



# The Unwanted Wife

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** The Unwanted Wife (Unwanted #1) All Alessandro de Lucci wants from his wife is a son but after a year and a half of unhappiness and disillusionment, all Theresa de Lucci wants from her ice cold husband is a divorce. Unfortunate timing, since Theresa is about to discover that she's finally pregnant and Alessandro is about to discover that he isn't willing to lose Theresa.

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They got home after midnight and while Sandro proceeded to lock up, Theresa wearily headed for the shower in the upstairs guest bedroom that she was still determined to occupy, despite Sandro forcibly moving her back to the Master Suite every night. She was standing beneath the hot, relaxing spray of the multiple shower heads in the luxurious guest bathroom, her forehead pressed to the cool tiles, when a rush of cold air alerted her to the fact that the frosted glass door to the cubicle had slid open. She turned around with a resigned sigh and watched as Sandro turned to close the shower door behind him, offering her a tantalizing glimpse of the beautiful bottom that she had so admired earlier in the evening, while he'd been chasing a ball up and down Gabe's lawn. He turned back to her and shook his head with a weary sigh. "You are, without a doubt, turning into one of the most stubborn people I know, Red," he groaned. "I want that divorce, Sandro," she insisted, trying not to drop her eyes to his eager erection. He smiled slightly, taking a step towards her. "I know," he admitted tiredly, reaching around her to grab the body wash and sponge dangling from the ornate faucets. His arms brushed against her naked flesh with every move he made and she tried desperately to shield her body's eager reaction from him and folded her arms over the burgeoning red tips of her breasts. "A.and... I don't love you anymore," she continued desperately, watching as he applied the fragrant body wash to the soft sponge. He kept his gaze on the sponge in his hand. "I know," his voice sounded a little strange but when he looked up again his expression was neutral. He raised his hand and gently started running the sponge over her folded arms. "And I don't want to stay in the same room with you anymore," her voice quivered embarrassingly when he grasped one slender wrist with a big, gentle hand and lifted her arm away from her breasts to run the sponge down the underside of said arm and up towards her sensitive armpit. Her already hard nipples tightened to the point of pain. She swayed slightly, trying not to moan in pleasure, when he lifted the other arm and subjected it to the same sensual treatment. "You've made that abundantly

clear," he whispered in response to her former statement, his eyes fixed on her obviously aroused breasts. He stepped even closer, crowding her with his large body and backing her up against the smooth tiles. The sponge swept across first one tight bud, then the other, so lightly she wasn't sure if she'd imagined the touch or not. This time because he was so close, his every little move brought his hard, smooth chest in brushing contact with the painfully erect little tips, it was all she could do to maintain her train of thought. The sponge was sweeping down between her breasts now and down over her torso, her flat stomach and further down still, over her abdomen and between her... She sucked in a harsh breath when he quite deliberately dropped the sponge to replace it with his fingers. "And... I want a... a..." she panted, when his fingers continued to stroke insistently down where she was most sensitive and one of her hands latched onto his wrist to curb the movement. He remained undeterred, staring down into her upturned face raptly. "A divorce..." "You said that already..." he pointed out, his chest starting to heave as he sought to control his reaction to her obvious arousal. His hungry gaze dropped from her face to her small breasts, where her hard, raspberry pink nipples were starting to peek through the rapidly disintegrating suds. With a desperate groan he removed his hand from between her thighs, dropped to his knees and palmed the small mounds, taking one sudsy bud into his hungry, hot mouth. Theresa arched back at the electrifying touch, her back bowing and her head hitting the tiles with a thud. Her big, beautiful husband, who knelt like a suppliant at the temple of her body, licked and kissed his way across the shallow valley between her breasts to find the other aching peak while his large hands swept down her body to her narrow hips, which he determinedly anchored to the tiled wall in an effort to keep her still. Theresa shuddered wildly and her hands buried themselves in his wet hair before restlessly moving to his shoulders where her nails dug in. He finally rose to his feet again, pinning her to the wall with his entire body, his erection throbbing urgently where it was trapped between his hard ridged stomach and her narrow torso. He had his hands braced against the wall on either side of her head, while he thrust himself gently against her torso. He kept his hot, narrowed gaze on her nakedly vulnerable face, his own face was a mask of tight control while his eyes were ablaze with an emotion she did not recognise and could not read. His eyes

were restlessly darting from her own half-closed eyes, to the full, lower lip which she had caught between her small, white teeth. With a slightly muffled curse, he groaned and lowered his head until his mouth touched hers. Theresa's entire body went rigid as his lips gently nuzzled against hers, demanding nothing, just exploring the unfamiliar contours of her ripe, generous mouth. His strong hands moved from where they were braced against the wall to tenderly cup her face, fingertips meeting in the middle of her brow and palms resting on either side of her jaw. His mouth gradually demanded more, moving insistently against hers until she sighed and melted against him as her own mouth explored his. His tongue, tasting of mint, ran over her lips seeking entry into her mouth and she opened up for him, wanting this so much she ached. Her hands fluttered up wonderingly, cupping his jaw in an effort to bring him even closer and he was happy to oblige, his kiss going even deeper than before. She felt as if she was being consumed by him, greedily eaten alive and absorbed into him. It was the most intense experience of her life and from the way he throbbed against her torso she guessed he felt pretty much the same. He reluctantly lifted his mouth from hers to look down into her face with a penetrating stare that seemed to see right into her soul and then he smiled. A completely open, unguarded and boyish smile, the like of which she had never seen from him before. She barely had time to catch her breath before his mouth was on hers again, thoroughly plundering it. She moaned hungrily and wrapped her arms around his neck, his hands were moving now, roaming all over her soft, naked flesh before gripping her tight backside and hoisting her up until she had her slender thighs wrapped around his waist. He lifted his mouth from hers and dropped his face into her neck to lick the droplets of water that had pooled in the sensitive hollow there before moving back up to claim her lips again devouring her with his lips, teeth and tongue. Theresa was completely overwhelmed by his unexpected passion, he had never seemed this out of control before and she felt like she was simply being swept along with the tide. He tightened his grip on her behind before, half-stumbling; he carried her out of the shower, through the bathroom and into the bedroom where he barely managed to get them both onto the bed. Theresa's feet touched the carpeted floor and her backside was half-off the bed but she didn't care one whit for the discomfort when, with barely a pause from his

ravaging mouth, he surged into her... she managed to tear her mouth away to cry out; the sound harsh and raw in the silence of the room. Her entire back arched, until only her head touched the bed, while she raised her legs to wrap them around his waist again, her ankles crossing over his taut, pistoning buttocks and her arms wrapped around his broad back, while her nails dug into his flesh and drew blood. Sandro was making sobbing, desperate sounds into her mouth but he still refused to relinquish her lips, coordinating the thrusts of his tongue with those of his driving hips and Theresa's muffled moans took on the same frenzied rhythm. His hands moved up to wrap themselves in her wet hair, tilting her head back almost violently to get better access to her mouth. His wet body slid and rubbed over hers, his muscles bunched beneath the taut satin of his skin and Theresa's body burned at every point of contact. One of his hands swept back down to one of her thighs, lifting her hips even higher to allow him even deeper penetration. More! More! More! She tried to say the words but she couldn't with his mouth on hers, so she moved hands to his behind to pull him closer, she wanted him closer, harder, deeper and he knew it... because he adjusted accordingly and she sobbed into his mouth, feeling like she was dying an exquisite death. She spiralled higher and higher and when she reached the pinnacle, she spun out of control, freefalling back down to earth with a scream that was swallowed into his mouth. Her entire body clenched around him and Sandro, feeling her climax, was unable to hold back... his breath laboured in and out of his lungs as he fought for control but he was as lost as she was and lifted his mouth from hers long enough to release a hoarse shout that she barely recognised as her name. His body arched violently and he lifted her from the bed and into his lap as he held her as close as he could, his strong arms wrapped around her narrow back as his body jerked within hers and his lips fell back onto hers, gentler this time as his body continued to thrust lazily. He hugged her even closer and while he knelt on the edge of the bed, her legs straddled his hard thighs, her chest pressed to his and her arms were tightly wrapped around his neck as she fought to keep her balance while he nuzzled her mouth with his. He finally went completely boneless and collapsed down onto the soft bed, taking her with him and keeping her wrapped up in his arms with one of his hard thighs still pressed between hers. He was still kissing her, lifting his mouth from hers to nuzzle

her neck and kiss her shoulders before coming back to her mouth over and over again as if he could not get enough of the taste of her. His hands were petting her all over and gradually their breathing slowed down and their mutual trembling abated slightly. He was a gentler, softer presence inside her now, only occasionally twitching as if to remind her that he was still there. "God," he finally whispered. "Oh my God, Theresa... that was amazing." Theresa, who was only now coming back to herself tensed at his words but he seemed not to notice, still stroking her, kissing her, whispering little endearments and half-finished Italian sentences into her hair. In a year and a half, during which time they'd had sex on average four times a week and at least twice a night on each of those occasions, this was the first time... ever that Sandro hadn't recited his standard mantra. He shifted slightly, to arrange her more comfortably against him, one arm tucked beneath her head and the other resting heavily across her breasts. His fingers formed lazy circles on the overheated skin of her upper arm and he had his head on the same pillow as hers, so close she could feel his still-unsteady breath feathering through her hair. He occasionally dropped soft kisses onto the sensitive skin beneath her ear and along her delicate jawline. Theresa was tensing more and more in his arms, not sure how to react to all of this. First the kisses, then the shattering sex, then the absence of those five words and now this unprecedented display of affection. It was as if, just when she'd found a way to protect her already battered, bruised and fragile heart from him, he found some other way around her defences, leaving her vulnerable to even more pain. He was still whispering into her ear, half-broken Italian words that she didn't understand at all, trying to pull her closer but Theresa resisted, finally snapping out of the half-trance that she had been in. She could not let him do this to her... not again! He had hurt her too many times in the past, with his careless disregard, his other women and his contempt for her. She would not allow him into her heart again. Finally clueing in to the fact that Theresa was not as into the cuddling as he was, Sandro lifted himself up onto his elbow, resting his head on his hand and looking absolutely gorgeous in all his naked splendour. "Cara, what's wrong?" She nearly laughed out loud at the ridiculous question before struggling in earnest to escape from beneath his heavy arm. For a few seconds his hold tightened but he finally raised his arm and allowed

her to scurry off the bed. "The sheets are soaking wet," she said breathlessly, refusing to meet his eyes. "I need to change them." "Leave it for the maid in the morning," he grinned lazily. "The cleaning service doesn't come in on a Saturday and besides, I can't sleep on a wet bed." "Don't be silly, Red," he admonished gently, sitting up gracefully. "You're sleeping with me in our bed!" "I'm not," she shook her head adamantly and his grin widened indulgently. "Stubborn cat," he swung his legs off the edge of the bed and stood up with the lethal grace of a predator, stalking her languidly. "Of course you are." Theresa backed away but he pounced before she could get very far, his hands on her shoulders, applying just enough pressure to keep her from fleeing. "Look at me," he demanded softly when she kept her eyes glued to his chest. When she refused he muttered something beneath his breath before lifting one hand from her shoulder to tilt up her jaw until her eyes met his. Whatever he saw in her defiant gaze made his eyebrows lower and his eyes darken. "I'm trying to fix this, cara," he finally whispered, the words almost torn from him. "You can't," she shook her head sadly. "This... whatever it is... it's irreparable." "Why?" He shook his head slightly in confused frustration. "Because everything you do now feels insincere and forced!" She hissed in sudden fury. "Every touch, every apology, every endearment... it's like you brushed up on the 'Theresa Noble User Manual' and learned what makes me tick!" "Firstly, it's Theresa de Lucci and secondly, I don't know what the hell you're talking about!" He practically shouted, shaking her slightly. "The kisses for one," she itemised. "What?" "A year and a half of marriage, Alessandro and tonight was the first time you've ever kissed me," she pointed out. "You must have realised how much it hurt me to know that you despised me so much that you couldn't even bring yourself to kiss me." "That's not..." "So of course tonight," she interrupted him; not at all interested in whatever it was he had to say. "After making me feel so special by finally doing me the honour of introducing me to your friends, this is when you decide to sweeten the pot with a few of your kisses! It probably struck you as a pretty effective way to keep the bitch muzzled and content, right?" "You're misreading the entire situation, cara." "Don't call me that! I am not your darling... I've never been your darling and I'm not going to be naive enough to fall for your so-called charms again!" "What do you want from me?" He suddenly

demanded in frustration, releasing her shoulders so abruptly that she stumbled and fell. He froze in horror, staring down at her with a look of such abject misery, contrition and despair on his face that she almost felt sorry for him. She sat up and stared into his distressed face. "I want a divorce," she whispered and he sank down to his knees beside her, lifting a hand to caress the curve of her cheek. "I'm sorry," he groaned. "I'm so sorry for more things than you could possibly imagine... but that's the one thing I can't give you." "Then we have nothing more to talk about," she pushed herself to her feet, ignoring the hand he offered to help her. She suddenly realised that they were both naked and sighed heavily. "Please, just go back to your room, Alessandro," she pleaded and he hesitated, his eyes lingering on her face for a few long moments, before he turned abruptly and left. She woke up in the guest bedroom the following morning... alone. She was both saddened and relieved by that. A quick glance at the clock told her that it was well after ten in the morning and the gloom told her that it was probably raining. Theresa was shocked that she had slept so late and rushed through her morning ablutions, while trying to ignore the ever-present queasiness. She gingerly made her way downstairs, feeling like someone with a hangover as she headed for the kitchen. Fortunately there were no food smells emanating from the room but when she walked in, it was to find Sandro sitting at the breakfast bar and staring thoughtfully down at his full coffee mug. He looked up when she stepped into the room his eyes sweeping over her figure, taking in the worn old jeans, faded sweatshirt and battered little trainers. "How are you feeling, ca... Theresa?" "Fine," she mumbled, getting herself a glass of orange juice before turning toward the breakfast bar and taking the seat opposite his on one of the quaint wooden chairs. "Aren't you going to eat anything?" He asked softly and Theresa grimaced, the thought of food making her stomach churn queasily. "I'm fine." He swore softly. "You're obviously not fine," he growled. "I don't know what you think starving yourself will achieve." "Oh for God's sake, I'm hardly starving myself, just skipping breakfast." "You look like you've skipped entirely too many meals recently," he shook his head and sent a scathing glare up and down her thin frame. "If it'll get you off my back, I'll have some toast," she seethed before slamming her glass down. She used too much force and must have placed it right on the edge because the glass went



tumbling down to the floor and shattered on impact, spilling the bright contents all over the pale blue tile of the floor. The jarring noise completely unravelled Theresa and frayed her nerves to breaking point. "Oh," her eyes flooded with tears as she realised whose fault it had been. "I'm sorry..." "Theresa," Sandro was beside her in seconds, his hands on her shoulders and his face peering down into hers in concern. "Are you okay?" "I'm fine," she whispered, shrugging out of his grip and he dropped his hands abruptly. "Are you sure?" He demanded to know. "You're as white as a sheet..." "Just a bit of a shock," she waved his concern aside. "It's raining ," she observed inanely, in a very weak attempt to change the subject and her eyes fixed on the dull greyness of the world outside. "Yes," he stepped further away from her and knelt down to pick up the shards of glass from the floor. "It is." She started to get up but he looked up at her from where he was squatting at her feet and dropped a large hand on her thigh kept her from moving. "The floor's slippery and covered in glass; let me clear it up before you get off the chair." She shrugged and silently watched as he efficiently went about cleaning up her mess. "What are you doing today?" He asked casually, keeping his back to her as he discarded the glass and paper towels he had used to sop up the excess juice into the trash can. "I need to do some shopping," she answered distractedly. "I was thinking of heading to the city for some stuff..." she intended to buy about a dozen different home pregnancy kits, a task which she had delayed for much too long. "I'm running low on some things too..." he responded carelessly, turning around to face her. "I'll drive you." Theresa came out of her daze with a wry smile. "Wow. That was such a transparent lie that I'm almost embarrassed for you," he chuckled wryly in response to her dry wit and shrugged slightly. "I know it wasn't up to scratch but give me a break, it's been an eventful twenty-four hours and I'm not in top form," he joked lightly even though his eyes were still sombrely engaged in running over her face and body in concern. "I don't want you to drive, Theresa; you look a bit out of it. Do you think you're coming down with something?" Yes. Pregnancy. "I'm fine but I do feel a bit out of sorts this morning, probably the whiskey in that Irish coffee I had with the ladies last night," right, she'd barely made her way through a quarter of one mug before realising that, if she was pregnant, drinking would probably not be such a great idea. Still, Sandro didn't know how

much she'd had, so it was a perfectly acceptable excuse. He seemed to fall for it and nodded his acceptance of her explanation. "When would you like to leave?" Theresa sighed softly; she really didn't want him trailing after her while she tried to figure out a way to buy home pregnancy tests without him noticing. Sandro would never miss that. "I really do have some stuff to take care of, Theresa," he said seriously, seeming to read her mind. "I'll leave you in relative peace." She chewed on her lower lip thoughtfully, not missing how his eyes flared when her tongue darted out to soothe the sting of her teeth where she had accidentally bitten too hard. "Okay... give me an hour to get ready," to shower, get dressed, throw up and such... He nodded. He was as good as his word and mostly left her alone to listlessly browse around the upmarket boutiques in the very high end shopping mall that he had driven her to. She had the first ten minutes away from him to buy the pregnancy kits, six of them, all different brands (who knew there were so many choices available?), just in case he changed his mind about leaving her alone but surprisingly he did nothing but constantly call or text her to be sure she was okay and didn't need him but that got rather tedious after the tenth text message in forty minutes and the fifth call in an hour and a half. In the end, she simply told him she was done shopping and he suggested they meet up and head to a restaurant for lunch. The upscale restaurant was obviously one Sandro often patronised so, even though it was lunch time on a Saturday afternoon and the place was exceedingly popular, they were seated immediately. Theresa watched the staff fawn all over him and bitterly wondered if he had brought any other women here. The suspicion was confirmed, when the waiter turned to her with a slight smirk. "And what will the lady be ordering today?" He asked in that supercilious manner that servers in upmarket restaurants often had. "Your Caesar salad, no dressing, toast and water," she ordered brusquely. "And have you decided on a main course yet?" He asked with that annoying smirk. "That would be it," she responded shortly, his smug attitude was really grating on her nerves. "Theresa," Sandro leaned forward in concern. "You didn't have breakfast; you need to eat something more substantial than just salad." "I'm really not that hungry," she shrugged dismissively, handing the thick leather-bound menu back to the waiter. "Please just let it go." "If you're on some crazy diet..." "I'm not on a diet!" She snapped. "Just, please, stop trying to manipulate

every single aspect of my life!" His jaw clenched and his lips thinned in obvious anger but surprisingly enough he let it go before proceeding to order a staggering amount of food from the waiter. Once they were alone, he leaned back in his chair and stared at her thoughtfully. "Seriously," he began after a long silence, which she had stubbornly refused to break. "What's going on with you?" She gaped at him, unable to believe the stupidity of that question and he lowered his eyes, apparently realising that himself. "Aside from the obvious," he qualified. "And try to keep the sarcasm down to a minimum." "Well aside from the obvious fact that I'm unhappy with my life as it is right now," she shrugged. "I can't say that there's much going on with me." "You're lying to me," he sounded so incredulous at that fact that she actually laughed in genuine amusement. "Are you having an affair?" "Back to that are we?" She was laughing even harder now. "Sandro, not everybody stoops to infidelity when things aren't going right in their lives." "What the hell is that supposed to mean?" He sounded outrageously offended and leaned toward her, all affronted, bristling male. "Oh come on, Sandro, you know what it means!" "No I don't, do enlighten me," he invited sarcastically. "It means," she spoke with exaggerated and offensive slowness. "That I'm not the one who has been having the affairs. It means that I had the misguided notion that the sacred marriage vows we took were just that, sacred vows. It means that I'm not the one who deliberately set out to hurt and humiliate my spouse as publicly and as painfully as possible." "I admit that I did some things to deliberately hurt you... in a misguided attempt to punish you for a situation that wasn't your fault," he began carefully. "How magnanimous of you to admit that," she interrupted sarcastically. "You were misled into believing that I... loved you," he ignored her interruption. "I was misled into believing you were..." "Your drinks," the waiter's smooth voice interrupted the first really meaningful exchange they'd had on the subject and Sandro slanted him an annoyed look before gritting his teeth and waiting in fulminating silence for the man to finish. When the waiter finally left, Sandro turned his gaze back on her. "I thought you knew about your father's scheme, I thought you were fully on board with it," he admitted softly. "What exactly is my father's 'scheme'?" She asked carefully, wary of being shot down again. "He owned something that I desperately wanted and the only way he would let

me have it was if I paid a huge amount of money for it and then married you."

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"What are you doing here?" Theresa paused on the threshold to the kitchen and stared at the big man who stood in front of the open refrigerator wearing only baggy sweatpants, without shoes or a shirt. He turned around slowly to meet her eyes and she swallowed past the huge lump in her suddenly dry throat, God he was so much more beautiful than she remembered. She, however, felt unattractive and sloppy in the Sylvester the Cat silk shortie pyjamas she was wearing. She knew that she had a sleep crease down the side of her face and her hair looked like a bird's nest. "I live here," he replied casually, one hand grasping a carton of orange juice and the other lazily rubbing back and forth over the rippled contours of his abdomen. Her fascinated gaze fell to that hand and she imagined her own hand replacing his. She shook herself slightly to rid herself of the erotic image and focused on her outrage at seeing him so casually standing in the kitchen. "You're usually at work by this time," she pointed out. "Yes, I am," he agreed. "But since you go to great pains to not be around when I head out in the mornings or come home at night, I figured the only way I'd know what the hell was going on with you was to stay at home today." "You can't simply stay at home," she was appalled by that notion. "You're the boss." "Exactly and if the boss can't take the occasional day off then there's really no point in being the boss," his voice was casual, light even but his eyes roamed over her small figure almost hungrily, taking in every single detail of her fuller face and rounder figure. They had been living past each other for nearly three months, with Theresa deliberately evading him when he was in the house. She tended to ignore his text messages and let the machine take his calls. He left little notes for her, sometimes asking her to dinner, sometimes asking after her health, he had recently stuck a Post-it on the fridge reminding her to buy new prenatal vitamins because he'd noticed that she was running out! When she'd forgotten to buy the vitamins despite his reminder, she'd found a new bottle on the kitchen table and a Post-it, with a half-dozen exclamation marks drawn on it, stuck to the lid. He never entered her bedroom

uninvited and she never did any inviting. They still shared the bathroom that connected the two bedrooms which was how he had known that her vitamins were running low but Theresa took great care to shower after he left in the morning or before he returned in the evenings. Now, after successfully avoiding him for nearly three months, finding him so casually standing in the kitchen, half naked and gorgeous, was a bit traumatic to say the least. "Why are you even interested in what's going on with me?" She finally asked. "We live in the same house, you're pregnant with my baby and I have no idea how you are. The situation is a bit abnormal to say the least, don't you think?" "It works for me," she dismissed, casually turning away from him and toward a cabinet to fetch a cereal bowl. "So it would seem," she heard the fridge door closing and tensed as she sensed him padding towards her, he came to a standstill directly behind her and reached up for another bowl. He was standing so close to her that she could feel the heat coming off of his naked chest and his warm, musky scent enveloped her. She shut her eyes and tried to regain her equilibrium in the face of such overwhelming sexuality. He lingered behind her for much longer than he should have before abruptly moving away and leaving her feeling bereft. When she turned back to face him, he was sitting at the wooden table in the sunny breakfast nook and shaking a huge amount of corn flakes into his bowl and when he realised that she was watching him, he lifted the box enquiringly. She sighed before carrying her bowl to the table where she sat down opposite him and watched as he sprinkled the flakes into her bowl, topping the dry cereal with strawberry halves and banana slices that he must have cut before she came downstairs. It was the housekeeper's day off so Theresa hadn't planned on anything fancier than cereal anyway but the company was unwelcome and unexpected. She watched as Sandro poured a generous amount of milk over her cereal and filled a glass with orange juice, which he nudged over to her. She nodded her thanks before lifting her spoon and awkwardly starting her meal. Sandro tucked in enthusiastically and was done before she was halfway through. He leaped up and over to the fridge, digging around in there before triumphantly producing a grapefruit which he halved, put into bowls and carried back over to where Theresa was sitting. He placed one half in front of her before he sat down, grimaced to himself and proceeded on his own half. "I thought you didn't like grapefruit," she suddenly broke the silence between them and he

grinned over at her while his hair, which was in serious need of cutting, flopped over his forehead endearingly. "I don't," he admitted. "But I thought I'd give it a try anyway." "Why?" She asked curiously. He merely shrugged and she decided that she really didn't want to know and didn't push for a response. "So has the morning sickness completely finished?" He asked after another short silence and she made a noncommittal sound which he could interpret any way he wanted to. He lifted his eyes to hers and something in his expression made her sigh and shake her head. "Not completely, no..." she admitted. "But it's a lot better than it was before." "What are your plans for today?" He asked keeping his eyes glued to hers. "I was going to spend the morning with Lisa and the baby," her cousin had given birth to her beautiful son, Rhys, just a couple of days after Theresa had had her own pregnancy confirmed. "Mind if I tag along?" He asked casually and she frowned slightly, disturbed by the notion of her husband "tagging along" with her all morning. "Well..." she began reluctantly. "I wanted to discuss some business with Elisa," he added. "What business?" She asked flatly. "It's about her loan," he elaborated. "What about her loan?" Her voice rose in alarm but his face remained impassive. "I won't have you upsetting her, Sandro." "Well, I either tell her today, while you're there as moral support... or I tell her sometime when she's alone and vulnerable," he shrugged disinterestedly. "What are you going to tell her?" She asked in a panic. "I don't believe that's any of your business, Theresa," he dismissed in an annoying casual voice. "Now why don't you hop into the shower while I clean up down here? I'll use one of the guest bathrooms this morning." She shook her head desperately. "Sandro, you can't do this..." "Well, I have no aversion to doing a bit of housecleaning," he said, deliberately misunderstanding. "You know that's not what I meant," she hissed angrily and he cultivated a baffled frown which completely infuriated her. "Well if you have a problem with me using a guest bathroom, then I have to tell you, I certainly don't mind sharing a shower with you," he grinned lasciviously and she made an angry sound in the back of her throat, before turning on her heel and stalking off with her head held high. She refused to talk to him for the duration of the drive to Rick and Lisa's home. It was only as he slid the car through their security gates, that she turned toward him desperately. "Sandro, please don't do this..." she begged, her beautiful eyes appealing for mercy. The stony expression on his face went even

grimmer and he reached out a blunt forefinger to gently trace the delicate line of her jaw before turning away from her and getting out of the car. She was devastated by his lack of response and climbed out numbly when he came round to open the door for her. He took her hand but she tensed and tried to drag her hand out of his grip. For a moment, when his hand tightened around hers, she didn't think he would allow it but he reluctantly released her and instead placed one large hand in the small of her rigid back, steering her towards the front steps, which led up to the house. Lisa had been expecting her and was waiting in the doorway with a huge smile on her face. She still retained the few kilograms that she had picked up during her pregnancy but she fairly radiated happiness and good health. She greeted Theresa effusively, enveloping her in a warm hug and spared a slight smile for Sandro who loomed above both of them. "Alessandro, what a surprise," she nodded politely. "I didn't expect to see you today." "I took the day off," he responded easily. "And when I heard Theresa was coming for a visit I thought I'd come along with her and see that baby of yours again." Again? Theresa wasn't aware that Sandro had bothered seeing Rhys before now and she frowned in confusion, wondering why Lisa hadn't mentioned it to her before. "Also, I had some business I needed to discuss with you." Theresa tensed at the last bit but Lisa simply smiled and nodded, making Theresa wish that she had called ahead to warn her cousin of the impending disaster. Why would Sandro do this now? When he was getting everything he could possibly want? What merit was there in destroying Lisa's business? She looked up into his relaxed face and wondered if she could possibly have misread the situation but what other business could he possibly have to discuss with her cousin? Lisa led them into the house and Sandro immediately gravitated toward the three-month old baby who was seated in a blue baby seat which was placed on the coffee table in the living room. His entire face seemed to light up at the sight of the infant and Theresa watched in fascination as he sank to his haunches until his face was level with the baby's head. "He's grown a fair bit since I saw him last," Sandro observed in delight, reaching out to grab one of the infant's flailing hands. "Well, I should hope so since he never stops eating," Lisa grimaced and Sandro laughed. Theresa took a step back, feeling like she'd just stepped into some alternate universe. Sandro was crooning down at Rhys in Italian and the baby was staring up at him raptly, his green eyes unblinking. "Would



either of you like something to drink?" Lisa asked politely and Theresa shook her head numbly, watching while Sandro nimbly undid the straps of the baby seat and lifted the infant into his arms. "Coffee would be nice," he nodded, rocking the baby soothingly. Rhys made an uncoordinated grab for Sandro's hair and managed to latch on to a tiny fistful of it. Sandro grimaced good-naturedly and said something admonishing to the baby in Italian, while he reached up to loosen the baby's grip. Lisa excused herself to go to the kitchen but Theresa barely heard her, she was too busy dumbly watching her husband with the baby. "I didn't know you liked children," she whispered, one of her hands absently dropping to her still-flat belly in a protective gesture that he couldn't miss. "I like babies well enough," he murmured casually. "I am quite fond of them actually." She tried to disguise the stab of pain at his words. "Any baby except mine, of course" she murmured half-under her breath and he inhaled impatiently, his eyes flaring with fury that he kept contained because of the baby in his arms. "If you're going to be making asinine comments like that please make them when I have both hands free to throttle the life out of you," he said in the most personable, baby-friendly voice he could manage. He sat down on the sofa still holding Rhys in his arms and feeling a flare of possessive resentment; Theresa made her way over to him and held her arms out for the baby. "I would like to hold my nephew, if you don't mind," she informed coldly and he raised one arrogant brow, before standing up and gently depositing the serene baby into her arms. She sat down gingerly in the chair opposite the sofa and cooed at the sweet baby she held in her arms. Sandro stood up and stretched lazily. "While you're busy in here, I think I'll go and have that chat with Elisa," she looked up in alarm but he was smiling gently down at her, his eyes warm with some emotion she had a hard time defining. "Sandro," she began quietly. "You stay in here with Rhys," he murmured softly. "I don't want you getting upset by anything Lisa and I may have to say to each other." Before she could utter another word of protest he was gone. Theresa got up nervously, holding the baby to her chest. Much as she strained and strained she could not hear a single sound from the direction of the kitchen and she slowly began to move toward the kitchen as well. She was just outside the slightly ajar door when the sounds of their quiet voices finally reached her. "But I don't understand why?" Lisa was asking, sounding baffled but, strangely enough, not too upset. "I still have at least

a year within which to finish the loan, it's a substantial amount of money, so I don't see why you would do this?" Theresa bit her lip, wanting to intervene but not sure how anything she could do or say would persuade Sandro to change his mind. She felt helpless and furious and strangely hurt that he would carry out his threat anyway. "It's the right thing to do," Sandro's deep voice rumbled quietly in response to Lisa's question. "I gave you the loan for all the wrong reasons. Reasons which I now... regret... I can't in good conscience allow it to continue." "So let me pay it and we can put it behind us," Lisa implored and Sandro said something which Theresa didn't quite catch. "Sandro, this is crazy," Lisa was starting to sound upset and Theresa braced herself, prepared to enter the fray come hell or high water. Sandro's next words cut her short though. "Elisa, please, you have to let me do this..." he sounded... desperate. "It doesn't feel right," Lisa was saying and Theresa frowned in confusion. What on earth was going on here? "I've drawn up the papers, it's practically a done deal," he was saying urgently. "I have to think about it and discuss it with Rick, of course," Lisa was saying softly. "Of course," Sandro agreed amicably and realising that their conversation was at an end, Theresa very quickly made her way back to the living room. She was back in the chair and gently rocking a contentedly gurgling Rhys when the other two appeared. She sat up abruptly, her wide eyes flying from one face to the other. They both looked annoyingly relaxed and neither face revealed much. Sandro placed the tray that he was holding onto the coffee table and sat down on the same sofa he'd occupied earlier. Lisa sat down next to him and busied herself with the tray, placing a tall glass of orange juice on the coffee table in front of Theresa. "Don't argue," Sandro intervened when she opened her mouth to protest. "It's good for you." He helped himself to the coffee while he and Lisa proceeded to chat like old friends. Theresa sat there seething, hating to be so thoroughly excluded. "I'm sorry I couldn't join you yesterday, Theresa," Lisa suddenly said. "How did your check up go?" Theresa glared at her cousin for bringing up the topic in front of Sandro, who sat up and watched her like a hawk as he waited for her to respond. "It was okay," she murmured awkwardly. "What did he say about the dizzy spells?" Lisa asked and Theresa was aware of Sandro tensing up like a coiled spring at the question. "Nothing important," she responded evasively, keeping her eyes on the baby in her arms. "What dizzy spells?" Sandro suddenly asked in a dangerous voice.

"She's been feeling faint for most of the last two months," Lisa helpfully informed and Theresa gritted her teeth. "And you didn't think to tell me?" Sandro suddenly snapped furiously. "I didn't think you'd care," Theresa muttered miserably and Sandro swore venomously beneath his breath. "She didn't think I'd care," he repeated incredulously. "Oh my God, woman... you assumed that I would not care about something that directly impacts your health and the baby's well-being?" "Of course, I know you'd care if anything happens to the baby but I didn't want to worry you about something that I know is not a big deal." "And how do you know that? Did you obtain a degree in medicine sometime over the last three months? Of course I've seen you so rarely lately that you could have gotten a degree in quantum physics and I wouldn't have known!" Lisa choked back an entirely irreverent giggle at that and both Theresa and Sandro glared at her. "Sandro, I told you... I'll take care of the baby and myself. You needn't worry about it. Your responsibility toward me, us, is at an end," she reminded logically. "We're still married," he pointed out. "And I think I'll decide when and where my responsibility toward you and the baby will end. From now on, you will keep me fully apprised of what's going on with your and the baby's health." "No," she maintained stubbornly. "It's none of your business. You made it clear that the only reason you ever wanted me to get pregnant was to escape from this marriage, so why don't you leave me alone while I attempt, once again, to do everything in my power to make you happy?" "The only thing that would make me happy right now, you stubborn red-headed little cat, is if you would simply do as you're told for a change!"