

“Hear me out, Sarah—you *owe* me this!” She glares at him and he smiles back. “I think you’re functioning under a misconception about who you are, and it’s time to set the record straight.” Now meeting her gaze evenly, “Hun, this family has always been able to count on you and with good reason. Whether it’s for the big stuff like love and understanding, or something small like a helping hand, you’ve given us something that can’t be bought or spent or taken away. You gave it to Eve today the same as your parents did to us, and I know you’ll give it again soon.

“Mother, I know I speak for Eve when I say that you gave her a parent’s ultimate gift: you made her feel lovable and good, you paid attention to her and really listened, and you remembered what she said. And even if you didn’t find her perfect, you accepted her for who she

## *A Late Bloom*

is. No one could ever doubt the pleasure you found in her. And because you cared, you made her, and us, feel special.

“You know, I think your folks put so much of themselves into you that you carry them around with you wherever you go. I happen to think that you’re more like your father—though he definitely was more of a risk-taker than you.” Teddy pauses to stroke his chin. “Maybe he wasn’t. Not about death anyway. After all, he did manage to make this life a heaven on earth, just in case.” Then to himself, “I wonder if that’s why they call it ‘the present’?” He strokes his chin some more. “So as far as I can tell, your father was preparing you his whole life to carry his torch.

“Mother, the only thing you’re guilty of is that you’re becoming who you were meant to be. A little later than some, perhaps. But hun, if you don’t already know it, I’m real proud of you.”