tomorrow would come soon enough, too soon probably, but he'd cross that bridge when he came to it. Meanwhile, he had a lot of work to do and a little time to do it in. But at least he wouldn't have to worry about his daughter while he was doing it, and that, he was discovering, was more important than anything else.

What a day it had been, Emily mused, wrestling Amanda Sue into her sweater. She had worked closely with Logan Fortune for two years now, but never like this. It was as if they were a couple, rather than simply a good business team, and such illusions were terribly dangerous given the way she felt about him. She'd held the attraction at bay for such a long time, but she wasn't superhuman.

She had known from the beginning of her employment with him that any personal involvement would be sheer folly. Logan was a real player in the field of romance, and Emily was anything but. Dalliance with the likes of him could only lead her to a

broken heart, but here she was about to spend the night at his house. Still, what else could she do? He and Amanda Sue both were obviously exhausted, and how could she not allow him the benefit of her experience when he was trying so very hard? One night, she told herself, and tomorrow would be a better day for everyone.

Finally getting Amanda Sue properly attired, Emily began to gather their things, all the while balancing the child on one hip. Amanda Sue helped out by grasping handfuls of her blouse, front and back, and hanging on. It was awkward, but it beat setting her down and then trying to keep her from looting the desk while gathering everything. She was heading toward the door, laden with baby, purse and bulging diaper bag, when she called out, "We're going now."

To her surprise, Logan got up from his desk and hurried out to send them off. "Wait. Amanda Sue can't go without telling Daddy 'bye-bye." He waved at his daughter and pretended to blow a kiss, as before. His daughter, however, had other ideas. She puckered her lips and leaned so far forward that Emily had trouble holding her up. Logan laughed. "What's she doing now?"

Emily smiled. "I think she wants a real kiss."

He all but recoiled. "A real kiss?"

"It won't kill you, Fortune, and my arm's weakening."

He bent and quickly smacked Amanda Sue on the cheek, but the baby objected, wiping it away with a flat wipe of her hand and puckering up again. Logan looked to Emily for help, and it

was all she could do to keep from laughing. Finally, he pursed his lips and gave Amanda Sue a dry, fleeting peck on the mouth. Satisfied, Amanda Sue grinned and settled back, her arm looping around Emily's neck. Logan colored, but the eyes with which he gazed at his daughter were very nearly worshipful.

"See you later," he said nonchalantly, but he wasn't fooling Emily. That first real kiss from his daughter had tied his heart into knots.

He turned away, but a sudden thought occurred to Emily. "Oh, wait," she said. "What about the safety seat? I can't take her in my car without it."

"You're right. Here, take my keys." He dug into his pants' pocket. "Better yet, just take my car. Otherwise, I'll have to walk down with you."

"True. If you're sure that's how you want to handle it, though, we'd better trade. Otherwise, how will you get home?"

"Good point."

She dug in her purse for her own keys and handed them over, then thought better of it. "Uh, actually, I have to stop to get some overnight things and feed my cat, so I'd better take my apartment key."

"Right."

She pointed out the key, and he worked it off the ring, handing it over with his own.

"This thing just keeps getting more and more complicated, doesn't it?" she said, putting the keys into her bag.

Logan sighed. “To tell you the truth, I guess I’m still reeling from the news. It’s like this whirlwind blew into my life and hasn’t slowed down yet. I keep hoping that when it does, it’ll leave behind some semblance of order, but what are the chances of that?”

“Not much, I’d warrant,” she admitted sympathetically, “but it’ll get better eventually.”

He sighed. “At least I have you until it does,” he said softly. “God help me if I didn’t.”

Emily felt a strange heat blossom in her chest. She quickly turned away before it could spread to her cheeks. “Better get going,” she said briskly.

“Remember,” he called as she pushed through the door, “dinner’s on me.”

She nodded and kept moving, afraid to look back for fear of what she might see in his eyes. Simple gratitude or a certain sensual warmth? The problem was, she wasn’t sure which would frighten her more.

The little car chugged into the driveway and promptly died. Logan pulled the emergency brake, removed the key from the ignition switch and grabbed the bag of Tex-Mex on the passenger seat. The clutch in Emily’s inexpensive car definitely needed an adjustment, as did the driver’s side door, which creaked alarmingly when he opened it and maneuvered his way out.

The temperature had dropped into the upper thirties in the past few hours. Logan shivered, wondering if Amanda Sue had a

heavy coat. It would be infrequently needed here in San Antonio, but he couldn't have his little girl going around cold, not that it was apt to slow her down any.

He made a mental note to ask Emily about the coat as he trudged up the walk to his front door. Then he'd suggest she get that clutch looked at. He wouldn't have her driving his daughter around in an unsafe vehicle. In fact, he wasn't sure he wanted Amanda Sue in such a small car at all. It just didn't seem as safe as his own German luxury sedan. With that in mind, he let himself into the foyer and moved down the hall, baby giggles washing away the tiredness that had been dogging his steps all day long.

He stepped into the living room, a smile on his face, and once more froze in his steps. It wasn't unexpected clutter, this time. The room, in fact, was in pristine condition, save for the old blanket spread upon the floor and the two playing upon it.

Garbed in a footed sleeper, Amanda Sue lay on her back, one hand fisted around the open collar of Emily's blouse, which had been unbuttoned almost to mid-chest. Emily lay on her side next to Amanda Sue, propped up on one elbow. She tickled the baby's round tummy with her fingertips while Amanda Sue kicked and giggled happily and tugged on the collar of Emily's blouse, laying it open and exposing the plump swell of one firm breast. Emily's glasses had been put away and her long, sand-colored hair swung in a thick, silky fall to the floor. Her straight skirt was hiked up to the tops of her thighs, her long legs and slender, delicate feet bare.

Desire hit Logan in the gut, his gaze sweeping up those long, graceful limbs to the skirt bunched near their tops. She definitely did not wear stockings on a daily basis. All this time and he had just now noticed this enticing fact. All this time and he had just now noticed how enticing his executive assistant was.

Had he once thought her oval face was too long? Her mouth too wide? He realized now that it was nothing more than the severe manner in which she had been wearing her hair. Without her glasses he could actually see and appreciate her deeply set, golden-brown eyes and the sweep of high, prominent cheekbones. He was astonished to find that she was, in her own unique way, quite breathtakingly beautiful, and she had been sitting right under his nose for the past two years! He couldn't help wondering just how stupid it would be to seduce the best assistant he'd ever had. If he did, would she suddenly develop dollar signs in her eyes? Somehow he didn't think so.

Emily looked up just then and smiled welcomingly. "Look who's here," she said to the giggling Amanda Sue. "Daddy's home."

Quick as lightning, Amanda Sue flopped over and sat up. She clapped her hands and held up her arms. "Daa-dy!"

Logan dropped the food bag onto a corner of the dining table as he passed by and hurried toward his daughter and her fetching sitter. Going down on one knee, he scooped up Amanda Sue, and laughed delightedly at the exuberant hug and loud, smacking kiss that he got. She smelled clean and fresh, his little girl,

like something new and bright and wholly Amanda Sue, and he realized suddenly that parental love was something innate and fierce. She was his little girl and he loved her. It was as simple as that. Never mind that she had turned his life upside down, that only days ago he hadn't known she even existed. She was his now, and that was all that mattered.

Abruptly, his headstrong daughter twisted around and pointed up the stairs. "Boog!" she announced.

Emily laughed. "She has the memory of an elephant, I swear. I promised her more than an hour ago that Daddy would read her a certain book for a bedtime story."

"Well, Daddy will just have to do that, then," he said enthusiastically. His empty stomach rumbled, but he dutifully rose to his feet, Amanda Sue cradled in one arm, and reached down a hand for Emily. She slipped her fingers into his palm and let him pull her to her feet. "I see she's ready for bed," he said.

"It's not always a two-person job," Emily replied lightly.

"I'm beginning to think there's nothing you can't handle," he said teasingly.

She laughed. "I'm going to remind you of that the next time I ask for a raise."

"Emily," he told her seriously, "all things considered, I'd say a raise was the very least I could do for you. Just name the amount."

She laughed again. "Nah, I don't want you saying I took advantage of you later."

"That's usually my line," he quipped.

She didn't seem to find it funny. Lifting an eyebrow, she looked away. "Is that our dinner over there?"

He nodded. "I assume you like Tex-Mex."

"Love it. Why don't I put it in the oven while you try to get a certain someone down for the night?"

"I'll give it my best shot," he said, "but if I'm not down in half an hour, call the anti-terrorist squad."

Emily chuckled, turning away. "I'm starved."

"That makes two of us," Logan said, following her as far as the foot of the stairs, where he turned and climbed upward while she went on into the dining room and kitchen. He carried Amanda Sue across the landing and down the hall, talking nonsense to her while she babbled back.

"What'd you do this afternoon, Amanda mine?"

"Mimy do sum-sum-sum." She waggled her little fingers above her head.

"Did you play with Emily, hmm?"

She nodded sharply and went on talking. "Up fruffle and pickers. Go see." She pointed to the door to her own room. Logan carried her inside and flipped on the overhead light.

It looked like something out of a fairy tale. A curving canopy had been erected above the white crib, which now sported frothy pink ruffles over and under. The rocking chair had been similarly adorned, and the window, as well. A lamp in the shape of a carousel sat atop the dresser, surrounded by baby dolls and stuffed animals. The shelves below the window had been filled

with small books and colorful toys. A music box had been attached to the side of the crib. Pictures of baby animals adorned the walls. Amanda Sue pointed her little finger at each one and labeled it.

"Pupup. Kitty. Hosey. Sicgen. Pigky. Pish. Moo-cow."

Logan laughed and hugged her tight. "That's right!" He pointed and confirmed each name, correcting her pronunciation. "Puppy, kitty, horsey, chicken, piggy, fish, and a little cow."

"Moo-cow!" Amanda Sue insisted.

"All right, moo-cow. What a smart girl you are, Amanda Sue."

Bucking, she demanded to be put down. He bent and set her feet on the floor. She promptly led him on a tour of the room, pointing out every item for his approval. Finally they made their way to the rocking chair and the book that lay upon the seat. Amanda Sue snatched the book up and held it by one corner, patting the seat cushion with her free hand. "Daddy 'own."

Logan obediently sat, then gathered the child into his arms. She snuggled into the crook of his elbow and crossed one little ankle over the opposite knee, ready to be read to. He was halfway through the brightly illustrated book about—what else?—baby animals, when Emily slipped into the room. Amanda Sue beckoned her over so that Emily stood behind the chair and peered over their shoulders at the pages of the book. Amanda Sue pushed her head back, looking up at Emily. "Cav," she said, adding, "Moo-cow, cav," as she pointed to the mother cow and the baby calf.

“Good grief, she’s bright,” Logan said proudly.

“She certainly is.” Emily moved away then, walking softly. “Mind if I turn down the light?”

“No, go ahead.”

“How about a little background music?” she asked as she switched on the lamp and switched off the overhead light.

“Sure.”

Suddenly the mood was entirely altered, softened, as tinkling music filled the air.

“Keep your voice low and rock gently as you read,” Emily counseled in a whisper as she clipped Amanda Sue’s pacifier to her shoulder and placed Sugar Bear in her lap. The child immediately popped the nipple into her mouth and got a hammerlock on the toy. Logan began to rock, carefully, quietly reading and turning the pages. Soon he realized that Amanda Sue was no longer paying attention. She had dropped off, her face turned into his chest. As he watched, she pushed the pacifier out of her mouth with her tongue and sighed. Suddenly Emily was at his shoulder, whispering into his ear. “Just get up very slowly.”

He laid aside the book and slowly rose, carefully shifting his sleeping daughter as he did so. Emily floated across the room to fold back the covers on the crib. Logan followed and gently lowered Amanda Sue to the mattress. She stirred, sighed, and collapsed into deep slumber, Sugar Bear atop her chest. Logan tucked the covers around her as Emily rewound the music box. He turned on one monitor. She picked up the other and slipped

from the room. Again Logan followed, gently closing the door behind him.

"She loves that room," Logan said as they moved away, keeping his voice low. "She had to show me every little thing, and she kept saying, 'Mimy do, Mimy do.' I didn't realize she was talking so much, not that I could understand much of it. She knows all the animals, though. That much, I got. Did you teach her?"

Emily shook her head. "No. You'll have to credit her mother with that and much more. Amanda Sue has been handled with great care. She's been read to on a regular basis and taught all the basics. Tonight when I brushed her teeth, she didn't protest a peep, just opened her little mouth and patiently waited for me to finish, then rinsed her mouth and gave me a big smile. She kept talking about you this evening, too. 'Daddy come? Daddy come?' I kept assuring her that you would, but I could tell she was missing you."

Logan felt a lump rise in his throat. "She's amazing, isn't she? I can't get over how bright and loving she is."

"When she's getting her way," Emily said cheekily.

He chuckled. "Too true. No one will ever run over Miss Amanda Sue, you can bet on that."

"Not that they're likely to get the chance," Emily said, looking back over her shoulder at him as she began descending the stairs.

"Meaning?"

"They'd have to go through her daddy first, now wouldn't

they?"

He found that he liked the idea. A natural protectiveness seemed to come with the job. "It's so strange," he said. "She didn't exist for me just days ago, and now…" He shook his head, unable to put it into words. He didn't have to.

"I know," Emily said, reaching the bottom of the stairs. "A child changes everything."

He couldn't argue with that. They walked on into the kitchen, where she had laid out plates and flatware. Emily poured the iced tea while he got the food out of the oven and set out the containers. His stomach rumbled again as the aromas of refried beans, rice, tamales, guacamole and spicy enchiladas mingled. They sat down and dug in. The first pangs of hunger were satisfied before his mind turned to other things.

"You were quick to credit her mother earlier," he said to Emily, "but I couldn't help noticing how well you handle Amanda Sue, as well as you do everything else, in fact. You said something yesterday about nieces and nephews, but I have a nephew, and I haven't learned what you have about kids."

She smiled and put down her fork. "Maybe we should put this into perspective. You see, I'm the next to youngest of seven children, and we're pretty spread out, so I have nieces and nephews only a few years younger than me, and quite a few even younger ones. The count went to sixteen, total, this year, some of whom have children of their own."

"Wow!" He shook his head, wondering what else he didn't

know about this woman. Funny, he'd spent more time with Emily Applegate these past two years than any other person of his acquaintance, and yet he knew next to nothing about her.

She picked up her fork and cut a piece of tamale. "That won't last long, though," she said.

He brought his mind back to full attention. "What's that?"

"Sixteen."

"Nieces and nephews, you mean."

She nodded, chewing and swallowing her tamale. "My little sister has just announced that she's in the family way again."

"Your little sister?"

Emily nodded again. "Her name's Lola. She's twenty-three and has been married four years already. We marry young in Kentucky."

"Kentucky," he echoed, thoroughly irritated with himself for not knowing where she was from. Why had he never asked? "Didn't I hire you out of Dallas?"

"That's right. After college I worked in Kingsboro, then Memphis, Tennessee, and then Dallas." She toyed with her guacamole, then forked up a tiny bite. "I was the only one who couldn't wait to get out of Kentucky—well, not counting Cathy."

"Cathy? That one of your sisters?"

Emily shook her head, a tiny smile curving her mouth. "Cathy Wazorski," she said, eyes twinkling. "She was my very best friend. We grew up plotting ways to get out of Kentucky."

"And you found your way out through college," he surmised

correctly.

"True. It wasn't easy, mind you. We were poor as church mice. Mom and Dad just couldn't afford to help, so I'm still paying off the school loans, but it's worth it."

Logan shifted uncomfortably. He knew the value of hard work. He'd earned his way to the top of the family company, and no one could say otherwise, but he'd never had to worry about money, certainly not as a college student. Now he wondered if Emily was not somehow a stronger or better person than he for having done it all on her own. To turn aside his thoughts he changed the subject of the conversation.

"And did Cathy make it, too?" he asked.

Emily grinned, making him feel that she'd just been waiting for him to ask. "You could say that, seeing as you probably know her as Ciara Wilde."

He dropped his fork. "You're kidding! The actress?" He fleetingly pictured the tall, shapely star with the flowing blond hair as he'd seen her in her last movie, enveloped in satin and furs, and tried to reconcile that with a picture of Emily's childhood friend from Kentucky.

"The very same," Emily confirmed proudly. "In fact, as I'm sure you've heard on the news, she's filming a movie here in San Antonio right now, and we get together as often as our schedules allow."

He shook his head. "I'm absolutely amazed."

She laughed. "Don't let the movie star persona fool you.

Cathy's nothing like her public image. She's really a sweet, down-to-earth person."

He picked up his fork. "I wasn't talking about Cathy, or Ciara."

"No? What then?"

"You! What else don't I know? Not only are you the best executive assistant I've ever had, you're an expert with children, and you came by that expertise as a poor kid from a big family in Kentucky who pulled herself up by her bootstraps and now hobnobs with movie stars. Add to that your looks, and Emily Applegate is an altogether unexpected bundle of surprises."

She frowned at him, leaning forward slightly over her plate—and unwittingly giving him an excellent view of the deep cleavage between her breasts. "What about my looks?"

As if she didn't know. "You hide them, that's what," he said. "You pretend to be this mousy, prim, pseudo librarian type, when you're really quite beautiful."

Emily gaped at him, then pointedly clamped her mouth shut and swallowed. "If that was supposed to be a compliment, then, thank you—I think. I was unaware, however, that my efforts to present a professional appearance offended you."

"I didn't say that," he protested. "I just meant that you look different without your glasses and with your hair down and…" He cleared his throat and switched course. "You just surprise me sometimes, that's all." He lifted his napkin to his mouth and changed the subject. "Let me know whenever you and your friend want to get together, and I'll see to it that you're free."

Emily bowed her head, her long, silky hair sliding across her shoulders in a multicolored cascade of biscuit brown, sand and gold. “Thank you, Mr. Fortune. I appreciate that.”

He liked the way she said his name, but he suddenly decided that it was not enough just to hear her say it in casual conversation. No, indeed. Before he was through, he would hear her whisper his name with longing and shout it with ecstasy. Wise or not, he was going to find a way to have Emily Applegate in his bed.

Then he would know all her secrets.

Four

Emily mechanically stroked the brush through her long hair, lost in thought and comforted by the mindless ritual that she performed nightly. The fact that she sat on the edge of a large, sumptuous bed made of pale twisted logs and belonging to Logan Fortune accounted for both her bemusement and her tension.

What an odd evening it had been. After dinner they'd sat on the couch and discussed her thoughts on child development and exactly what he ought to be looking for in a nanny. Logan had informed her that she needed to have her clutch adjusted, then had asked her questions about her childhood and family, but to her surprise, he hadn't mentioned Cathy—or rather, Ciara Wilde—again. In fact, he'd almost seemed to be flirting with her, Emily! But no, that couldn't be so. She simply wasn't his type.

Frankly, she'd half expected him to demand an introduction to Cathy, especially since Cathy was at present right there in San Antonio, a fact that anyone who read the daily papers, listened to radio or watched a local news program on television could not escape. Emily wasn't sure what to make of his seeming lack of interest in one of the world's most beautiful women. Cathy—or Ciara, actually, though she couldn't quite think of her that way—was very much Logan's type, while she, Emily, was anything but. Perhaps Amanda Sue's advent into his life had changed him more than she realized. More likely, though, it was merely a

momentary aberration.

No doubt, once they found a nanny to take over Amanda Sue's care, Logan Fortune would revert right back to his womanizing ways. Perhaps he would even forget about his little daughter and live as though she didn't even exist. Emily couldn't quite believe that, though, not after watching him fall head over heels for the little imp these past couple of days. He hadn't even balked when she'd suggested that he ought to again sleep upstairs tonight, that his being the one to answer his daughter's cries of distress would be a bonding experience. Of course, she'd promised to take over for him if Amanda Sue again seemed intent on keeping him awake through the night, but still, he seemed anxious to forge a real relationship with his daughter.

No, she couldn't see Logan abandoning his daughter emotionally or otherwise, but neither could she see him genuinely interested in herself. She just wasn't his type, and if she were, it wouldn't mean anything because Logan Fortune was not her type. She wanted a man who would be happy to settle down with one woman, a man who would love and treasure her always. She couldn't settle for anything less and still maintain her self-respect.

It was a terrible pity, all things considered, because Logan was everything she wanted in a man. Unfortunately, she knew Logan too well to believe that she could hold his interest indefinitely. No, Ciara Wilde would definitely have a better shot at it. Still, she had no intention of introducing the two, none at all, if only for Cathy's sake. After all, it was common knowledge that her friend

was engaged to be married to one of Hollywood's most popular hunks. Emily couldn't help feeling a little envious since her own life seemed destined to remain forever hunkless. It had been a very long time since she'd found a man whom she even wanted to meet for coffee, let alone date, any man besides Logan, that was.

With a sigh, Emily laid aside the brush, lifted the covers and slid beneath them. The soft ivory cotton of her short, man-tailored pajamas warmed against her skin almost instantly. Within moments, she was sleeping peacefully, unaware of the sultry dreams of the man in whose bed she lay.

Heart-rending sobs. Muffled words. Pounding. Emily jerked awake, aware that the door to her bedroom had been opened. Light flooded her consciousness, blinded her eyes. She blinked, clearing tiny patches of sight that revealed rugged furnishings and desert tones. She was in Logan Fortune's bedroom, and those deeply mournful sobs belonged to baby Amanda Sue. She struggled up onto her elbows, just as Logan's considerable weight caused the side of the bed to dip.

"Ma-ma! Ma-ma!"

Emily shoved hair out of her face and croaked, "What's wrong?"

"I think she dreamed about her mother," Logan said in a clearly anguished voice.

Emily sat up straight, folding her legs beneath the covers. The first thing she saw was Logan's bare chest, burnished skin molding well-defined pectorals lightly covered with crisp, dark

hair that dwindled sharply into a straight line that dropped out of sight beneath the elastic waistband of his fleece pants. Only then did she see Amanda Sue, who lay in her father's lap without struggle, one arm thrown across her eyes, tears seeping from beneath it as she sobbed. This was no temper fit but deep grief. Emily leaned forward to lift the tiny arm. Amanda Sue's temper reasserted itself, and she actually took a swipe at Emily, but Emily didn't take it personally. She stroked Amanda Sue's hair, crooning softly.

"It's all right, darling. Daddy and Emily are here. It's all right."

"Ma-ma," Amanda Sue sobbed. "Ma-ma."

"I know, sweetheart. I know. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. But Daddy is here."

A worried look on his face, Logan shifted Amanda Sue into a sitting position. "That's right. Daddy is here, and we'll take care of you, I promise. Emily and Daddy will take care of our Amanda Sue."

Amanda Sue took a deep, shuddering breath. "Da-dy go," she ordered petulantly, and Logan looked at Emily.

She could read the question in his eyes. Did Amanda Sue want him to leave her with Emily? She probably did. After losing her mother it would be perfectly normal for her to try to bond with the first available female, but it was her father with whom she needed to bond, not a temporary baby-sitter. Emily shook her head, and Logan looked down at his daughter, turning her face up with a finger pressed beneath her chin.

“Amanda Sue, Daddy isn’t going anywhere. You’re my little girl, and I’m going to take care of you from now on.”

Amanda Sue’s snub of a nose was running, and Emily wiped it with a corner of the sheet, finding nothing else close to hand. Amanda Sue tried to take advantage of that to shift herself into Emily’s arms, but Emily folded her hands in her lap. Logan went on talking to the child in a soft, gentle voice, and presently she lifted a small hand to finger the underside of her father’s beard-roughened chin. He smiled down at her, dipped his head and nipped at her fingers, catching them in his mouth. She didn’t giggle as she might have at another time, but she didn’t pull away, either. He kissed her palm and her cheek, whispering, “Amanda Sue is my girl. Yes, she is. Pretty Amanda Sue is Daddy’s girl.”

Amanda Sue caught a huffing breath and solemnly asked, “Wuv Da-dy?” She seemed to be asking whether or not Daddy loved her and if she was expected to love him in return. Emily’s heart turned over, but Logan went as still as a statue. Emily felt a lump in her throat. She swallowed it down and moved closer, reaching around Logan to stroke Amanda Sue’s damp cheek, all too aware of the expanse of bare skin he presented.

“Daddy loves you, Amanda Sue,” she crooned. “You’re his very own little girl.”

She gave Logan a gentle nudge in the ribs. He jerked, then cleared his throat and smiled.

“That’s right, angel. Daddy does love you.” He gathered her into a fierce hug, whispering, “I love you very much.”

Amanda Sue's fine hair caught in her father's beard stubble as she pulled back. Fascinated, she lifted a hand to his cheek. Then abruptly she shifted her attention to Emily. Eyes bright, she grinned and declared in a playful tone, "Wuv Mimy!"

Emily felt as if she'd been kicked in the chest. Laughing to keep the threatening tears at bay, she pulled Amanda Sue out of her father's embrace and laid her on the bed so she could tickle her tummy. "And I love you, too, munchkin," she managed, telling herself as the child giggled that it was just a game. Amanda Sue would forget her once she had completely bonded with her father, a process that seemed to be proceeding apace.

The growling of Amanda Sue's stomach stopped her giggles cold. Comically, the baby lifted her head and peered down at her belly, a look of wonder on her face. Emily and Logan laughed. Emily said, "Someone's hungry."

Amanda Sue promptly flopped over and sat up, holding out a hand. "Bobble," she demanded.

Emily smiled. "All right, young lady, a bottle it is." She gathered the child into her arms and looked at Logan. "If you'll take her back upstairs and change her diaper, I'll heat the milk and fill the bottle."

"I thought she drank cold milk now."

"She does, but warm milk will help her sleep."

He lifted both brows, suddenly seeming much too close sitting there on the side of the bed. "You mean that old wive's tale about

warm milk is true?"

"I do." She tickled Amanda Sue under the chin. "A warm bottle and dry diaper ought to have this little lady snoozing again in no time." She held Amanda Sue toward her father. "Go with Daddy, sweetheart, and I'll bring you a bottle. Okay?"

Amanda Sue nodded emphatically and, leaning sideways, looped an arm around her father's neck. Logan folded her against him and kissed the tip of her nose. She giggled and wrinkled her nose at the prick of his beard. Logan chuckled and stood. "Come on, then, sweetheart. We've got one end dry, now let's try the other."

"I'll be up in a minute," Emily said, watching as they left the room. Logan's broad back was straight and strong as he carried his daughter through the door. Emily swung her feet over the side of the bed and stood. Moving quickly, she padded barefoot into the kitchen, poured milk into a measuring cup and heated it in the microwave for several seconds. After testing it, she heated it a few seconds more, then poured it into a clean bottle and carried it upstairs.

Logan was still trying to get a dry diaper on Amanda Sue, who was repeatedly lifting both legs and letting them fall again. "Amanda Sue, please stop," he was pleading. "Stop kicking. Let Daddy fix your diaper."

Emily stepped to his side. The child spotted the bottle and let out a cry, reaching for it, but Emily shook her head. "Not until you let Daddy fix your diaper."

Amanda Sue promptly collapsed her legs. After a second or so, she reached for the bottle again, and Emily handed it over. Immediately, Amanda Sue lifted her legs, much to her father's irritation. Emily took the bottle back.

"That's not fair, Amanda Sue," she admonished gently but firmly. "Let Daddy finish the diaper, and I'll give you the bottle."

Amanda Sue's bottom lip protruded in a pout, but she lay still long enough for Logan to fix the diaper and snap closed the legs of her knit sleeper. Emily handed over the bottle and picked up the baby, moving to the rocking chair. "It isn't good to let them fall asleep with a bottle in their mouths," she explained. "Leads to tooth decay."

"Ah."

She sat down and helped Amanda Sue get comfortable. "Will you wind the music box and lower the lights?"

Logan nodded, then said, "Let me wash my hands."

"Good idea."

He left them for a time, then returned to do as Emily had requested. "You can go on to bed, if you want," she said, looking up at him.

He nodded, but instead of leaving the room, he began straightening the covers in the crib, then brought Amanda Sue her Sugar Bear. She grinned her thanks around the nipple in her mouth and got her customary headlock on the stuffed toy. Within minutes, the bottle was drained and Amanda Sue was rubbing her eyes. Emily looked around to find that Logan had left the

room quietly. She rocked a little while longer, then gently moved Amanda Sue to her bed, tucked her in with her Sugar Bear and kissed her forehead. Amanda Sue closed her eyes and sighed deeply, well on her way to a sound sleep.

Emily slipped out into the hall and gently closed the door behind her, the empty bottle in hand. To her surprise, Logan pushed away from the wall and came to her side, whispering, "Is she asleep?"

"Almost. I think we ought to let her get herself to sleep this time," Emily replied as they moved on down the hall. "If she cries again, go back in but don't take her out of bed. Instead, reassure her in whispers and try to settle her into sleep that way, so she'll learn that she can't expect to get picked up whenever she demands."

Logan nodded, a hand on the back of his neck. "It wasn't my imagination, though, was it? She really was crying for her mother, wasn't she?"

"I think so," Emily told him. "I think she did dream about Donna and wake up missing her. It's only natural, you know, and it may happen again, but you know how to handle it now, just keep assuring her that you love her."

Logan sighed and slid an arm around her shoulders, saying, "I owe you so much. You've taught me things I couldn't have learned anywhere else. I didn't even realize how important it was to say the words until you prodded me."

"It's always important to say the words," she said, "but you'd

figure out most of this stuff on your own in time."

Logan shook his head. "I don't know. There's still so much to think about. For instance, shouldn't she be giving up that bottle pretty soon?"

They had reached the head of the stairs, and Emily turned to face him, intentionally dislodging his arm. It was proving difficult to think clearly with that arm wrapped around her. At the same time, it felt oddly natural. She pushed her hair over her shoulder, saying, "Your instincts are better than you think. Yes, I'd say that it was time to think about giving up that bottle, but if it was me, I'd wait a few weeks, be sure she's settled in well with the new nanny and all."

He nodded thoughtfully. "Right. She has enough to deal with just now. What about potty training, though? When do we start that?"

Emily chuckled. The middle of the night was a strange time to be discussing such subjects, but she answered him anyway as she descended the stairs. "It's too early for that, in my opinion, but it won't be long. I'd say that in a few months you ought to buy a potty chair and put it in her bathroom. Talk about it and what it's for, then later you put her in pull-ups, disposable diapers made like panties. After that, you buy some talking books, the ones with the little recorders built into them, and when you sit her on the chair, you let her entertain herself with one of those books so she'll stay there long enough to get her business done. But even then you'll have to clean her up, praise her, and reward

her, remembering that she's going to have accidents from time to time, and this is all moot because the nanny is going to handle it anyway. Not that you won't have a hand in it. You're her father, after all."

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