

Chapter 1

Although it was only a few minutes past 6:30pm, it was dark, not unexpected in Santa Cruz in early January. The Uber driver popped his hatchback and offered to help them with luggage. Tim declined, moving the four suitcases—one for him and three for Pat—on to the sidewalk.

Pat started to pick one up. “Leave it,” Tim instructed. “We can come back outside for those in a minute, but before we bring in suitcases, I want to carry my bride across the threshold.”

Pat giggled. “I’m a modern woman. No carrying needed.”

“That may be, but I’m feeling old-fashioned at the moment.” He smiled at her, put one arm around her back just above her waist, and attempted to scoop her into his arms.

She slipped away from him, laughing as she did. “I bet you can’t catch me before I get inside on my own, my old-fashioned caveman,” she flirted, heading for the front door.

“I can be a caveman if that’s how you want to be carried, but you’re being carried,” he said, his tone full of playful mischief. He gave chase and tossed her over his shoulder when he caught her.

Pat squealed, but was laughing too hard to resist, which is how she came to greet her tail-wagging Dalmatian, Dot, who jumped against Tim’s backside in an attempt to get her head up high enough for the backward slung Pat to scratch her ears; her cat, Wimsey, who abandoned his rule about avoiding Tim and rubbed against his legs, and Tina and Robin, their pet-sitting next-door neighbors, butt-first, draped over Tim’s shoulder.

“Carrying the bride across the threshold accomplished,” he crowed as he set Pat down, “inelegantly, but done. I’ll go get our luggage.”

“I guess we don’t have to ask if you had fun on your honeymoon,” Tina chuckled.

Pat dropped to her knees to cuddle her pets. “We had a marvelous time. We brought home a wooden basket with lovebirds on its handle from Victoria as a keepsake. We liked it so much, we brought one for you, too, as a thank you gift for watching Wimsey and Dot. It’s in one of our suitcases; we’ll find it sometime.” She picked up Wimsey. “Did you two behave?” she asked the furry duo.

Tim struggled in with all four suitcases and dropped them unceremoniously near the front door. “How much do we owe you for taking care of Dot and Wimsey,” he asked, reaching for his wallet.

Robin held up her hands. “Nothing. We won’t accept money for pet-sitting,” she smiled. “But we do have a favor to ask of Pat.”

“What is it?”

“It may take a while to explain, so if you two want to be alone right now, we can come back tomorrow,” Tina said.

Pat replied merrily, “Oh no you don’t. You can’t entice and leave. I want to know now. Otherwise, I’ll be curious all night long.”

“Good. That’s what we hoped you’d say. Tina and I want to be parents,” Robin began. “We’ve decided to use a sperm donor to make things simpler...”

“But my parents had fertility issues and I was the result of a sperm donation,” Tina interrupted.

“We know the odds of us getting sperm from the same donor are small...” Robin continued.

“But we don’t want to take any chances of having our baby look like inbred Hapsburg royalty,” Tina grimaced. “Could you find out who my father was so we can be sure we don’t accidentally use him

again for our baby?"

"When I was the Santa Cruz County Law Librarian one local attorney asked if I could find a child who had been given up for adoption. He needed to find her for an estate settlement case he was working on and knew research like that wasn't part of my job description..."

Robin stopped her with a question. "Did you find the child?"

"I did. It was fun and exciting. Finding your biological father might be a bit different, Tina, but I'm happy to try."

Tina grinned. "I know you'll figure it out. What do we do?"

"We'll need to start in the same way I did then with a DNA sample from you. Get a swab kit from Ancestry. They have the biggest database of clients and DNA so use them rather than any of the other companies who advertise services."

"See, Tina, I told you that was the right thing to do," Robin said. "We've already got a kit from them and a few other companies as well. Tina spit in cups and we sent them off. We should get a report any day now."

"Thank you so much for doing this," Tina smiled. "And welcome home Mr. and Mrs....?" she let her question dangle.

"Tim Lindsey and Pat Pirard," Tim replied.

After Tina and Robin left, Pat remembered the red light on her answering machine had been blinking when they left for their honeymoon and saw that it was still impatiently beckoning her. She started toward it before having second thoughts. Tim seemed to read her mind. "I'm glad you don't feel like you have to pick that up yet."

"I want one more night of honeymoon," she smiled and put her arms around his neck.

"I was hoping you'd say that," he said, his voice a caress.

"Uh-huh. I've never spent the night with a caveman before and I think it's time I see what that's like. I don't need to be hoisted on your shoulder again, though," she teased as she took his hand and led him upstairs.