

"Yep, Shy One." Lanny's eyes lost some of their light. "With a time limit, I need to focus on *The Decision*. And you know I won't be able to concentrate on *that* if we're within close proximity."

"Tell me about it." She managed a faint chuckle as her eyes brimmed with tears.

Lanny held her in his strong, secure arms as they sat in silence. Their breathing synced, so it was hard to tell where one's breath began and the other's ended.

Finally, he said, "My beautiful girl, I have to leave. Know you'll be in every beat of my heart while I'm away from you." Lanny rose from the swing. Taking Shy's hands in his, he lifted her up and drew her into his protective embrace. "Close your eyes," he said, his voice soft and low, his warm breath washing across her face. She closed her eyes, and he gently stroked her tears away with his thumb. Then he bent over her and fluttered his eyelashes against her cheek.

"What are you doing?"

"It's a butterfly's wing," he murmured. "It lifts all worries and they take flight."

She smiled, her eyes still closed. He placed one finger under her chin and raised her face toward his. His lips pressed ever so tenderly against hers, and they kissed for what seemed an eternity.