

Chapter One

Sarah screamed. She was in agony. It felt as though her insides were being torn apart from within. Eyes screwed shut, fingers scrabbling at the tiled floor of her kitchen, she willed it to be over. Another spasm rippled through her gut, and another scream came from a throat made raw. Where in hell's name were they? She'd phoned what felt like hours ago and the girl on the other end said they would be here right away. She had even told them she was on her own and that there was no-one nearby to help, and detailed the exact route to her cottage in case they got lost in the lanes. Where were they, the bastards?

The face of another bastard flashed into her head; the too handsome, too perfect bastard who had got her into this mess and then ran as soon as he found out she was pregnant, back to his bitch of a wife! Whatever happened to his promise of 'never-ending love', and 'I'll tell her soon, don't worry. You're the one for me. I'm just waiting for the right moment'?

Her back arched off the floor as a wave of intense pain pushed down from her belly to her vagina. The baby was coming.

Sarah started to cry. She had not wanted it to be like this, on a cold, tiled floor, surrounded by a cooker, a fridge, some units and a washing machine, the smell of last

night's lasagne in the air. Where were they? Didn't they care?

A cool breeze washed over her face, and the eyes she'd screwed shut snapped open. Someone was in the house!

Fighting back the pain, she raised her head from the floor, her vision swimming as she stared at the doorway. There *was* someone there! She could see him, dressed in white, distorted and blurred through her tears.

"About bloody time," she ground through gritted teeth.

Another wave of pain had her gasping, back arched and fingers scrabbling.

A hand, cool and gentle, rested on her forehead, pushing her down, and she flinched, but with its touch came easement. Although awareness remained, she felt detached, remote from the ravaging of her body, which she knew continued the process of birth. Had he given her drugs? If so, how?

Soon after, she felt a tugging between her legs, liquid pooling beneath her buttocks to be absorbed by her robe, and knew she had given birth. She opened eyes she never knew were closed and raised her arms to receive her child - *her* child. Not the bastard's! *Hers!* - and met the smiling gaze of the doctor. This time the tears that fell were tears of happiness.

The man's dark eyes crinkled, and his snow-white beard parted to reveal teeth equally as white. Inclining his head toward the baby, he smoothed a bedraggled lock of hair from Sarah's eyes, and then rose, his smile radiant against ebony skin.

A pounding at the front door demanded Sarah's attention. "It's open!" she called through the kitchen, wondering whether it was the doctor's colleagues come to help. If so, they were too late. But when she looked back to where the doctor had been standing, he had gone.