

## Chesapeake August 1987

As Cuda lay in bed he was aware of everything around him, as if it was the first time he had ever been there. In fact, the reason that he was so acutely aware of it all was because he thought it could be his last time there.

Kathy was lying next to him and he could hear her shallow breathing, which made him think that she was asleep, even as he knew that she would have had trouble sleeping the night before he left. He stared at her peaceful face and it still took his breath away at times like these. Her eyes were closed and her lips slightly parted which made her look innocent and vulnerable, making him want her even more than he already did. He could smell her hair which flowed across her pillow in waves and he wondered when he would smell it again. He traced the outline of her body with his eyes as she lay there, his eyes stopping to linger on the curve of her waist. She was naked, but the sheet was casually draped across her from her shoulders down, as if in an attempt at modesty while asleep. Even though he had seen her a thousand times he wanted to look at her without the sheet on. He thought about gently pulling it off but didn't want to disturb her.

He was filled with an aroused anticipation, in part because he had so much ahead today but also because it was morning, and he always felt this way in the morning. It was the last morning he

would have an opportunity like this for a while and he ached to touch her one last time. But he did not.

He concentrated on the way the sheets felt on his skin as he was lying there, and listened to the quietness of the room. All he could hear was her barely perceptible breathing as his eyes wandered toward the window, where the first hint of morning seeped into the room.

“Are you awake?”

The suddenness of her voice startled him and he quickly moved his eyes from the window to her face. Her eyes were wide open now and he looked directly into them and realized that she had not been asleep at all.

“Are you?”

“I asked first.”

“Well, in that case I’m still asleep,” he teased.

She slid her hand across the sheets and reached for him below his waist. She felt how hard he was and mischievously grinned as she held him in her hand.

“Then you must be having some incredible dreams. Who are you dreaming about?”

“Someone with deep beautiful eyes that captivate someone’s soul, has a great body,” his eyes wandered to her mouth, “and has these pouty lips that are dying to be kissed.”

She leaned toward him, and as she turned her head to kiss him she pulled him closer.

He could feel the wetness of her mouth and the passion within her as they kissed, slightly opening and closing their mouths. Their wet lips moved back and forth and their tongues probed

each other's mouths. They pulled closer, feeling the warmth and smoothness of the other's body as their breathing increased.

He pulled his mouth away and turned his head slightly, for just a second, so he could reposition himself to better hold her and pull himself closer.

The light from the window was now beginning to fill the room and when he turned his face back to kiss her he saw that her lips were closed and her lower lip was slightly trembling. A single tear ran down from the corner of her eye toward the mattress as she lay there quietly looking at him. He could see that her eyes were swollen as they held him, full only of questions.

He couldn't believe what he was seeing. "Hey, we're not going to have any of that now, are we?"

"Any of what?"

"Tears . . . crying . . . carrying on. All that stuff."

She forced herself to hold back her emotions but it seemed to make her tears start flowing more, and she couldn't hold those back.

"No, I'm fine," she sniffed.

"You are? You don't look like you're fine."

She was beginning to feel slightly angry now and she said more firmly this time, "I said, I'm fine."

"Then why are you crying?"

"Why am I crying? Misplaced emotions, I suppose. Why do you think I'm crying? You're going away for seven months and I'm just supposed to act like nothing is happening?"

"It's my job. I'm just going to work and then I'll be home,

just like anyone else that goes to work. It's only *six* months, too."

"That's what they said last time. They always say six months, then something happens, and it's seven, eight, who knows how long. A year?"

"I can't control that. It's the way it's always been. It's not a big deal. It'll be over before you know it."

"It *is* a big deal. Not everyone else goes away to work for seven months then traipses back home like nothing unusual happened."

"A lot of people go away for seven months around here."

"That's because they're in the Navy too. But at least they deal with it and don't make believe like it's nothing unusual."

"It's not something unusual. It's just a fact of life, and with an attitude like that you're going to make it that much worse. I'm just going to work, just like any other day, and then I'll come home."

"You *might* come home."

"I *always* come home."

"Last time. Some people didn't come home last cruise."

"They weren't me."

She tried not to feel anger but it seemed to well up uncontrollably from deep within her. "Oh, I forgot, you're invincible. You're the perfect RIO and you're always lucky. The pilots you fly with never make mistakes. I suppose that's why you went for a swim in the Caribbean three months ago when your pilot couldn't get aboard, or did you forget about that little ejection thing?"

"I lived."

“Well, what if you’re not so lucky next time? Luck doesn’t last forever. When it runs out it doesn’t make any difference how lucky you were last time, does it? It only matters how lucky you are when it happens next time.”

When she stopped she realized that she had been steadily getting louder.

He was lying there looking at her blankly, almost in disbelief.

“This conversation is over.” He pushed himself up from the bed then rolled feet-first onto the floor.

“What if I want to still talk about it?”

He moved away toward the bathroom without turning to answer her.

She was feeling so much but at the same time felt almost nothing. Passion, anger, fear, love, and even hate roiled inside her, but it always left her feeling the same when he left. It left her feeling numb. And alone.