

## Chapter 4

Sunday, January 6, 2002

Kelly

**I know that Tannon is my brother. I find it necessary to remind myself of that quite often.**

**He saved me from myself five years ago. Upstate New York, after Dad died, wasn't the place for me. But I didn't know that. I got into some trouble by hanging out with the wrong folks. Nothing big, but any record of drugs can kill a flying career.**

**Then Tannon insisted that I come live with him in California. He wouldn't take "No" for an answer. After we discussed things for months, he finally showed up on the doorstep in Syracuse and hauled me away. I didn't leave kicking and screaming, but I certainly hadn't made up my mind to go. If he hadn't handed me that airline ticket, I'd probably still be thinking about leaving Syracuse.**

**We've shared a lot, particularly in the past five years. Before then, we hardly knew each other. He was just my nerdy older brother, and he embarrassed me a bit. I knew he was smart, but he really didn't seem to be headed much of anywhere. He knew how to handle school, but the universities and the military didn't equate to a real job in my mind. It just seemed to me that he couldn't do anything else.**

**Of course, my family treated me as if I was precious. But I resented the fact that it was mostly because I was a girl. I didn't believe it in the least. Nor did the rest of the world. I had no real goals, except my passion for flying. It's really more of a love than a passion. I can't do without it. Everybody, especially Tannon, told me I needed to finish my college degree, if I were going to do anything with my flying. I'm still working on it, but not very hard.**

**When Dad died, Mom saw no need to hoard the insurance money. She is pretty well set for life, and she asked us what we wanted. Tannon**

**was on his way to a successful career in science, such as it was. And he wanted to do it on his own. I asked for money to fly. It's the best investment anybody ever made in me, although it was far from inexpensive. Someday I may be able to pay back Mom, if I get an airline job. But I'd just as soon delay that a while.**

**I really thought that I was going to blow that money with only a Sunday pilot's license to show for it. But pretty soon it was clear that I could be a flight instructor, if that's what I wanted. The question was whether I wanted it.**

**There wasn't anybody willing to hire a green female flight instructor in Syracuse, but Tannon made a great student in the meantime. I almost had to trap him into learning to fly from me, since he thought that nearly everything else was more important than flying. But after he was finished playing junior physicist in the Air Force, he had to wait for the next graduate school semester to begin at USC. That gave me a full summer to get him hooked on flying, and it gave Mom a use for the rest of that loose money. Of course, Tannon insisted on paying Mom back for his flight lessons, and I think that he eventually did.**

**That was a summer to remember. Just fly and be with Tannon. Nearly every morning, we'd head out to the practice area from Hancock Field, Tannon in the left seat and me in the right. He was the perfect student. And the perfect brother. As my flight student, he asked some tough questions, but together we worked them all out. For the first time in our lives, I was in charge. I loved the challenge of teaching my brother to fly. We spent most afternoons pouring over the books and charts, getting Tannon ready for his private pilot flight test. We really got to know each other. You could almost say that we were two distant relatives who finally began to like each other and then ran off wildly together.**

**Tannon got his private pilot license and eventually his instrument rating. That's the first real role that I played in his life, and it became an important accomplishment for both of us. That instrument rating made me especially proud, since it proved that he was really serious about flying. I know that it didn't start out that way. I'd like to think that my brother learned something from me that he couldn't have found elsewhere. I gave it to him. Two years ago, he bought an airplane, a Piper Arrow. And now flying is an even bigger part of his life. So am I.**

**After Tannon left for graduate school in California, I didn't have many constructive uses for my abundant free time, and that caused some problems. I finally got a job as a flight instructor, but that only got me further into trouble. I did the things girls my age were supposed to do, and that was the real source of the problem. Men are not my cup of tea. Nor is growing up.**

**When Tannon moved to Los Angeles after that wonderful summer, I went downhill fast. On my worst days, I blamed it on him for leaving me. On my better days, I blamed others for taking Tannon away. When he decided to stay in California and take a teaching job, I even refused to write him any more. I felt that I had lost him forever.**

**Thinking of Tannon alone in California during those years was heartbreaking. I knew him well enough to know that he didn't have any real friends. He has always been a loner. Within Tannon is a bit of a recluse. I worry about that because it reminds me of myself.**

**But he came back for me. He saved me from where I'd been. He may have even saved me from where I'm still headed. Who knows for sure?**