



Silhouette®

1046
December

INTIMATE MOMENTS™

Carla Cassidy
a year of
Loving dangerously

**STRANGERS WHEN
WE MARRIED**

**Husband and
wife...again?**

**When a deadly traitor threatens to dishonor a top-secret agency, A YEAR OF LOVING
DANGEROUSLY begins....**

Seth Greene

Green eyes, lean muscles—
irresistibly good-looking

His efforts to single-handedly capture Simon brought Seth home to the wife he'd left—the child he had fathered. The family he longed to finally claim as his own. If only he could...

Meghan Greene

A brainy beauty in danger of falling in love with
her ex-husband...

Because he needed her help, Meghan let the husband who had broken her heart into her home once more. Now she wondered if she would be able to deny anything to the man she'd once given herself so passionately to....

“Simon”

Luck had been on his side so far, but desperation
might be this deadly traitor's undoing....

*With money as his prime motivator,
Simon set about closing a deal that would give
him the cash he needed to complete his evil
mission. Would nothing stop him now?*

Dear Reader,

The year is ending, and as a special holiday gift to you, we're starting off with a 3-in-1 volume that will have you on the edge of your seat. *Special Report*, by Merline Lovelace, Maggie Price and Debra Cowan, features three connected stories about a plane hijacking and the three couples who find love in such decidedly unusual circumstances. Read it—you won't be sorry.

A YEAR OF LOVING DANGEROUSLY continues with Carla Cassidy's *Strangers When We Married*, a reunion romance with an irresistible baby and a couple who, I know you'll agree, truly do belong together. Then spend 36 HOURS with Doreen Roberts and *A Very...Pregnant New Year's*. This is one family feud that's about to end...at the altar!

Virginia Kantra's back with *Mad Dog and Annie*, a book that's every bit as fascinating as its title—which just happens to be one of my all-time favorite titles. I guarantee you'll enjoy reading about this perfect (though they don't know it yet) pair. Linda Randall Wisdom is back with *Mirror, Mirror*, a good twin/bad twin story with some truly unexpected twists—and a fabulous hero. Finally, read about a woman who has *Everything But a Husband* in Karen Templeton's newest—and keep the tissue box nearby, because your emotions will really be engaged.

And, of course, be sure to come back next month for six more of the most exciting romances around—right here in Silhouette Intimate Moments.

Enjoy!



Leslie J. Wainger
Executive Senior Editor

Carla Cassidy

STRANGERS WHEN WE MARRIED



INTIMATE MOMENTS™

Published by Silhouette Books

America's Publisher of Contemporary Romance

To Frank, my own deliciously dangerous hero,
who shares not only my life, but my hopes, my dreams,
my heart, as well.



A note from popular writer Carla Cassidy, author of over thirty-five novels for Silhouette Books

I love reunion stories...stories where couples get a second chance to embrace a love that will last a lifetime. Working on the sixth book in the A YEAR OF LOVING DANGEROUSLY series gave me the opportunity to unite two people who belong together. *Strangers When We Married* is the story of a love meant to be, a love that time and sacrifice won't change.

Deliciously dangerous Seth Greene stole my heart and made telling his story an absolute delight. Meghan Greene is a strong, independent woman who has pulled her life together after her bitter, heartbreaking divorce from Seth. When these two reluctantly team up to find an elusive criminal, the passionate past comes crashing back to haunt them and make them realize what's really important in life.

Participating in this continuity series with so many talented authors telling so many wonderful stories about honorable, committed men and the women who love them has been a pure pleasure. I hope you will enjoy reading *Strangers When We Married* as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Happy reading!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carla Cassidy". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left and then curves back under the name.

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He dreamed of death and destruction, of guns barking and human carnage. And in his nightmare the dead came back to haunt him, their eyes coldly accusing.

Seth Greene sat straight up in bed, automatically reaching for the gun he wasn't wearing. His heart pumped ferociously, shooting volumes of blood through his veins to his brain, producing the kind of fight-or-flight adrenaline that was intimately familiar.

It took him only a second to leave the dream and gain reality, to remember that he was in the only place on earth he was safe...except from his dreams.

He drew a ragged breath and raked a hand across his jaw, waiting for the burst of explosive adrenaline to subside.

Brilliant moonlight filtered into the large room through the floor-to-ceiling window that provided a spectacular view of the rugged southern California mountains.

He got out of bed and went to the window, hoping the moonlit landscape might erase the lingering vestiges of his nightmares, erase the bitter taste of failure from his mouth.

There were no bad views at the Condor Mountain Resort and Spa. Each window offered a panoramic view of nature at its finest. Towering pines, the Pacific Ocean and rugged landscape gave the impression of a place untouched by man. Even the buildings that comprised the luxury spa were built to blend harmoniously into the landscape.

It had been designed as a place of peace, of healing and tranquillity. But, in the twenty-four hours since his arrival, no peace had entered his soul, no tranquillity had eased the burden of guilt that ripped at his gut.

He turned away from the window and grabbed the jeans he'd kicked off before going to bed. He pulled them on along with a thick, flannel shirt and his shoes, then left the room, knowing further sleep was impossible, at least for the rest of the night.

Unsure of his destination, knowing only the need to escape the confines of the room, he wound down the darkened corridor and found the door that led him out onto the large flagstone terrace.

Once outside, he breathed deeply of the ocean air in an attempt to relax his shoulder muscles that had been knotted for far too long. But, the memory of those dead men, their haunting, accusatory faces in his dream, merely served to further tighten his muscles and sicken his gut.

Back home, it would be cold enough to snow. He tipped his head back and closed his eyes. Washington, D.C., was beautiful in the snow, the stately buildings and picturesque homes with a glistening frosting and dangling shiny icicles.

He frowned and focused his gaze on the sky overhead. D.C. hadn't been his home for a very long time. Almost two years.

The brilliant stars faded as images flashed through his mind, images of a quaint town house in Georgetown, and a woman with eyes the color of a mysterious forest and a mane of curly red hair.

Meghan. He remembered tangling his hands in that glorious hair, kissing sweet, full lips until they were swollen. The memory of their lovemaking was seared into his head. Hot. Hungry.

Swearing beneath his breath, he whirled around and placed his hands on the rough edge of the stone wall, beyond which was a deep, deadly ravine.

"Contemplating jumping?" The deep male voice came from behind him and he turned around to see Easton "East" Kirby eyeing him soberly.

"You know me better than that," Seth scoffed. "I've never been one to take the easy way out." He once again turned to face the ravine. "How did you know I was out here?"

East joined him at the wall. “When you came down for supper last night, I knew you were coiled too tight to sleep the night through. I’ve had one ear to the floor for the last couple of hours.”—

Seth forced a small smile. “A position like that makes it hard to make love to your wife, doesn’t it?”

East laughed, the deep, low chuckle of a contented man. “Don’t you worry about Alicia’s and my love life. We manage fine, thank you.”

Considering the fact that East’s wife, Alicia, was almost five months pregnant, it was obvious they did manage their personal relationship fine, as well as managing the Condor efficiently.

For a moment the two men stood side by side, both of them staring out into the shadowed darkness before them. Around them night creatures rustled in the underbrush, a light ocean breeze stirred the leaves of nearby trees and somewhere in the distance a coyote howled its malcontent.

“I screwed up.” Seth turned and stared at East’s face, focusing on the man’s eyes to see if there was any hint of censure there. “I screwed up and a lot of good agents fell.”

He drew a deep, ragged breath as he saw no censure, no judgment in East’s eyes, and had instinctively known that he wouldn’t.

“Those men knew the risks and if I were you, I’d be hesitant to accept full blame for a blown sting operation.”

“I’m placing blame where it belongs,” Seth said darkly. “Hell, it’s obvious the agency blames me since they sent me here.”

East chuckled once again. “I’ve never heard anyone before consider coming here as a punishment.” His laughter died and Seth felt his gaze on him. “Jonah sent you here because you needed to put things in their proper perspective, because you need to rest and make sure your head is on straight before they send you out again.”

“What did Jonah tell you about all this?” Seth’s stomach knotted up as he thought of the man he’d give his life for, a man he’d never actually met in person.

Jonah was the head of SPEAR, the covert government agency that gave Seth his orders...the agency that gave Seth a reason for his existence. SPEAR, an acronym that defined all that Seth was as a man. Stealth, Perseverance, Endeavor, Attack and Rescue, an organization to which Seth had pledged his honor, committed his life, and would die for if necessary.

East shrugged his broad shoulders in answer to Seth’s question. “You know Jonah...a man of few words. All he said was that the sting was successful in that SPEAR is now in possession of the weapons Simon intended to acquire.”

Seth frowned at the name of the man who was attempting to destroy not only Jonah, but the entire SPEAR organization. “Yeah, we got the guns, but Simon escaped...along with seven hundred pounds of uncut heroin.” Again a wave of anger and guilt bludgeoned Seth from within. Dammit, it had been his operation. How in the hell had it all fallen apart?

East emitted a low whistle. “Seven hundred...street value will be astronomical.”

“Don’t remind me.”

Again the two men fell silent. Seth stared out into darkness, his mind whirling in chaos. At the same time his mind reeled, he drew in deep breaths in an attempt to give an outward appearance of calm.

“I think maybe I’ll do a little hiking in the morning,” Seth said, although a trek through nature was the furthest thing from his mind.

East nodded with obvious approval. “Nothing like fresh air and exercise to cleanse the spirit.”

Seth forced a yawn. “I’d like to head out at before sunrise, so I guess I’ll go back to my room and see if I can catch a couple more winks.”

East nodded once again. “Seth, if you need to talk...or anything, you know Alicia and I are

available any time.”

~~Seth clapped the tall, powerfully built man on the shoulder. “Thanks, East. I’ll be fine.” Without waiting for a reply, aware of East’s speculative gaze on him, Seth turned and went back the way he had come.~~

Once inside the privacy of his room, he sat on the edge of the bed, allowing his thoughts full rein. Dead agents...a wealth in dope...and Simon. His mind reeled with frustration, regret and anger.

He remained seated on the bed for a little over an hour, hoping to allow enough time to pass to ensure that East and his wife were sound asleep.

Thankfully, he hadn’t unpacked his things the day before when he’d arrived. The small black bag by the door held everything he needed to live, including two sets of false identification...identification he couldn’t use because he didn’t want anyone, especially not the superiors who had provided the false credentials, to know where he was going or what he was doing.

He zipped the bag and with the stealth of a wildcat, opened the door and crept down the hallway in the opposite direction he’d gone earlier.

Not wanting to use the front door in the lobby area, he headed for a little-used service door in the kitchen. He pulled the door open and hesitated in the threshold, torn between duty and desire, following rules or breaking them.

He knew if he walked through the door and into the night, he’d be AWOL. He wasn’t sure what repercussions to expect, knew that he’d be considered a renegade agent, but he couldn’t worry about that now.

He had to get out of here. Another minute of this peace and tranquillity would kill him. Seth was accustomed to action and he had a definite plan in mind.

Without further hesitation, he stalked out of the door and into the night. The darkness surrounded him, and his dark jeans and shirt camouflaged him as he walked further and further away from the resort.

He needed some answers. Sooner or later Simon would sell the 700 pounds of heroin for cash and more weapons, ammunition he could use to further his destruction of Jonah and SPEAR.

Seth knew only one person who had the sharp intelligence, the innate shrewdness and skilled computer expertise to help him find Simon and the missing drugs.

His ex-wife.

Meghan.

Of course, before he could get her to agree to help him, he’d have to get her to agree to at least see him, talk to him. And that might be far more difficult than finding a cunning, traitorous criminal named Simon.

Meghan Greene believed in the comfort of rituals. She always had a glass of wine before dinner no matter how long the meal might be postponed.

Despite exhaustion and late hours, she always rubbed hand lotion on her legs and elbows before getting into bed. And every evening before leaving work for the day, she covered her computer monitor with a dustcover and carefully wiped down the glass-topped desk with window cleaner.

This day was no different: She sprayed and swiped, then stepped back to survey the results.

“When you get done over there, how about giving my desk a little spray and elbow grease,” Marjorie Lathrop said as he carried a cup of coffee past her.

“Fat chance,” Meghan retorted and eyed his desk with disdain. Discarded take-out food containers littered his space, along with dirty coffee mugs, a plate of three-day-old chocolate éclairs

and enough dust to fill a vacuum bag. “It would take more than a little elbow grease on that. You might consider calling HAZMAT to take care of the job.”

“Ha ha,” Mark replied dryly. He flopped into his chair and eyed her curiously. “Got big plans for the weekend?”

“Sure, me and my best guy are going to spend some quality time together.” Meghan swiped the glass a final time then opened the nearby supply closet and put the cleaner away.

“How is Kirk?” Mark asked as he propped his feet up on his desk, narrowly missing the stale *éclair*s.

Meghan smiled. “He’s wonderful.” She stole a glimpse at her watch. “And if I don’t get out of here, he’ll be squalling because dinner is late.” She pulled on her coat and picked up her purse.

“Okay, I’ll see you tomorrow morning. Turn the sign in the window on your way out.”

Meghan nodded and when she got to the door, flipped the sign from open to closed, then stepped out of the front door of the squat redbrick building.

The sign in the front window of the establishment proclaimed it to be the Lathrop Employment Agency, owned by Mark. Although it was true they functioned as an employment agency on the surface, in actuality the office belonged to SPEAR.

The Washington, D.C., traffic was horrendous as usual, and it took Meghan close to thirty minutes to get to the nearby Happy Time Day Care Center.

She hurried to the cheerful room where Kirk spent his days. “Sorry I’m late,” she said to Harriet Winslowe, the white-haired teacher all the children called Grandma Harry. “Hey buddy.” She held out her arms as Kirk came toddling toward her, a drooly, happy smile decorating his handsome little face.

“Mama.” He grabbed her nose and squealed in delight as she scooped him up and kissed his sweet, chubby neck.

“Was he good?” she asked Harriet.

“Good as gold. I’ve never seen such a happy baby.”

Meghan smiled. “Yes, he is a happy boy.” She shifted Kirk from one side to the other. “And growing like a weed.”

Harriet smiled. “They tend to do that.”

“Yes, they do.”

As Meghan bundled the little boy up in his coat and hat, she and Harriet small-talked about the weather and the imminent Christmas holiday.

“Thanks, Harriet,” Meghan said when Kirk was ready to go. “We’ll see you tomorrow.” Within minutes Meghan had Kirk buckled into his car seat and they were heading to the Georgetown town house Meghan called home.

It was a short drive, but as always, by the time Meghan pulled up at the curb in her usual parking space, Kirk was sound asleep. He wouldn’t take naps during the day, but each evening on the drive home, he fell asleep and usually napped for a full hour.

After parking, she got out then unbuckled her sleeping child from the back seat. As she picked him up, he curled into her and turned his face into the side of her neck.

Meghan’s heart swelled with love. There was nothing quite like the sweet sensation of a child’s sleepy breath against your skin.

She took two steps toward her town house, then paused. Frowning, she realized somebody was seated in the chair on her front porch. It was definitely a male. She squinted, wishing she had a free hand to shove her glasses up more firmly on the bridge of her nose. Drat her myopic vision.

At that moment the man stood and instantly recognition flooded Meghan. There was only one man who held himself with such authority that he appeared to command the very air surrounding him. Seth.

His name exploded in her head at the same time her arms tightened around her son. On the heels of recognition came anger.

What was he doing here? He'd promised...absolutely promised he'd never talk to her, never see her again. He was her past, and that's where he'd promised to stay.

As she walked closer, his features came into sharper focus. She'd never known him when he hadn't needed a haircut, and today was no different. His dark brown hair fell well below the collar of his coat. Despite being unfashionably long and rather shaggy, the style suited his arresting features.

Kirk squirmed, as if protesting in his sleep her tight hold on him. She relaxed her grip a tad, squared her shoulders, then marched ahead, dread rolling in the pit of her stomach.

"Meghan." He nodded his head in greeting.

Before she could reply, her next-door neighbor, Mrs. Columbus, stepped out on her front porch. As usual, the old woman was clad in a duster, this one a swirl of rainbow colors.

"Yoo-hoo, Meghan, dear." The old woman waved and smiled broadly, the gesture causing her plump cheeks to nearly swallow her narrow eyes. "I tried to get your friend to come inside and wait for you where it's warm."

"He isn't a friend," Meghan mumbled beneath her breath. "Thank you, Mrs. Columbus."

The old woman remained standing, as if expecting an introduction to the handsome man on Meghan's porch. But, Meghan had no intention of making one.

Mrs. Columbus stood for a moment longer, her curiosity palpable, then with a disgruntled sigh disappeared back into her house.

Seth hadn't moved during the brief exchange. Meghan walked up the three stairs to her porch and studiously ignored him as she unlocked her front door.

"Meghan, I need to talk to you."

She turned and glared at him. "We had an agreement."

"We did," he concurred. "But my circumstances have changed." His gaze shifted from her to the child in her arms.

"Well, mine haven't." She opened her door and started to step inside, but he reached out and grabbed her arm, impeding her escape.

"Meghan, it's a matter of life or death." Although his features remained placid and his voice low and calm, she felt the tension that radiated from him.

"If it's your life or death we're talking about, then I'm just not interested," she replied with forced coolness.

"Please." His eyes, those mesmerizing green eyes that had once reminded her of springtime, of burgeoning possibilities and the birth of hopes and dreams, now appeared the turbulent color of stormy seas.

She wanted to tell him no. She wanted to tell him she wasn't interested in anything he had to say. But she'd never before seen him with stress deepening the lines around his eyes, never before felt the kind of desperate energy that flowed from him.

Seth had never needed her before, but as she gazed at him, she felt his need and if she searched deep in her heart she would have to acknowledge that need was provocative.

She sighed and opened her door. "Come in. I'll give you five minutes," she said.

"Thank you," he said simply. He followed her into the hallway and she pointed him to the kitchen. "Sit in there and I'll be right back."

She carried Kirk into the nursery, where dancing bear wallpaper greeted her. Her hands trembled slightly as she placed the sleeping little boy into his crib. He didn't stir as she pulled off his cap and coat, then covered him with a light blanket.

For a moment she remained standing next to the crib, wondering what possible circumstances

had brought Seth back into her life. It had been almost two years since he'd walked out, a little over a year ago that she'd contacted him about Kirk's existence and he'd complied by her wishes that he stay out of Kirk's life.

Why was he here? Had he suddenly decided to be a father to his child despite everything? She stared at the little sleeping boy, his brown hair tousled from the hat, his chubby cheeks slightly reddened as they always became when he slept.

"Over my dead body," she whispered fervently. There was no way she was going to let Seth into Kirk's life. There was no way she was going to let Seth break Kirk's heart like he had hers almost two years before.

She'd give him five minutes to explain exactly why he was here, then she'd send him on his way. With that thought in mind, she left Kirk's room and went to the kitchen.

Seth paced the room in restless energy and for a moment didn't see her standing in the doorway. She took that minute to study him, to see what changes had occurred since she'd last seen him.

A little over six feet tall, he still didn't have an ounce of fat on him. His jeans perfectly fit his slender hips and hugged his waist and long legs as if tailor-made. He'd shrugged off his jacket and wore a simple black T-shirt beneath, the short sleeves displaying the taut muscles of his shoulders and arms.

Physically, he looked the very same way he had when they'd said goodbye so long ago. But, something was different and when he saw her and stopped pacing, she realized exactly what was different. His eyes. They'd never looked haunted before.

"You've redecorated," he said, indicating the round wooden table that had replaced the glass-top modern table they'd once owned.

"I needed a change." She walked past him and opened the refrigerator. She took out the leftover tuna casserole and placed it in the oven to reheat. She didn't intend to break her routine just because her ex-husband had shown up out of nowhere.

He paced for a moment longer, then threw himself into a chair at the table and thrummed his fingertips on the tabletop in an irritating rhythm.

Meghan got out a can of corn, opened it and placed it in a saucepan. Placing the pan on one of the stove burners, she looked at Seth. "I gave you five minutes. Two of those minutes have already passed."

He swiped a hand through his hair, looking tense and distracted. "Did you hear about the sting in L.A.?"

"Bits and pieces," she admitted. "You were there?"

He frowned. "It was my baby. I worked closely with Keshon Gray setting up the sting to get Simon."

Meghan moved to sit across from him at the table. "But Simon got away."

Seth nodded. His eyes glittered with hatred for the man who threatened the very foundation of SPEAR, a man they knew nothing about except that he went by the name of Simon. "Yeah, somehow the bastard slipped through. And he took something with him...seven hundred pounds of uncut heroin."

Meghan sucked in a deep breath. "That much smack could finance a lot of trouble."

"Exactly." Again his hand raked through his hair, tumbling the thick long strands into boyish disarray. "That's why I need your help. You can do magic on that computer of yours. You have access to information nobody else does. You can help me find Simon and those drugs."

Suddenly Meghan realized that the moment she'd seen him sitting on her front porch, despite her desire to the contrary, a tiny flare of hope had lit. A hope that he wanted to see her, wanted to be a part of her life, of Kirk's. For a brief few minutes she'd entertained the foolish idea that he needed her as

woman...but what he needed was her as a fellow SPEAR agent.

~~His words extinguished that tiny flame of hope, and she remembered all the reasons she'd cast him out of her life, out of Kirk's.~~

"You know I can't do that," she replied curtly. "The kind of information you'd need is highly classified."

"You have clearance," he countered.

"Yes, but if anyone finds out what I'm doing, my clearance could be pulled or I could get fired."

He grinned, that slow, easy smile that had once arrowed straight through her heart. "You're too good to get caught. Besides, it isn't like this would be the first time you've done something like this for me."

She frowned and stared down at the table, knowing what he was talking about. When she'd first met Seth, he'd been assigned to a desk job at the "employment agency" while a leg wound he'd received healed. At that time, Meghan had used her computer and processing information skills to help locate Raymond Purly, the man who'd shot Seth. Raymond had been arrested and was now serving time for the sale of narcotics.

At that time, Meghan had worked beside Seth during the days, and shared a bed with him at night. Their lovemaking had been wild and wicked and wonderful, and Meghan had given him her heart, her soul, and every dream she'd ever nurtured for the future. And he'd taken her heart, her soul, and all of her dreams and shattered them.

"Meghan." Her name was a soft plea falling from his lips, and he reached out and covered her hand with his. "You're the only one I can trust and you're the only one with the expertise to get what I need. Simon is a dangerous loose cannon, and since you're also a SPEAR agent, he's as much a threat to you as he is to anyone."

Meghan yanked her hand from beneath his, hating the fact that even after all this time his touch still managed to stir something inside her.

She stood, and thought she might hate him...for coming to her at all, for needing her in all the wrong ways. She thought she might hate him most of all for reminding her of the threat Simon posed to the SPEAR agency.

"All right," she said reluctantly. "I can't make any promises, but I'll see what I can find out."

"Great." For the first time since he'd arrived, she saw a slight easing of his tension. "Oh, there's one other small favor I have to ask you."

She frowned irritably, not taken in by the seeming nonchalance of his voice. "What?" she asked flatly.

"I kind of went AWOL from the Condor Mountain Resort last night. You wouldn't mind if I bunked here for a few days, would you?"

At that moment Kirk squalled from his bedroom, a plaintive cry of protest that mirrored the protest Meghan wanted to scream.

As Meghan left the kitchen, Seth drew a deep breath and sank down at the table. He hadn't expected the sight of her to affect him, but it had.

The moment she'd gotten out of her car, her red curls bouncing and gleaming in the waning sunlight, his stomach muscles had knotted as memories assailed him. He'd always tangled his hands in her wildly curly hair as they'd made love, loving the way it felt so silky against his fingers.

She'd paled at the sight of him, her freckles appearing to grow darker against the alabaster of her skin. If anyone had told him years ago that at some point in his life an obsessive-compulsive, freckle-red-haired woman would drive him wild, he'd have laughed at them. But that's exactly what had happened.

He and Meghan had shared a crazy, passionate weeklong courtship, then seven months of marriage before reality had intruded and they'd both realized they'd made a terrible mistake.

How many times had he watched those beautiful green eyes of hers darken with desire, light up with laughter, and then at the end of their relationship, cloud with tears?

He shoved back his chair and stood once again, too restless to sit and irritated with the damnably unwanted memories.

She was a piece of his past and he wasn't here to fix or change the choices they'd made, choices that had led to separate lives for each of them.

Pacing back and forth, he could hear the faint sounds of her talking to Kirk. His son. The boy's little face had been hidden in the curve of Meghan's neck when she'd first arrived.

As he heard Meghan returning to the kitchen, he found himself eager to see the child that he was almost ashamed to admit, until this moment, had been an abstract in his mind.

For the past fourteen months, since the day of Kirk's birth, he'd consciously shoved thoughts of the child away. It had been the only way he could deal with the agreement he'd made with Meghan, the painful agreement to stay out of Kirk's life.

Kirk entered the kitchen first, toddling a bit unsteadily. Automatically, Seth went down on one knee and opened his arms. Kirk stopped at the sight of him. His bottom lip trembled ominously then he turned back toward Meghan.

Meghan scooped him up in her arms and carried him to the nearby high chair where she buckled him in. Seth dropped his hands to his sides and stood once again, oddly disappointed that the little boy hadn't run to his embrace.

You stupid dolt, he told himself. What did you expect? The kid has no idea who you are. Why would he come to you? He doesn't know you're his father. To him you're nothing but a stranger. Nothing but a stranger...and if Meghan had her way, that's what he'd remain.

"Seth, it's just not a good idea for you to stay here," Meghan said. She walked to the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of wine. She held it up and he shook his head.

As she poured herself a glass, he focused his attention once again on his son.

Seth sat in the chair next to Kirk's high chair. His son. He had his mother's eyes. Brilliant green and at the moment they stared at Seth with both curiosity and wariness. He didn't have Meghan's hair. Kirk's was straight and a dark, rich brown.

My hair, Seth thought, a thrill shooting through him. The child had his hair and his square chin. Kirk had his straight nose and dark brows, yet had Meghan's full lips and cheekbones.

The little boy was an attractive combination of both mother and father and a swell of emotion shot through Seth as he continued to drink in the sight of the little features.

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