

Worth Fighting For **by Bryna**

It had started raining about two hours ago and hadn't let up yet. Erica stared out of her and Jack's bedroom window, replaying the conversation that they had at the yacht club and the day's events.

Jack had confirmed that their marriage was in trouble and that comment, along with knowing he was out all night with anyone other than her, broke Erica's heart. Jack had said he wasn't ready to give up and Erica believed he meant it. Jack and Erica had decided that the club wasn't the best place to discuss their problems and Jack agreed to come back to the house so that they could have an evening alone and talk. Erica felt encouraged as Jack took her by the hand, gently kissed her and led her toward the car.

Jack went to get the car as Erica waited anxiously by the door. She knew that they had a long way to go, but just the idea of an evening alone with Jack sounded like heaven. Just to be close to him again, even if it was just watching him sleep made Erica feel happier than she had in a long time. Erica was so focused on Jackson and spending time with him that she was unaware that all of that was about to change.

Without warning, Jeff came around the corner and nearly knocked Erica off her feet, causing her to stumble. As she began to fall, Jeff steadied her with his arms and helped her regain her balance. Jack arrived just in time to see Jeff with his arms around Erica and her laughing. Erica walked over to Jack and as she did, she noticed that his countenance was different. The love that had been in his eyes moments

earlier had now turned back to anger and bitterness. Coldly he said he felt that they needed their space.

The whole ride home was filled with nothing but silence and it frightened Erica. What had changed his mind and why was he acting so distant? When they returned home, Erica tried talking to Jack to find out what was wrong. Jack said he needed time to sort out what had happened and wrap the idea of Erica having a son around his head. Erica agreed to spend the night in the guest room to give Jack his space, but Jack decided to go to the loft instead.

She hated that he left. She hated being separated from him. She hated that during their first year of marriage they had spent more time apart than together. Going to sleep every night without him was nothing short of torture and waking up without his arms around her was worse. She begged him to stay. She tried to convince him that separation was only going to increase the distance between them, not resolve anything. Erica knew that if they could just spend time alone together, then they could work things out. She had told him that it should have been *them* on the boat, out all night, not him and Brooke and she meant it.

In the two hours since Jack had left and the rain started, Erica had been through a myriad of emotions. First there was sadness, loneliness, hurt, and now, anger. She was angry at Jack for turning to Brooke for emotional support and angry at him for walking away, even if it was only temporary.

At that moment she realized that she had had enough. Jackson was NOT going to make all the decisions in their relationship and she wasn't going to let him push her away. All of a sudden it dawned on Erica..."go to him". She was going to the loft and she wasn't leaving until he agreed to

come back home and settle things. She wasn't going to give him space. If she had to smother him with love then she would. If she had to intoxicate him with emotion, she would; whatever it took to get through to him that she loved him and wasn't about to back down.

Erica grabbed her keys and rushed out the door. All of a sudden, the rain and the storm didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was Jackson and making him understand that what their marriage needed was time together, not space. Erica raced out of the house with nothing but her car keys. She didn't even notice that the rain was still pouring down in sheets.

Across town in Jackson's loft, he too, stood looking out the window. He had been ready to take Erica in his arms after their conversation at the club, but then he ran into Jeff. Just seeing Jeff touching Erica brought back the feelings of anger and hurt that Erica's secret had caused him. But, mostly it brought up feelings of jealousy.

Most people didn't know that since he and Erica had been married that they had been trying one last time to create their own little family together. They had been about to start fertility treatments just after the Ball, but medical problems and family crises seem to get in their way. Now here Jeff was. . . A blast from the past. Erica's first husband and the father of her son. He was the father to the child Erica never knew she had. Jackson was angry and mad. Mad that Erica could share a bond like that with someone she never loved. He was scared that Josh would bring them together and ruin what he and Erica had spent years creating. *Erica and I should be sharing a child right now, not Erica and Jeff. If things had gone according to plan, Erica would be pregnant with my son, not keeping her son with another man a secret.*

The crash of thunder brought Jackson's thoughts back to reality. It wasn't until that moment that he realized that his anger didn't lie with Erica, but with circumstances. He knew that Josh wasn't supposed to exist. He knew that given the drama their family had been through the past few months, that there wasn't a good opportunity to tell him about Josh. He and Erica had barely had any time alone and any time they did have, was spent discussing Lily or Kendall. Another crash of thunder and bolt of lightening jarred Jack to his core . . . *Erica*.

She still hated storms. He knew that she must be terrified especially since she was all alone. He knew that Erica was trying to put her fears about the past to rest, but he also knew how clingy and frightened the sound of thunder still made her. He hadn't even talked with her about what Madden had done to her but he could only imagine the emotions and memories it must have brought back for her. If he hadn't been so stubborn and selfish, he would be at home with her now, holding her, comforting her when she needed him.

Earlier that day, when Erica had seen Jack and Brooke exit the yacht she had told them that it should have been them on the boat; out all night, together...she was right. It *should* have been Erica that Jack clung to. He promised her on their wedding day that he would be there for her. At this moment, he felt as if he had failed her miserably. Not only was he not there for her, but the look on Erica's face when she realized that he had been gone all night with Brooke was one of pure anguish.

"Enough is enough" he thought as he picked up the phone to call Erica. His first thought was to run home to her and take her in his arms, but he knew with the storm in full force, that

Erica must already be terrified. He didn't want an unexpected presence in their bedroom to startle her even further.

Jack was relieved when he heard her beautiful voice on the other end "Hello..." "Erica, sweetheart..." Jack began but stopped as her voice continued "you have reached the Montgomery residence. I am sorry we aren't available to take your call...."

"Come on Erica...pick up the phone..." Jack sighed in frustration as he waited for the message to finish. As exasperated as Jack was that she didn't answer he couldn't help but chuckle. Erica had been trying for weeks to figure out the new answering system. She hated the pre-recorded messages and had been trying to record one of her own. He loved the way her voice sounded. There was something about hearing her refer to herself as 'Montgomery' that still made him smile. "Erica, Sweetheart, it is me. If you can, please pick up the phone...." the line was silent on the other end..."Erica I am coming home. Hopefully you are sound asleep oblivious to this weather, but if you aren't, please know that I will be there soon...Erica...I love you baby." Jack hung up the phone as those last words still hung in the air. How could he have, even for a moment, considered life without her? How could he let her think that he could have a life without her? The sound of his cell phone ringing brought Jack back to reality "Erica?" he said.

"No, Dad it's me..." The voice on the other end began.

"Reggie? I thought you weren't coming back until this weekend" Jack questioned his son.

"I was, I mean I am, but I forgot some things and needed to get them before I left. Dad, where is Mom?" Jack loved

hearing Reggie call her that and Erica loved it even more. She was nervous when Reggie told her that he was going with some friends to hike in the mountains for a week, but she eventually came around when Reggie turned on the charm.

"What do you mean, where is Mom? She should be home, did you check our bedroom?" Jack answered becoming concerned.

"Yeah, but she's not here. Her car and keys are gone but her purse and cell phone are still on the coffee table." Reggie answered.

"I am on my way home now, just sit tight and we will find her, I promise. She probably went to Kendall's or Myrtle's."

Jack tried not to sound scared but the truth was he was more than a little nervous that Erica was nowhere to be found. His thoughts drifted back to earlier that day when he told her he needed space. The look on her face was one of hurt and pure devastation. She was crushed that he didn't even want to be in the same room with her and he knew it. He should have taken her in his arms and told her that he loved her and that he would not abandon her, but he didn't. At that moment all he could think about was shutting her out the way he felt she had shut him out.

Jack...could you be any more of an SOB right now? he thought as he realized that Erica was so upset when he left that she could have done just about anything. With Bianca's jet and their boat at her disposal, she could be halfway around the world right now. Jack picked up the phone to call the marina and the airport to see if there had been any sign

of Erica. To his surprise Derek was on the other line.
"Derek? Is that you?" Jack questioned.

"Yes Jack. One of our patrol officers found Erica's car abandoned with no sign of her in it. We were just checking to make sure everything is okay; have you talked to her today? We have checked with Opal, Kendall..."

Jack's head dropped. She was missing. No one had seen her, no one had heard from her, and she was nowhere to be found. She was lost in a raging storm and the last words he had spoken to her were full of anger, bitterness, and resentment. "Oh God, please let her be okay..." Jack started to pray as he dropped to his knees.

Erica was standing outside Jack's building looking up at the loft. She had gotten about two miles from his street when her car battery died. She didn't have her phone and wasn't about to spend the next few hours sitting in a car. She had to get to Jackson, so she did the only thing she could do...she walked. She hadn't even been aware of the pouring rain as she replayed the past few months in her head.

Why hadn't she told Jack about Greg? Why didn't she lean on him when Greg was taunting her and telling her all the things he wanted from her? She should have told him. At the time her reasons sounded good...he had been sick, then he was in NY, then Kendall's accident took over her life. But the truth was, he was her husband, and she should have told him. Now she was faced with the fear of losing him forever and that was something that she couldn't live with. She had spent the better part of an hour walking in the rain trying to get to him and now that she was this close she was losing her nerve.

What if he didn't want her anymore? What if seeing Jeff at the club and having Erica's secret thrust in his face yet again, was too much for him? What if he had leaned on Brooke again and this time it went too far?

Erica didn't know what to do. She felt completely broken. In all her years on this earth, through everything she had been through, she had never felt this alone. Erica fell to her knees on the sidewalk as she wept for everything she felt she was about to lose.

Jack called Reggie and gave him the news. They planned to meet at the house and retrace Erica's steps. Jack's first stop was Erica's car. He needed to find out why it was on the side of the road and why she wasn't in it. Jack turned out the lights and locked the door. The lights were flickering in the loft. Just as he left the power went out and he remembered the fire that he had made earlier. His mind drifted back to Christmas. He had surprised Erica with their house and they had made love in front of the fire all night long. They were so happy then. "We will be that happy again" Jack said to himself "I promise you Erica"

Jack stepped out of the stairwell and exited the building. He was just about to get into his car when he heard a faint sob in the distance. Jack looked around and saw a small figure kneeling on the sidewalk. As he got closer, his heart leapt. It was Erica.

"Erica? Baby? Sweetheart, I have been so worried." Jackson could hardly believe his eyes as he knelt down beside Erica. She looked so fragile and vulnerable.

Erica didn't acknowledge Jack at all. She knew she heard him and she knew she felt his presence but she was so

afraid that she would look up and he wouldn't be there, that it was all a figment of her imagination. Jackson gently lifted her chin up and their eyes met. He had so many questions that he needed to ask her but one look into her big brown eyes and her tear-stained face said it all.

She had come to him. She was fighting for them in the only way she knew how. She was going to be with him whether he liked it or not and she was going to love him no matter how angry he was with her. Seeing her like that and knowing that she came for him made Jackson's heart feel as if were going to explode with love for this woman.

Jack lifted her small frame into his arms and pulled her close to his broad chest. Erica instinctively laid her head on Jack's chest and whispered "I couldn't lose you Jack." At that moment the rained seem to disappear and Jack was overcome with a flood of emotion. He didn't even try to hold back the tears that were beginning to fall. She was his, totally and completely. After all she had been through; Erica could love like no other. He was overwhelmed that her heart belonged to him and him alone.

Slowly Jack placed her on her feet. He gently cupped her face and with a newfound passion, he captured her lips. It didn't take long for the kiss to take on a life of its own. Jackson pulled her close as he deepened their kiss. The feel of Jack's warm lips on hers released a flood of relief from Erica's heart as she began, once more, to sob.

Jackson held her close in his arms and warmth surrounded her. "It's okay, he whispered...We are okay, sweetheart" Jack said through the tears. Erica looked at him with such extreme love in her eyes that it took his breath away. He knew that he needed to get her inside and get her warm, but

seeing her like this evoked such want and passion in him that he simply could not ignore it.

Jack's lips met Erica's again in an explosive kiss. Love, want, need, and hunger took over Jackson and he couldn't seem to get close enough to his wife. His hands went from her face to her waist as he pulled her closer and then to her hips as he lifted her up. Slowly Erica slid down his body as her hands caressed Jackson's muscular chest. Erica's arms were instantly around his neck as her fingers ran through his wet hair.

An eternity seemed to pass before Erica broke the kiss out of need for air. Jackson just looked at her breathless. The look in his eye was unmistakable as Erica took him by the hand and led him towards the door. Jack didn't think he could wait another second to continue their kiss, so he tugged at her arm causing her to turn around and face him. In one amazing second, he grabbed her and pressed up against the side of the building as his lips continued the handiwork they had started just moments earlier. The kiss deepened as Jack leaned into her. Slowly Jackson's hands slid under Erica's shirt and began to caress her skin. The feel of Jack's hands on her bare skin and the feel of his body weight pressing her into the wall was more than she could take.

"Jack, I want you so much right now. I don't know if you still want me, but I want you." Erica whispered as Jackson was exploring her neck with his lips.

"Erica I could never not want you. Jack said breathlessly, "Can't you tell at this moment how very much I want you." Jack replied looking in her eyes.

"I don't know what to think, Jack. I am so afraid that this is a dream and I am still sitting on the sidewalk being afraid that I have lost you for good."

"Erica, I once told you that you could never lose me. That still rings true." Jack replied with love in his eyes.

"But I was so scared Jack, this afternoon you said..."

"I know what I said, Erica, and I was acting like a selfish child. Come upstairs with me, will get you dry, we will call Reggie and let him know you are all right and then I will spend the rest of the night showing you exactly how much I want you. We will get through this Erica. I meant what I said at the club. I am NOT giving up on us. This kind of love that we have, it only comes once and we have fought too long to have it. I will not walk away from it." Jack said as his hands cupped Erica's face.

Erica didn't say a word as she nodded her head 'yes'. Jackson lifted her in his arms and they made their way into the building. Jack was doing his best to keep focused on getting Erica taken care of so that they could re-ignite the passion that they had experienced outside, but Erica couldn't seem to keep her hands to herself. The power was out which meant the building was pitch black. Erica seized the opportunity to caress any part of Jackson that she could reach.

Jackson loved the feel of her hands on him. She loved how gentle and loving they were. As if the feel of her hands wasn't enough to drive him wild, Erica's lips started making a path of their own. They went from Jack's cheek, to his ear, to his neck and finally landed on his lips.

By the time they reached the penthouse he was ready to express his love right there in the hallway. He placed Erica on her feet and pressed her against the door. His lips immediately went to her neck where he knew she was the most sensitive and Erica's hands looped around Jack's neck. Jackson's hands rested on Erica's hips and slowly lifted her up so that she was at eye level with him. His lips explored Erica's lips and his tongue gained entrance into her mouth as her legs wrapped around his waist. Jack's hands were now free as Erica's legs secured her to him and his body weight was holding her in place against the door. His hands slowly moved up Erica's shirt and begin to caress her skin.

The couple had forgotten that they were standing in the hallway of an apartment building as both worked to remove the other's shirts. Erica seemed to make her hands work fast enough. She wanted to feel her skin against Jack's bare chest, but his shirt wasn't cooperating. Suddenly Erica felt something begin to vibrate against her thigh. Erica broke the kiss and looked inquisitively at Jackson with one eyebrow raised.

It took a moment for Jack to come back to reality and realize why Erica pulled away from such passionate kiss. Both began to laugh as Jack removed his cell phone from his pocket and he placed Erica on the ground. "Hello? Yes Reggie, I found her. She is with me right now. I am sorry son, I was about to call you. I will tell her. Love you too...bye."

Jackson hated the interruption but was thankful Reggie called. Had he not called, Jackson completely unaware of his surroundings at the time would have taken Erica right there against the door in the hallway.

"Reggie was looking for me too?" Erica inquired still out of breath from Jackson's amazing kiss. "I thought he had left already." "

It is a long story which I will be glad to fill you in on later. Right now I we need to get you out of these wet clothes." Jackson said with a mischievous grin.

Jackson led Erica into the loft. The only light was coming form the fire. Jackson began to light the candles that were scattered around the loft.

"So this is where all my candles went?" Erica said with a grin.

"Sorry" Jackson said, "I meant to grab the box with some of my old clothes in it, but I grabbed these instead. All the boxes in our closet look the same. I can never tell which is which . . ." Erica laughed

"Jack, why don't you just read the labels."

"Oh, so now we are being cute? Here I am trying to create a romantic mood so that I can live up to my promise of passion and you are making jokes "Jack said trying to hide the grin creeping across his lips and the look of seduction that was still in his eyes.

"Oh, I am sorry," Erica said "Did I hurt your feelings?" Erica slowly began to move towards Jackson. "Is there um...anything I can do to make it up to you" Erica said while giving him 'the look' that made him weak in the knees.

"How about we just get you warmed up so that you don't get sick?" Jack slowly moved over to her and gently pushed her

wet hair back from her face. She looked breathtaking to him at that moment. Her hair was glistening from the raindrops and the way her clothes were clinging to her every curve drove him wild. Erica's face was beautiful, but her body was to die for. Button by button Jackson began to remove her shirt and reveal every inch of her. When her shirt was no longer an obstacle he reached around and unzipped her skirt.

Erica's hands were on a mission of their own as she quickly removed Jack's shirt and unbuttoned his jeans. She stepped back slightly to admire this sexy man that was her husband. Even after all the years, just looking at him shirtless sent chills down her spine. She had missed being close to him, feeling his skin against her, making love to him.

Piece by piece clothing fell to the floor. Jackson was admiring every detail of his wife's body when he noticed a shiver run down her spine. "Come here, you." Jack said in a low and husky voice. "I think it is about time I warm you up."

Jack grabbed the blanket off the couch and draped it around Erica's exposed body. As his hands tugged on the edges of the blanket, he pulled Erica towards him. Jackson's lips captured Erica's in a kiss even more powerful than the one before as he swept her up in his arms. Jackson walked across the room and gently laid her in front of the fire. He gently kissed her abdomen, her chest, and her neck. His hands ran thorough her hair as he looked deep into her eyes. "Oh how I love you, my heart" Jackson whispered as he looked at her with more love than he thought he was possible of giving to another person. Jackson's body pressed into Erica as he placed himself on top of her.

Just as Jackson's lips crashed down on Erica's he heard her whisper "Oh, I love you, Jack."

For the next few hours, Jack and Erica made love in front of the fire. They started off full of passion and hunger. Each time they made love, they took things more slowly as if they were savoring every second. Just when they would tire out Erica would sigh or smile and it would ignite Jackson's fire for her once more. Erica was in heaven. She had missed Jack so much over the past few weeks and longed for him in a way she had never known before. This man owned her, body, soul, and spirit and nothing was going to come between them or cause problems for them. Erica decided at that moment that her life wasn't worth living without this man.

Erica watched him sleep for hours. She was so afraid that if she closed her eyes she would wake up and she would be at home, alone. Finally exhaustion got the better part of her and she fell into a content sleep.

As the sun rose in the distance, the light streamed through the windows. Jackson was constantly amazed that this beautiful woman was his wife, but this morning was different. He realized that she was more than his wife and they were more than a marriage. She was his way of life, his air, his heart and his soul. There was no way he was going to let anyone or anything take that away from him.