

Chapter 10
Incorporation

While Chuck read Shannon's bedtime story, Bobbi brewed a single cup of coffee and retreated to the quiet and solitude of the study. She switched on the desk light, leaving the overhead light off. Curling up on the love seat, she pulled an afghan down over her feet, and sipped from her cup.

Chuck, she had to concede, handled Shannon brilliantly. His explanation was simple and straightforward, and Shannon took it all in stride. Was she being unreasonable, then? Chuck kept saying Tracy wasn't a threat to them.

Dear God, I get a sick to my stomach every time I think about Chuck going to her house, seeing her every week. I don't believe her when she says she's not after him. God, he's only human, and if she—

"Honey? You okay?" Chuck switched on the overhead light. "You're all alone here in the dark."

Bobbi quickly wiped a tear away. "I'm fine. Just wanted a little quiet time after everything."

"You want me to leave you alone?"

"No, come and sit with me, and tell me you love me." She set her cup over on the desk, and swung her feet down off the love seat to make room for him.

"I thought you'd never ask." Chuck flipped the light back off, and slid in beside his wife, pulling her close. "I love you."

She nestled against him, lightly running her hand across his chest, across his favorite well-worn Cardinals jersey. That's the way their marriage was, wasn't it?

Comfortable and familiar. Was that enough?

"She's not what I pictured," Bobbi said.

"How so?"

"I hoped she was a lot sleazier. Nothing was low cut. Nothing was too tight. She's very attractive."

"There's no contest, you know."

"Doesn't matter. I can't get it out of my head."

"That's my fault." Chuck shifted around to face Bobbi. "Honey, my affair happened because I wasn't right with God, and I wasn't right with you. It will never happen again. No matter what my other failings are, I will never betray you again. You know that, don't you?"

"Yeah," Bobbi whispered. Rationally, she knew Chuck was right, but that awful knot in her stomach would never go away as long as Tracy was around. "She said she didn't have a choice about coming back here. What's that supposed to mean?"

"How should I know? She never confided in me."

With some relief, Bobbi leaned against him again. "It's almost like she's bringing Jack to you. She made sure you found him. She knew you'd find out he was yours, and that you'd want to be part of his life. She's arranged it all so it looked like you were the one pushing it forward. Then, after all her belligerent pretense, she didn't fight you."

"Why would she want me to take Jack?"

“I don’t know. She said he was her life. The whole reason she ... I mean, she wanted a baby, your baby. The creepy part again.”

Chuck gave his a wife a gentle squeeze. “How do you feel about Jack?”

“Jack’s a doll. I’d take him in a minute.” She reached for her cup and took a long drink. “This was never about Jack.”

“Never?” Chuck raised his eyebrows. “You said you didn’t want anything to do with him.”

“All right, for a little while, it was about Jack, too. You knew I’d come around though.”

“I was counting on it.”

“So ... you’re going to her house tomorrow?”

“To pick Jack up, yes. Do you want me to take Gavin or Glen?”

Bobbi sighed deeply. “No. I trust you.”

“I know that, but will it put your mind at ease?”

“I’ve got to get past this. As long as it tears me up, she owns me.”

Friday, September 7

“Miss Laurie! I’m gonna spend the whole weekend with my dad!” Jack Ravenna shouted as he got off the school bus at Building Blocks Daycare. “The judge said so!”

“What great news!” Laurie Dillard held the door for him.

“He’s a good guy. Mom said so, and he wants a picture of me for his wallet just like his other kids. And I have brothers and a sister, too!”

“That’s very exciting, Jack. I hope you have a great weekend with him.” Jack hung his backpack on its designated hook, and skipped outside.

As Laurie watched him dart around on the playground, she wondered what changed. A few weeks ago, Tracy couldn’t say anything good about the deadbeat who showed up suddenly. Was she simply trying to give the guy a fair chance by telling Jack that his dad was a good guy?

Chuck and Bobbi were in court yesterday, too. Wouldn’t it be bizarre if Chuck were Jack’s father? *Laurie Dillard, that’s completely preposterous. Chuck’s not a vindictive deadbeat like Jack’s dad.*

Chuck sighed when he checked his watch again. It was twenty after three, just four minutes later than the last time he’d looked. Unable to focus on anything but Jack, he spent the afternoon deleting old files from his computer, and clearing his desk.

Now his mind settled on the conversation with his wife last night. Bobbi had a point. Tracy’s actions didn’t make much sense. *She threatened to fight me, came down here and made a scene, but she rolled over in court. She could have used Rita’s interference against me, and that would have shut the case down, but she didn’t. What’s her game?*

He pulled the file from his briefcase with all the public records information he’d gathered on Tracy and read back through it.

She had a pattern of covering her tracks and disappearing. Was she getting ready to do that again? Would she really leave Jack behind? If Jack was her life like she said,

how could she bear to leave him? Unless she was convinced somehow it was in his best interest.

What if he told her he knew all about the murder? What if he promised that he would see to it that she and Jack were safe? Would that be enough? Would she trust him that much?

“Mr. Molinsky?” Christine stood in the doorway. “It’s four o’clock. You asked me to remind you to call your wife.”

“Right, thank you. Aren’t you ready to go home yet?”

“It’s not five.”

“You make me look bad. I’m leaving after I make this phone call.”

“If you’re leaving, it’ll be just like getting off an hour early,” Christine teased.

“Hey,” Chuck pointed at her as she closed his office door. He dialed his home number, and Bobbi answered after a couple of rings. “I’m getting ready to leave.”

“I hope everything goes smoothly,” Bobbi said with a long sigh.

“You sure you’re okay with me going by myself?”

“I’m trying not to think about it.”

“We won’t be alone. Jack will be there.”

“I know. Just don’t ... don’t linger. Hurry home.”

“I will. What ... What do you want Jack to call you?”

“Just Bobbi. That’s the simplest.”

“Kind of impersonal, though.” She didn’t reply. Best not to argue with her right now. “It works. I love you.”

“I love you, too, and Chuck ... I trust you.”

“Thank you.”

Chuck shut things down in his office and left. He didn't want to get to Tracy's house too early, and give her another excuse to be difficult, so he stopped for gasoline. Inside the convenience store, he picked up a drink for Jack, and another one to take home to Shannon.

He set the drinks on the roof of the car while he took his suit jacket off and pitched it in the backseat. He started to slip his tie off, too, but decided formality with Tracy was wiser.

God, help me be civil, and not let any of Tracy's comments get to me. I don't want to lose my temper with her, especially in front of Jack. Ease Bobbi's mind about the visit. Help her remember the things she already knows are true.

He took a deep breath and headed for Tracy's house. When he and Gavin came, he was so busy looking for the house, he didn't notice anything about it. While it wasn't new construction, the two-story was very up-to-date with new windows, probably a new roof, too. Neat, well-maintained landscaping set off the perfectly manicured lawn. As he neared the house, he had to shield his eyes from the blinding glare of the late afternoon sunshine reflecting off Tracy's spotless white Lexus parked in the driveway.

Almost as soon as Chuck got out of his car, the front door opened. “You're here! You came! Mom!” Jack Ravenna ran back through the house leaving the front door wide open. Chuck walked up to the porch, but didn't venture inside. He could hear Tracy talking to her son. There was no sarcastic, defensive edge to her voice, just a soft gentleness. Shame reddened Chuck's face as he involuntarily recalled the last time he'd heard her talk that way.

He closed his eyes and pushed his hands deep into the pockets of his slacks. *The capital of Alabama is Montgomery. The capital of Alaska is Juneau. The capital of Arizona ...*

“Jack, the air conditioner is on,” Tracy said from just inside the door.

“Sorry. Gimme a minute.”

“I’ll get it,” she said, but before she could close the door, she found Chuck waiting on the porch. “Jack didn’t mention you were here. That explains why he left the door open.” She stepped out of the way. “You can come in.”

Chuck silently thanked God Tracy hadn’t changed into shorts and a tank top yet. “I’ll just wait for him out here. I think that’d be safer for everybody.”

“Suit yourself.” She started to close the door.

“Tracy, thank you.” Chuck surprised himself when he spoke.

“For what?” Tracy’s eyes narrowed.

“You told Jack I was a good guy, and you didn’t fight this.”

“I want what’s best for Jack, period. If that happens to work out for you, too, then lucky you.” Now the edge returned to her voice.

“It’s not luck. It’s providence.”

“Providence lines out extramarital affairs, does it?”

“No, but providence, I mean God, can turn them around and bring good out of them.” Chuck looked Tracy in the eyes, never blinking. “He can bring good out of anything, even murder.” That was her opening, her cue.

Tracy never flinched. “That’s some God you’ve got there, Chuck.”

“Yes, He is.” *Don’t press her. Live to fight another day.* “I’m going to take Jack to church Sunday morning, and I’d like to take him Sunday evening, but that would make us late getting back.”

“Not this time,” Tracy said softly.

“Fair enough,” Chuck said. “You’re welcome to join us. It’s Preston Road—”

“Is that what your wife said?”

“My wife? She’d be glad for you to come to church with us.” *I’m fairly sure she would be anyway.* He heard a scraping sound inside the house, and leaned forward to see Jack with a backpack and pillow, dragging a suitcase. “You need some help, buddy?”

“This ... is ... heavy,” Jack complained. “Mom, I’m just going for two days! What’d you pack?”

“Three changes of clothes, and pajamas. Just the basics. Oh, and your toothpaste.”

“Toothpaste?” Chuck asked.

“I only use one kind,” Jack said. “And I don’t eat bananas or coconut anything.”

“I think we can handle that.” Chuck picked up the suitcase. “Do you know your phone number, Jack, in case we need to call your mom?”

“I’m in first grade. Of course, I know my phone number.”

“Anything else we need to know?” Chuck asked Tracy. “Is he allergic to anything?”

“No, he’s perfect,” Tracy answered. “There’s a card in his suitcase with my cell phone number on it.” She knelt down to Jack’s eye level. “I’ll miss you like crazy.” She pushed his bangs from his forehead then hugged him tightly.

“I’ll miss you too, but we’ll be okay,” Jack said.

“Sure you will,” Tracy replied, standing back up. “He’s never spent a night away from me in his life.” She sounded as if she were coaching herself rather than her son.

“You want me to bring him back tomorrow?” Chuck asked gently.

Tracy studied Chuck’s face for a moment. “No, it’ll be good for him. He can’t hang on to his mommy the rest of his life.”

“You can call and check on him.”

“He’ll be fine.”

“I’m not worried about him.”

“Dad, come on!” Jack called from the front seat of Chuck’s car. Chuck smiled broadly. It sounded just as natural as hearing Shannon or Brad or Joel say it.

“I’d better go. He sounds ready.” Chuck turned and stepped off the porch. “Hey! Back seat. You still need a booster.” Jack rolled his eyes and climbed out slowly. Chuck opened the back door, and helped the boy get his seat belt buckled. He walked around and opened his own door, but before getting in, he called, “Goodbye, Tracy.” She didn’t speak, didn’t wave, just gave them a slight nod.

“Is one of those drinks mine?” Jack asked as soon as Chuck got in the car.

“Yep. Here.” Chuck loosened the bottle’s cap and handed it back.

“I can drink it now?”

“Yes.”

“Mom never lets me drink anything in her car.” Jack gulped from the bottle.

“Your mom has a very nice car.”

“Yeah, but I don’t think it’ll go over eighty. Will this one?”

“Not while you’re in it,” Chuck answered, glancing at Jack in the rearview mirror.

“Will you teach me to drive?”

“You got a few more years before you have to worry about that.”

“I know. I just like to plan.”

“Jack, we usually get pizza on Friday night. How’s that sound?”

“Yum, yum, yum.” He slurped loudly from his drink. “Eat out or bring home?”

“Either.”

“I vote bring home.”

“Bring home it is then,” Chuck said. Shannon would’ve picked eating out in a heartbeat.

Jack gulped his soda, and then shook his head until it fizzed in his mouth.

“Everything okay, Jack?”

Jack could see his dad’s eyes in the rearview mirror. He swallowed hard and nodded. “Yep. I mean, yes, sir. Am I in trouble?”

“Of course not. I just saw you shaking your head.”

“I was making a soda shake in my mouth. Mom never lets me do that ’cause sometimes it fizzes up a lot, and I spit. She hates that.”

“I see.”

“I can stop if you want.”

“Just be careful and don’t spit.”

Jack took another gulp from his bottle of Coke. His dad passed the soda shake test. This might work out better than he expected.

“Here’s our street,” his dad said, as they turned right.

“What’s it called?”

“Danbury Court.”

“Who’s Dan?”

“Dan? What are you talking about?”

“The Dan that’s buried here.”

His dad smiled in the rearview mirror. “Danbury. All one word. It’s somebody’s last name, I guess. Probably some real estate developer.” His dad pointed out the front window. “There’s Shannon waiting for us.”

Jack leaned up between the front seats so he could see. Yep, there was a girl all right, sitting on the edge of the front step watching for them. Then she jumped up and ran inside. By the time his dad pulled into the driveway, the girl was back outside, bouncing, dancing almost. Once his dad turned the car off, she flew down the steps toward them.

“Daddy, you took forever! Did you get him?”

“Who?” his dad asked.

“My brother? Did you get him?”

“Yes ...”

“Oh, I see him!” the girl said, pushing past his dad. “Get him out!” She pointed at Jack and yanked his dad’s sleeve, her ponytail swishing.

“Sweetheart, you’re gonna scare him,” his dad said gently. “Calm down.” His dad took the girl by the arm and pulled her out of the way then he opened the car door.

Jack slid out and stood face to face with the girl. He remembered her picture from his dad’s wallet. She was his sister.

“Jack, this is your sister, Shannon. And Shannon, this is your brother, Jack.”

“You go to my school.” Jack pointed a finger and squinted at her. “But you’re not in my grade.”

“I’m in Mrs. Brubaker’s class,” the girl said. “You know, kindergarten.”

“I’m in first grade.” He stood up straighter so he was even taller than she was. She still had all of her baby teeth, and she probably couldn’t even read yet.

“My mommy teaches first grade! Come on!” She took him by the hand and he stumbled up the steps behind her. “Mommy, here he is!” she shouted once she got inside the door. He never got to yell at home.

Jack pulled his hand back and carefully examined the house. It was tall, not too fancy, and it had a staircase just like his. He breathed in deeply. “What’s that smell?”

“It’s coffee,” a lady-voice said, surprising Jack. He hadn’t seen her. Maybe she just appeared. Maybe she was magic. She smiled and held out her hand. “Jack, I’m Bobbi,” she said reaching out a hand.

She knew his name. Then he remembered. “I know you,” he said.

“You saw me yesterday at court.”

“No, at school.”

“I teach first grade at your school.”

“Yeah!” He snapped his fingers. “You’re Mrs. Mo-whatever.”

“Mo-lin-sky,” Shannon corrected.

“At school, I’m Mrs. Molinsky, but here, you can call me Bobbi.”

“No, you’re a grown-up,” Jack said, “I can’t call grown-ups by their first name.”

His mother hated that, too. He chewed his bottom lip and scowled as he tried to think.

“Mrs. Dad.” Jack nodded. “I like it.” His dad finally made it inside with his suitcase.

“Dad, Mrs. Dad teaches at my school. I know her already.”

“See, you fit right in.” His dad patted his shoulder, and then he leaned over and kissed Mrs. Dad. On the mouth! In front of everybody! “I’ll go get the pizza,” he said.

“Pepperoni for everybody?”

Jack nodded, and made slurping noises. He grinned broadly when his sister joined in. He already liked having a sister. Once his dad left, Mrs. Dad pointed down a long hallway. “Shannon, why don’t you show Jack where the toys are?”

Toys! He completely forgot about toys! His mom didn’t pack any even. Thank goodness they had some. Shannon took his hand again and led him back through the house. “This way!”

“Jack, I’ll take your things upstairs,” Mrs. Dad called after them.

“Wait!” Jack ran back from the family room. “My dad said I could pick my room.”

“You can sleep in Brad’s room,” she said, and he followed her up the stairs.

“Joel’s coming tomorrow, so he’ll need his own room.”

“My brother?”

“What about Brat?” He never heard Shannon sneak up behind them.

“Brad.” Mrs. Dad made a big deal about the ‘d.’ “Brad is coming, too, but he won’t be sleeping here.” She opened the second door at the top of the steps. “Here you go, Jack.”

He walked slowly through the room. Everything was dark blue - the curtains, the bedspread, part of the walls. He walked over and pushed on the bed. It felt soft enough.

He punched the pillow. It was good, too. The dresser, though, had real treasure - football trophies. "Was Brad a football player?"

"Since he was about eight, I think," Mrs. Dad said. She walked to the dresser and pulled one of the trophies down for him. "This was his favorite. His teammates voted to give it to him."

Jack held the trophy carefully, afraid to breathe on it even. He touched the letters on the nameplate. "E-e-eagle Spirit. What's that mean?"

"The Eagles is the team name, and the team voted on the player who showed the most character and dedication."

"So he was like the best?"

"Maybe not the best player, but he's a terrific young man."

He eased the trophy back into Mrs. Dad's hands. He didn't have any trophies or anything. He lightly touched the desk, and took a deep breath.

"Is everything okay?" Mrs. Dad asked.

"Yeah," Jack said. "It smells tough. Not like a bully, but still tough."

"That's Brad's cologne," Shannon said. "He wears way too much. C'mon, I'll show you my room!" Shannon scrambled down the hall and Jack shuffled out behind her.

When Chuck returned with the pizza, Bobbi sent the children to wash their hands. Moments later, they bounded into the kitchen. "I wanna sit by Jack!" Shannon exclaimed.

"You don't have a choice," Bobbi answered. "I already set the table. You have to sit by Jack."

Shannon smiled at her, and took her seat. “Jack, she always teases like that. You’ll get used to it.”

“My mom never teases,” he said, as he surveyed the table carefully. “Is that my dad’s seat?” He pointed to the seat on his right.

“Yes.” Bobbi patted his chair, and he climbed up in it.

“Good, I like it that way,” he said. “Do we hafta have milk to drink?”

“Not on pizza Friday,” Bobbi said. She brought the pizza to the table, and then took her seat with Chuck and the children.

“Jack, give me your hand,” Chuck said. “Each meal we say a prayer. You ever pray before?”

“No.” He frowned, and pulled his hand back to his lap.

“It’s okay. We don’t have to hold hands. Praying is just talking to God, telling Him thank You for our food, and anything else we want to say.”

“To who?” Jack asked. “I don’t know anybody named God. My mom does though. She talks to him a lot, mostly when she’s mad.”

Bobbi cringed, imagining the things Jack might have heard in his short life. “This is a little different,” she said. “God takes care of us—”

“But I thought my mom did. I mean of me. She doesn’t take care of you guys.”

“Jack ...”

“Are you getting mad? ’Cause sometimes I ask too many questions.”

“I’m not mad. See if this makes sense. God made everything, and He’s in charge of everything. Sometimes He does things Himself, but sometimes He helps people do some of the things that need to be done.”

“Did He make the pizza?”

“No, but He made people smart enough to figure out how to make pizza and He made your dad smart enough to have a job, so we could have money to buy it.”

“Okay.” Jack reached his hands out to Chuck and Shannon. “That I can believe.”

Chuck took the boy’s hand and winked at her as he squeezed her hand. “Now you kind of look down like this and close your eyes.” Chuck bowed his head to show the boy, and Jack dutifully followed his lead.

“Father God, thank You for our food, and the day You’ve given us. Thank You for Jack. Give him a good visit this weekend, and bless Bobbi and Shannon and Brad and Joel and Grandma. Amen.”

“Can I try it?” Jack asked.

“Absolutely,” Chuck said.

Jack took a deep breath and lowered his head again. “Father God, thank You for my mom and my dad, for Mrs. Dad, for my brothers and my sister. Amen.” He started to raise his head, but quickly bowed it again. “Oh and the food. Thank You, amen.” He raised his head. “I messed up a little.”

“You did fine, Jack. Just fine.”

Chuck pulled the covers back on Brad’s bed, and Jack climbed in. “So what do you think?”

“About what?”

“About your family. How was your first night?”

Jack frowned several moments before answering. “I don’t know if this is gonna work.”

“Why not? What’s wrong?” Chuck sat on the edge of the bed, and motioned for Jack to sit beside him.

“I don’t think I can be as special as everybody else.” He dropped his chin down to his chest and absently traced the stitching in the quilt. “Brad has trophies.”

Chuck slipped down and knelt in front of Jack. “Son?” He waited for Jack to look up. “I know we need to get to know each other, but you’re as much my son as Brad and Joel are. You’re as much mine as Shannon is. It doesn’t matter how you got here, I love you, and I always will.”

“But you never even saw me until that night at my house.”

“Doesn’t matter. I love you because you’re my son.”

“So you love me because you have to.”

“Don’t ever think that.” He pulled Jack close, and hugged him tightly. “I love you because I want to. I can’t help it.”

“What about when I go home?”

“Do you think your mom still loves you even though you’re here with me?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” he said, straightening up.

“You belong here with me just as much as you belong with your mom. This is your place, your family. It may take a little while for it to feel that way, but it is. It always will be.”

Jack nodded, but he still frowned.

“Here, this’ll help.” He pulled a box down from the closet shelf, and set it on the bed. He dug through the box until he pulled out a stuffed monkey with long, gangly arms and legs. The monkey wore a yellow felt crown. “This,” Chuck said, handing the monkey to Jack, “is King MooKoo.”

Jack straightened the monkey’s arms and legs, and the slightest grin formed. “I can keep him?”

“He’s Brad’s. I can’t give him away, but you can sleep with him. Oh wait, I think he’s issuing a royal edict.” Chuck took the monkey back and held him up to his ear. “Yes, Your Highness.” He nodded vigorously, and Jack smiled, straining to hear the monkey speak.

“What’d he say?” Jack asked, eyes wide.

“He asked you if you wanted to join the Order of the Mole.”

“The what?”

“The Order of the Mole. You know, like in Mole-insky.”

“I have to change my name?”

“Of course not. You can be Sir Jack Ravenna of the Order of the Mole.”

“Who else is in the Order of the Mole?”

“Well, I’m Sir Charles, and my father was Sir James, then of course, there’s Sir Joel and Sir Bradley.”

“Sir Joel of the Mole?”

“Yeah, that one makes me laugh, too.”

“What do I have to do?”

“It’s mostly an honorary title. You just have to pledge your loyalty to the other members of the Order.”

“And they pledge to me, too?”

“Exactly. Of course, you’ll be pledged to any future members of the Order, whoever they may be.”

Jack thought for a moment, and then he stood beside the bed, and bowed low. “Please inform His Highness, King MooKoo, that I accept.”

Chuck whispered to the monkey, and nodded again. “He says we must confirm this with the Handshake of Solemnity.”

“The what?”

Chuck set the monkey down on the bed, and then he ceremoniously held his right hand up and spit into it. Then he rubbed his hands together, and nodded for Jack to follow. Jack spit into his hands with enthusiasm and rubbed them together. “My mom never lets me spit!”

Chuck held his right hand out and Jack reached to shake it. Chuck stretched his left hand out for Jack to shake it, too. After a moment, he dropped his hands. “That’s all there is to it.”

“And I can’t get kicked out?”

“Never.” Chuck patted the bed. “Think you can sleep now?”

“Can I have King MooKoo?”

Chuck tossed the monkey to him, then leaned down and kissed his forehead. He laid a hand on Jack’s shoulder and bowed his head. “Dear God, thank You for Jack. Help him to be a man who honors You in everything and help us be the family he needs. Help

me especially to be a good dad. Bless him, keep him safe, and help him know how much You love him. In Jesus' name. Amen." Chuck kissed him again. "Goodnight, Jack. I love you."

"I love you, too, Dad." He rolled over, and scooted further under the covers.

Chuck lingered for just a moment before turning out the light. *I love you, too, Dad ... God, You are the only one who could redeem something as awful as adultery.* He looked in on Shannon, and whispered a prayer for her before he headed downstairs to find his wife.

Bobbi unloaded the dishwasher, taking the time to decompress. She made it through tonight, but tomorrow they were having a cookout to make Jack's addition to the family official. Along with Brad, Joel and Ann, all of Rita's children would be here, except Danny. Chuck expected her to be the model of gracious acceptance. How was she supposed to help everyone else adjust when she couldn't?

Granted, Jack was a sweet little boy, but every time he called Chuck "Dad" or mentioned his "brothers," her blood ran cold. He wasn't hers. He would never be hers. He would always be that woman's son. Every time Bobbi looked at him, she saw his mother.

She put the last glass away and eased the dishwasher door closed. Before she could pull a cup down from the cabinet, Chuck slipped into the kitchen, startling her when he spoke.

"He's all settled in. It took a little while, but Brad's monkey was in the closet—"

“What?” Bobbi whipped around to face him. “That was Brad’s. You had no right.”

“I gave him Brad’s monkey to sleep with, not to keep. What’s the big deal?”

“It belongs to my son, and I will not stand by and let you give his things to her son.”

“Honey—”

“No, Chuck, you refuse to see it, but there is a difference.” She turned back around, and yanked a bag of coffee closer. She scooped enough for one cup, and dumped it into the basket of the coffeemaker.

“So when you said you’d take Jack in a minute, you didn’t mean any of that? I thought this wasn’t about Jack.”

“It’s not about Jack. He has a mother.” Bobbi measured the water and poured it into the reservoir. “He will never be my son, and I am not going to be his mother. I will be a gracious weekend hostess, but don’t ask me for any more.”