

# ~ Shoulda, Coulda, Woulda ~

by Ambrosia

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Disclaimers: All characters in this story belong to me. I couldn't fathom why they would remind you of anyone (wink)

Feedback: If you would like to send me some, I'd sure appreciate it. You may do so at [SumrBreeze@aol.com](mailto:SumrBreeze@aol.com).

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Jose Cuervo nestled between her thighs, Chase lifted the shot glass to her lips and in one gulp emptied the strong contents of it. The liquid burning as it slid down her throat, she grabbed the bottle and refilled her shot glass.

Wishing herself a happy 34th birthday she emptied it again. Happy. Hah. She didn't remember what happy felt like. Reddened eyes focused on the television--more specifically on the woman holding a hardcover novel that had recently made several bestsellers' lists, including the New York Times. She was tossing her head back and laughing, obviously enjoying her interview with Oprah Winfrey.

Oprah Winfrey--the queen of daytime television talk shows. She wanted her because of that novel she claimed to write. Lately it seemed that every time Chase turned on the television there she was with one popular interviewer after another talking about *her* novel, *her* characters, how she came up with *her* plot. Damn her! She was shameless as she sat there laughing, smiling, and chatting. She didn't have any morals. She didn't know the meaning of the word. Bitch!

Before Chase could get a hold of her senses, Jose Cuervo was flying toward the television, thrown by an angry hand. Fortunately, that hand had horrible aim due to its owner's excessive drinking so the tequila bottle flew right past the Panasonic. As pissed as she was at the interviewee she didn't want to break her television. It was pathetic, but the television had become her only friend.

She couldn't take anymore so she switched her friend's screen to black. If she were in Chicago she would have been tempted to find the acclaimed 'author' and plant her foot in her lying cheating ass. Melissa Ward had taken the world by storm a couple of years back with her first novel *Parade of Tears*, which climbed as far as number three. When her second novel *Lessons in Love*, the sequel to *Parade of Tears* was put on the bookshelves, it climbed to the number one spot and secured Melissa a rather extensive fanbase.

There was talk that her fifth and latest book *Intrigue* might be made into a motion picture. Melissa was becoming wealthy and gaining success at Chase's expense. The only thought that brought a smile to Chase's face was wondering what her ex-girlfriend would do after her readers started salivating for another book. With the release of *Intrigue* she had run out of stolen material to plagiarize.

Of course this didn't offer Chase much consolation. Even if Melissa decided to retire from 'writing', she was in. She had the money, the 2,500 square foot home, the summer home, the people continuously reminding her of her success and the new girlfriend who happened to be a famous actress who might play the lead in the possible motion picture adaptation of *Intrigue*.

Feeling sick to her stomach and wanting this horrible birthday to be over, Chase walked into her postage stamp sized bathroom and found the bottle of sleeping pills in the medicine cabinet. She usually took one, but today she decided to take a couple of them. The sun still brightly shone but she didn't care. She just wanted to go to sleep and wake up tomorrow so that she could continue feeling bitter toward Melissa--a.k.a the woman who single-handedly ruined her life.

Turning on the faucet, Chase cupped water in her hands, slurping it down with the softgels. Using the sleeve of her shirt to dry her mouth she chanced a look in the spotty mirror and promptly released a regretful sigh. It was worse than she had expected. In her opinion she looked even worse than shit.

Her blonde hair had long ago lost its will to shine and now lay limply around her shoulders badly in need of a trim. The area under her eyes was so dark that she resembled a raccoon and she was carrying a bit of luggage there from lack of sleep. If her parents could see her--especially her mother--she just knew that she would be chastised for losing so much weight. Chase figured that she had lost about fifteen pounds since Melissa dumped her two years prior.

Returning to her bedroom she kicked off her shoes intending to climb into bed when the doorbell rang. Her first inclination was to ignore it, but she decided to look through the peek hole. If the visitor was someone that she didn't want to see or know then she would ignore him or her. Spotting her older sister on the other side of her front door Chase thought for five seconds before she opened the door, trying to smile when she noticed the colorful gift-wrapped box in Elise's hand. She wondered what was in the grocery paper bag that her sister picked up from the hall floor before she walked inside the apartment, stopping to peck Chase on her cheek.

"Happy Birthday Chase," Elise stated in an excited voice, hoping her enthusiasm would rub off on her little sister. She had steadily grown depressed since her breakup with Melissa. Elise failed to remember the last time that she saw a genuine smile on her face.

Attempting to smile again, Chase closed the door. "Thanks El. You didn't have to come all the way over here though."

"It's your birthday. I couldn't miss your birthday." She headed toward the kitchen with the younger woman following. "Did you have anything planned for today?" Elise pointed to the two chairs positioned at the breakfast table, so Chase occupied one of them. Though she tried to see what Elise was doing at the counter, she successfully blocked her view.

Giving up, Chase answered the question. "Channel surfing followed by a nap that I was about to take when you rang. When I wake up later I'll treat myself with Chinese takeout. I have a hankering for eggrolls."

Elise glanced over her shoulder. "What kind of way is that to spend your birthday? You and I need to celebrate. This is your special day Chase. So," gingerly lifting whatever she had been working on, she turned around displaying the brightest smile, "happy birthday to you," Elise boisterously sang in an off-key yet heartfelt voice, bringing the mini birthday cake over to her sister. "Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday dear Chastity, happy birthday to you! And many more..." Putting the cake down, which was just large enough for six candles, Elise asked her to make a good wish and then blow them out.

Chase precisely knew what her good wish would be. Her eyes closed she spoke from within.

*I wish that I had never given Melissa Ward the time of day.* One puff was all it took to extinguish the half a dozen tiny flames. As her sister clapped Chase faintly smiled, her eyes having grown heavy. The sleeping pills were taking effect. Reaching underneath the table she pinched the inner region of her left thigh hoping that it wake her up. Although the pinch hurt, it didn't help.

"Chase?"

Her eyes slowly panned up to Elise's face. "Yes El?" She noticed the concern there and sought to assure her. "I'm fine. Just need a nap."

Elise attempted to hide her disappointment. She had wanted to coax her sister to go out with her for her birthday. Oh well, she would just have to modify her plans. "Would you open your present first? It's from me and the folks."

Chase nodded although she inwardly smirked. If their parents had anything to do with the gift Elise brought with her, she would strip out of her clothing and sprint around her apartment complex naked until the police showed up to haul her naked butt to jail. Could she really blame them for their disinterest in her life? With Melissa's assistance she was the one to sever ties with her family. Fortunately for her Elise was stubborn and never gave up on having a relationship with her.

Reading the thoughtful card attached to the gift first, Chase set it on the table before beginning to tear the paper. She felt as though she were moving in slow motion as pieces of gift-wrap floated from her fingers to the linoleum. When she pried the lid off surprise granted her a burst of adrenalin. Not removing it from the box, Chase lightly brushed her fingers across the silver Dell notebook. It had to have cost at least fifteen hundred dollars. Slack-jawed, she glanced at her sister.

"El I can't..."

"No, you better not say it," Elise interrupted. "When the she devil left one of the many things she took was the computer and as far as I know you haven't purchased another one, so this laptop is your birthday present and you will accept it." She purposely scowled. "Otherwise I'll have to kick your ass and I'm not in the habit of assaulting people. Especially members of my family."

It felt weird to chuckle, but for the five seconds it lasted Chase and her sister enjoyed it. "But I

don't write anymore El."

"That's why I decided on getting you this. I'd hoped that it would persuade you--get your creativity flowing again. There's plenty of memory on there for any future stories you'll write. With a laptop you can write just about anywhere. At home, at a library, a café, the park...anywhere Chase. *And* I've gotten you a free year of Internet service to do research or anything else you need. So you're all set."

Chase replaced the lid with a sigh. "Though I appreciate your thoughtfulness, I really can't accept this. It's too much. I'm not writing now nor will I ever. I'm done with that portion of my life."

"You've been writing since you were seven and even at that young age you showed promise." Elise smiled recalling her younger sister's earlier works, which were written by hand. Thank goodness grandpa bought her a typewriter for her tenth birthday because as creative as Chase was, her handwriting resembled chicken scratch. "Remember I was your first editor. Why give it up? You have a gift so don't let the she devil rob you of it."

The youngest blonde shrugged, the fatigue creeping back inside her bones. She wanted to put her head on the table and drift to sleep. "I don't have any desire to write." A few weeks after Melissa dumped her she had picked up a legal pad with the intention of starting a story. She was unable to get past the second sentence. Shoving the legal pad in a drawer Chase never tried again.

"How do we get you in the mood then?"

Chase muttered something unintelligible as her cheek connected with wood. Her eyes closed she heard her sister ask if she had taken anything. Forcing her brain to cooperate, she answered, "Unisom."

She didn't remember walking to the bed nor getting underneath the covers, but when Chase pried her eyes open there she was with Elise standing over her. She was told that her sister would return later--around 7 o'clock-- with an array of Chinese food and a couple of DVD's for their viewing pleasure. A kiss on the cheek and a whispered 'happy birthday' then Elise was gone.

Chase went to sleep with an unpleasant memory. The day that Melissa Ward broke her heart so tremendously that it barely functioned properly nowadays.

*Entering the two-story beachfront home that she shared with her partner of eight years, Chastity Sinclair made it three feet inside the door before she came to an abrupt stop. Where was the furniture? Had they been robbed? If so, the robbers took everything but the blinds, carpet and recliner that she had insisted on keeping when she and Melissa moved into the house.*

*Chase walked a few steps further into the empty home, stopping again when she heard footsteps coming down the stairs. She was visibly relieved when she noticed that the footsteps belonged to Melissa. Little did she know that her relief was to be short-lived.*

*"What?" Chase stared in shock. Her legs feeling weak, she sat in the recliner, which was the only seat in the living room. Melissa followed with a blank look on her face. "You're breaking up with me? What did I do?"*

*"Chase, it's nothing you did wrong. I just don't think we're compatible."*

*"Compatible Mel? After eight years you decide that we're not compatible?" She didn't wait for an answer. "Are you familiar with the term bullshit?"*

*"I just want to move on with my life."*

*"Is there someone else?" Melissa's silence offered her an answer. Chase wrapped her arms around an aching stomach. "How long?"*

*"That doesn't matter."*

*"It matters to me. How long?" Her eyes cast toward the carpet she heard the other woman sigh. She couldn't bear to look at her.*

*"A while. Maybe a year." Chase swore underneath her breath. "Listen Chase, the mortgage is paid in full and you can stay here until I sell the house. You'll need to find a job because I've terminated our joint account. If you need it, which I'm certain that you will, I'll loan you some money. Will a grand do? I'll write you a check right now."*

*The rage and agony battled for control as Chase glared into a suddenly impassive countenance. "Fuck you."*

*Melissa arched an eyebrow but showed zero anger. "Is that a no?" No response. "Fine, you don't want my money. Happy job hunting."*

*"Need I remind you that it was your idea for me not to work? I was employed until you begged me to quit. I'll take care of everything Chase, you said. You just work on your novels. Don't worry about money because I make enough to support the both of us. I had reservations but you wore me down."*

*"And you didn't have to work all these years. Now our relationship has come to an end and you'll need to find a way to support yourself." After a brief pause Melissa added, "By the way, those novels you're referring to belong to me." She had fully expected the uproar that followed.*

*"The hell they do!" Standing up, Chase began to pace, feeling Melissa's eyes on her. "I worked my ass off to produce those novel length stories and all five of them belong to me!" Over the years her tales had become like children to her, and she would be damned if she allowed Melissa to snatch her children away from her.*

*"I bought you the computer you used to produce those novels, I supported you for the majority of our relationship, I read everything you wrote and edited--I know your characters as well if not*

*better than you do. I gave you massages when you had writers block, I praised you, I kept you working and motivated--I did everything for you. I've earned this Chase. I feel like the stories are mine and I'm taking them." She pointed a finger at the confused young woman ten years her senior. "You don't want to tangle with me. Remember that my father is the foremost attorney at one of the most prestigious firms in this state. My uncle is Chief of Police and my grandfather is a Supreme Court judge."*

*"Sounds as though you have your authoritative bases covered. Good for you," was Chase's sardonic reply. "You really think that you can get away with this?"*

*"Just watch me."*

*Coming to a halt, she stared in disbelief. "You planned this," Chase stated, sounding amazed. "You read all of the short stories that I had published--that's what you told me that night we met. It was that night you set your sights on me. You've been working on this for eight fucking years. That's why you insisted that I write so often and for such long hours because you wanted to get as much out of me as you could. That's why you objected to my looking into getting my stories published. When I finished Parade of Tears you insisted that I wait until I had a few novels under my belt before I even started searching for an agent and stupid me, I listened to you. I obediently consumed every word that you fed me.*

*"Quite a coincidence that you're leaving me four days after I finished the revisions on Intrigue. I have to give you props for perseverance though. Eight years is a long time to stick around for a con." Chase shook her head. "I couldn't give a rat's ass about the powerful men in your family. Bring it on Melissa, because you're not taking my novels. I won't let you."*

*"I was hoping that it wouldn't come to this."*

*"To what?"*

*Excusing herself, Melissa hurried upstairs. She had returned with a couple of minutes with a blue folder that she dropped in Chase's lap since she had retaken her seat. Chase wouldn't touch the folder so the older woman proceeded to inform her of its contents using such a casual voice that she could have been discussing dinner options.*

*"I recall how distraught you and your sister were when your mother had a heart attack last year. Her doctor warned her to avoid stress...she's fragile and could have another heart attack at any moment." Walking toward Chase, she opened the folder. Glossy color photographs of Chase's father and a much younger woman in various states of dress greeted her eyes. Her fists clenching, she averted her eyes. "Chase what do you think would happen if these photos were delivered to Mom, hmm? I shudder to consider the repercussions of her discovering that her beloved husband of thirty-nine years had an affair.*

*"Granted, he only did it once because he felt so guilty but the damage was already done the moment he kissed her. If it's any comfort to you, it took the woman I hired to seduce your father five weeks to get him in her bed. He struggled so, I almost felt guilty. But then I reminded myself*

*that I was doing this for the greater good. My greater good.*

*"So Chase, basically if you fight me on this, Mom will receive the photos. Oh, and if that's not enough I've enclosed a disc of their adulterous lovemaking. Perhaps your mom can watch it--I could only stomach the first few minutes." Melissa had nerve to chuckle. "Though your father is in good shape for a man of his age, I have no desire to watch him screw. It would be a shame if the Sinclairs didn't last to see their fortieth wedding anniversary because of their youngest daughter's selfishness. Do you really want to be responsible for sending your mother to an early grave?"*

*Her hands tightly wound, Chase's knuckles turned a pale shade as she rocked back and forth on the recliner. Rage--in thirty-two years she had never felt such rage. As she stared into the eyes of the cold-blooded bitch kneeling before her, Chase actually felt frightened--of herself. She felt out of control, as though she were watching herself, unable to tell what she would do next. All of the good feelings she had developed about Melissa during the last eight years fizzled into nothing. Except for the rage Chase felt nothing else. Her teeth painfully clenched, she said nothing.*

*A lone tear escaping her eye, she neither flinched nor attacked when Melissa had enough gall to wipe it away with her thumb. "Dear sweet little Chase," she started, her voice filled with feigned tenderness. "I bet you want to hurt me don't you? You're so gullible and innocent--like a new puppy. As much as you may hate me now, you could never resort to violence though." Leaning closer she whispered into a reddened ear, "You don't have the figurative balls baby." Standing, Melissa informed her now ex-girlfriend that a box containing her short stories along with a few other belongings was upstairs in what use to be their bedroom. A quick goodbye and she was gone.*

*Snapping the disc in half, the sharp edge cut into her palm, blood seeping to the surface. Eyes glowering toward the closed front door as if Melissa was planted before it, Chase felt nothing.*

The thin sheet twisting around her legs, Chase turned over, the bed creaking as she did so. Even though she slept a frown creased her brow. She rued the day that she had allowed Melissa Ward to step foot into her life. It was her all-time worst mistake.

She wondered how the annoying sun managed to peek through the velvet curtain covering her bedroom window. Emitting a low groan, Chase sought to escape the rays poking her closed eyelids by rolling to the opposite direction. Vaguely she noted that the bed didn't creak. Also, none of the coils were pressing against her skin. In fact, for some strange reason her usually crappy bed felt pretty damn good. Too bad that she had to get up for work because she didn't want to move from the cozy spot.

Wait a second. Chase frowned despite her comfort. The sun shone brightly through her bedroom window, which meant that it had to be the next day--at least seven or eight o'clock in the morning. Falling asleep before four o'clock yesterday afternoon how had she managed to sleep so long? The Unisom wasn't that potent.

Opening her eyes, they zeroed in on the long-stemmed red rose laying on the unoccupied pillow with a small pink sheet of paper attached. Wait another second. She only had one pillow and she was using it. Lifting her head, Chase's eyes swept across the bed. The pillow wasn't hers and neither was the king-sized bed.

*What in the hell did that tequila do to me?*

Tossing the covers back, she sat up and turned toward the right where her window should have been. Instead there was a set of glass doors leading to a second-story balcony. She didn't have a balcony. And for that matter she didn't have a second floor either! Growing more confused by the moment, Chase ran a restless hand through her hair--at least she ran it through what remained of her hair.

Bolting from the comfortable bed, she hurried toward the first door she spotted. Fortunately, it was the bathroom--a bathroom three times as large as the one in her apartment. Its main features were the double sinks with gold fixtures, a stand-in shower with numerous gadgets to be viewed through the tri-panel glass doors, a Jacuzzi style tub large enough to accommodate four people and even a bidet about a foot away from the one-piece toilet. None of it was familiar and neither was her new hairstyle.

"How in the hell?" The good news was that Chase actually liked the hairdo although it was the shortest her hair had been since she was a baby. The bad news was that she didn't have any recollection of getting it done. Cut close to her scalp with tiny soft spikes sticking out from every angle on top of her head, the blonde and evidently highlighted hair had regained its natural shine. When she lifted her left hand to brush her fingertips over the spikes Chase noticed the 14 karat gold band surrounding her usually naked ring finger. It was stunning with a heart-shaped diamond in the center that was surrounded by both round and baguette diamonds. She stared at the piece of jewelry with incredulity.

As if this situation weren't peculiar enough. Chase could have sworn that the ring was a wedding band. What? Had she awakened, gotten drunk to the point her memory of last night's events were zapped and then went out and married a skilled hairdresser with a spectacular house? Well, at least a spectacular master bath and bedroom? Removing it, she read the words engraved on the interior of the ring.

*Chase, my heart is 4ever yours--Mic*

Mic? Who the hell was Mic and why had they given her this precious ring with the inscription that made no sense? Without full realization Chase slid the ring back onto her finger as she refocused on her reflection. Not that she was conceited by any means, but she looked better--perhaps even attractive. Miraculously, her weight appeared to have increased, hiding the ribs that had begun to be noticeable. Her curves had returned, the dark circles underneath her eyes had disappeared and overall she felt livelier. She didn't understand how, but it was true.

Asking herself what was going on as though she would magically come up with viable answers,

Chase went back into the bedroom and lifted the pink note from the rose. Unfolding it, she read its contents three times, her confusion rooting itself deeper with each word.

*Good morning and happy birthday sweetheart,*

*Simple instructions here (grin). Unless there is an earthquake (I'm talking 6.0 at least) or fire you are not allowed to leave our bedroom until I say that you can. Feel free to pee, wash your face and brush your teeth, but don't leave the bedroom--okay cutie? Love you.*

*Mic*

Nervousness joined her confusion. The note seemed sweet enough yet there laid a not so subtle message--don't leave the bedroom. Putting the note on the nightstand with a shaky hand Chase searched the room for a weapon. This was a hostage situation. Somehow this Mic person found out where she lived, obviously drugged her and brought her here where he or she wanted to pretend that Chase was their wife. Mic was obsessed with her and had decided to kidnap her on her birthday.

Panic-stricken, Chase wrung her hands. There was no telling how long the creep had been watching her, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. The thought of him following her around town caused the blonde to shiver. The phone. There was a phone on the opposite side of the bed. Although she half expected the line to be dead Chase walked around and picked it up. To her amazement she heard a dial tone. This kidnapper must have been a novice because ordinarily the victim wouldn't have a working phone at their disposal.

Taking advantage of her opportunity to do so, Chase punched in a number, one eye on the entrance to the bedroom just in case Mic walked in. She cursed herself for not taking that self-defense class with Elise a couple years back. The skills she would have learned could have come in handy right about now.

"Hello?"

"Oh, thank God," Chase breathed a sigh of relief that her sister had her cell phone on.

"Hey birthday girl!" Elise's happy tone drifted through the line. "I intended to call you. Just waiting for 8 o'clock. You beat me to it." Chuckling, she began to sing the obligatory Happy Birthday song. "...And many more..."

"Uh, thanks...again." Elise wasn't much of a drinker, but did she happen to be drunk this early in the morning? And where was the concern? Shouldn't her older sister have been worried that when she returned last night Chase was missing? She was supposed to return around seven and surely Mic had abducted her by then. "Elise I need your help."

"Okay. What is it?"

Sitting on the edge of the bed, she stared at the door. "Some lunatic going by the name of Mic

has kidnapped me. I woke up in his bedroom and found a note and a flower. The note told me not to leave the bedroom. I have no idea where I am." Jumping up, she hurried to the curved balcony. Sliding the glass door back she walked outside taking in the beautiful scenery. Down below there was a crystal clear freeform pool with several built in rock waterfalls ranging in different sizes. Beyond the backyard was a lake with one small blue and white boat floating on top. Chase would have called out to the person sitting within it fishing, but realized it wouldn't do her any good unless they had super hearing.

"I'm by a lake and some hills. You have any idea where that could be?" Chase was stupefied to hear her sister laugh. Did she think that this was a joke? "What? What's so funny? I'm fucking serious here El. This psycho put a wedding ring on my finger while I lay drugged." Resting her arms on the railing, Chase looked down and then shook her head. No that was too damn far to jump. Too bad she didn't have any feline genes.

Elise continued laughing. "Chase if I didn't know any better I'd swear that you were telling the truth. What creativity! I guess that's what makes you a superb writer. You should look into acting too 'cause you sound so convincing!"

*Damn it Elise, I might end up convincingly dead if I don't get the hell out of here.* "I don't know why I called you," the blonde tersely retorted, frustrated that her sister wasn't listening. "I should have called 91--" The phone was plucked from her hand before she could complete her sentence. *Shit. Maybe jumping isn't such a bad idea after all. Not like I've never broken a bone before.* Chase was afraid to turn around. She was too afraid to move so jumping still wasn't an option.

"Hello El!" A rich and husky feminine voice spoke from behind Chase. Against her better judgment, she felt a tingle deep in her belly when soft warm lips brushed against the back of her neck. A moment later she heard the woman's footsteps leading her to the bedroom as she continued conversing with Elise as though they were old friends. At least she pretended that she was talking to Chase's sister. She had probably ended the call the moment she grabbed the phone from her hostage.

This was why Chase was so perplexed when the woman--probably Mic--offered the phone back to her no more than three minutes later. Her eyes on the lake, she took the phone held over her shoulder. She waited a moment to see if the kidnapper would inform her not to try anything funny as she spoke, but that moment never came. However, she could feel them standing behind her. "Um, hello?"

"Chase, I'm going to be on my way. Have to get ready for work. But you have a wonderful day, okay? I love you and again happy birthday." She chuckled. "Hope you have fun with your lunatic spouse. We both know that Mic is *so* crazy."

Speechless, Chase couldn't respond. Again she asked--what in the hell?! Pressing the end button she dropped the cordless on the patio table. The only explanation she could come with as to why her sister was so nonchalant was because somehow Elise thought that she knew Mic. Perhaps she even suspected that they were in a relationship. *But El acted like she knew her.* Chase shook her head, completely bewildered. *I wish that this were only a nightmare.* As confused as she was, she

was positive that this wasn't a dream. She was wide-awake. Where and with whom, she couldn't answer.

Her skeleton nearly abandoned its skin when long arms wrapped around her waist. The thick blue terry cloth sleeves had her thinking that the woman was wearing a robe. She caught a whiff of a spicy fragrance that reminded her of cinnamon. A chin used her right shoulder as a perch while Chase tried not to resemble a tree caught in the middle of a hurricane. She wondered if this psycho was enjoying scaring the shit out of her. *She's crazy. She thinks you're her wife.*

The blonde gasped when she felt those lips again, this time on her ear. The tip of a tongue trailed from the top of her ear to the bottom. She felt the tingling again. *Damn, how can someone who kidnapped me turn me on? I must be crazy too.* Chase barely held in the moan as a warm tongue tenderly bathed her earlobe, taking a few seconds to thoroughly suckle it. The cool morning air hit her damp lobe when Mic released it from her mouth.

"Morning my love," a sultry voice whispered in her ear. Chase attempted to ignore the goosebumps that followed. Two years without sex and this stranger had effortlessly titillated a stagnant libido--the woman responsible had wrenched her from her pathetic virtually lonely life and the shoddy little apartment with the rent she could afford with her salary as a maid under a house cleaning company. *Shit, maybe I should thank her.* "I'm glad that you followed my instructions."

Chase loudly gulped. "Your instructions?" She repeated, feeling breasts pushing against her back. Her guess, 38C...and authentic. It was a gift. Chase was an expert at picking out the real from the enhanced boobs. *Am I nuts? Who cares about her bra size?! Generous breasts be damned! The lunatic with the sexy voice kidnapped me! Drugged me!*

"Mmhmm. To stay in our bedroom." Her neck was graced with another kiss. "You're a very good girl and because of that you shall be rewarded." She laughed, a delightful sound despite everything. "Though I would have rewarded you even if you were bad." Since Chase didn't know how to respond, she didn't. "Are you hungry? We fixed you a little something."

An eyebrow rose. *We?* Damn. Did she have accomplices? Released, Chase gathered the courage to turn around, watching as her kidnapper who she estimated was about four inches taller than her, walk to the bedroom door and open it. She had no clue what the front view looked like, but the back was pleasant enough. At least what she could discern with the long robe. What fascinated her the most were the couple inches past the shoulders slightly curly midnight black hair with streaks of indigo running through it.

Chase realized that she didn't know what confused was until three minors walked in single file into the room with smiles on their faces. She guessed the eldest and first in line to be fifteen or sixteen years old. Glancing between her and Mic, whose face--stunning face--she could now see, Chase noticed the resemblance between them. However, the teenager's hair was a sandy blonde. Mic's daughter? Was she using her own children to carry out this charade? The other two, a girl and a boy were much younger. The young girl who also resembled Mic looked to be sevenish and the cute little blond tyke four or five. Chase thought of her nephew as a young boy (he was

now nineteen) when she spotted Mic's possible son. *Please don't tell me that she kidnapped them too. None of them look under duress though.*

Chase was wordlessly led to the bed by Mic and instructed to sit up with her back against the headboard. Mic placed a pillow behind her for added comfort. Once she was settled, none of them aware of her racing heart, the teenager positioned the tray she had carried into the room over Chase's lap. Wishing her a happy birthday she leaned in for a kiss on the cheek. The frantic blonde forced a smile to her lips. No matter whom they belonged to, she didn't want to freak out in front of the kids.

The youngest children climbed onto the bed, yelling happy birthday at the top of their lungs. Wrapping their small arms around Chase's neck, they kissed her as well. The toddler left a small blob of spit on her cheek. Through it all she kept smiling, even managing a quiet thanks. Her smile faltered a bit with the boy's next remark.

"We made you breakfast Mommy. Mama says it's your favorite." Sticking a tiny index finger in the corner of his mouth, he looked at her as though waiting for approval.

*I sound like a broken record, but what the hell? I'm nobody's Mommy.* She awkwardly patted him on the head like he was a Chihuahua instead of a junior human being. "Thank you...honey."

Seated at the end of the bed, Mic smiled at them all, her expression one of content and love. Catching her eye, Chase recognized something but the notion disappeared before she could decipher what it was. *Odd.* She didn't know Mic, did she? Regardless if they had an encounter before or not, she didn't have any children and Mic wasn't her life partner.

With a flourish the teenager removed the top keeping the food warm. Chase managed to be surprised. This actually was her favorite breakfast. She decided not to stress her brain wondering how Mic knew that. She was beginning to think that she had lost *her* mind and that this was a figment of her imagination. The family she could have had.

Waffles topped with plump strawberries and whipped cream, bacon just the way she preferred it cooked to the stage between crisp and limp and fluffy scrambled eggs greeted her. Also on the tray was a steaming cup of coffee already doused with cream and Equal sweetener, a glass of milk and a homemade birthday card, which read 'Happy Birthday Mommy' on the cover.

Chase assumed that the youngest two made it because the five colorful stick people standing in grass or green shag carpet on the front seemed to have been drawn in a child's hand. Opening the card, her assumption was confirmed. She heard Mic call the teenager Sam and neither of the signatures at the bottom of the card was that name.

*Roses are red  
Violets are blue  
But there's no Mommy (except Mama)  
As sweet as you.*

*We love you Mommy,*

*Caitlin and Russell*

Surprising herself, Chase drew the two children in for a hug. "Thank you guys. This is the loveliest card that I've ever received." The small cuties beamed at her.

"Are you gonna put it on the fridge with the other art stuff?" Caitlin asked, pushing dark brown bangs out of her eyes.

Chase nodded though she had no idea where the kitchen was. "You betcha kiddo." That earned her a grin from the young girl.

"Chase," the teenager--Sam began, "I'm gonna take Cait and Russ to school so you and Aunt Mic can have some alone time today." She wiggled her eyebrows with a knowing grin splitting her lips.

"Samantha!" Mic started to reprimand her, but couldn't due to laughing so much at the teen's brazen comment.

"What?" Sam feigned innocence. Pulling keys from a pocket of her jeans, she jingled them at the smallest pair in the room. "Come on rugrats," she affectionately said. "We better get moving or we're gonna be late."

Several hugs were distributed before the young clan headed toward the door. Chase smiled when they assured her that she would receive her gifts later. Standing, Mic walked over to caress her supposed wife's cheek and leaned down to kiss her forehead with such tenderness that the blonde was actually touched. In that moment instinct convinced Chase that this woman didn't mean her any harm. No matter what was going on, nothing had hinted at impending danger.

"You stay here and finish your breakfast, okay? I'm gonna see the kids out, take care of a couple of things downstairs and then I'll be back." Mic pointed to the plate, an adorable grin on her lips. "Eat."

"I will." Chase looked at the fork neatly aligned next to her butter knife and spoon and picked it up. She was chewing a strawberry by the time Mic left the room, closing the door behind her. As she tried to figure this situation out, Chase ate a few pieces of delicious buttermilk waffle. She noticed the framed portrait on the wall above the dresser as she took a swallow of her coffee. Nearly dropping the heavy mug on her lap, she managed to place it on the tray with only a few caffeine spiked droplets spilling.

Carefully pushing the tray to the side, she stood up and hurried over to the dresser. She furiously blinked but her eyes weren't deceiving her. The 10X14 family portrait was of everyone who had been in this room including her. Chase looked closely but to her eye the photograph wasn't a fabrication. It hadn't been digitally altered to add her.

Veering from the conventional family portrait of the parents and their children dressed up and posing in front of their chosen backdrop, they were seated on the sand of a beach dressed in swimwear. The live ocean their backdrop, they presented the camera with overjoyed smiles. With Samantha seated between them, Russell occupied Mic's lap while his sister sat on Chase's. She noted that in the photograph Mic's hair was streaked with pink. Apparently she was fond of doing that and the streaks complimented her.

Chase stared at the other woman while searching for a sign of recognition. Something about her-- maybe those astonishingly sapphire eyes or that brilliant smile, which could lighten Scrooge's mood--was so familiar yet Chase couldn't pinpoint from where. Without warning a memory long ago tucked away made itself known.

*Seated at a booth within the crowded restaurant, Chase munched on her turkey sandwich while jotting down notes for her latest story, which was due in eleven days. She loved her job working at a local magazine where she created short stories for the bi-weekly literary magazine. Although the pay wasn't much to brag about it afforded her to do the thing she most loved and that made it worth it.*

*"Excuse me?"*

*Chase looked up and then further up to a gorgeous face framed by shoulder length curly black hair. The eyes were the first attraction and then everything else immediately followed. Wiping her mouth free of crumbs, the twenty-four year old smiled. "Yes?"*

*Holding her tray with her left hand, she pointed to the empty seat across from Chase. "A lot of people in here and it's difficult to find a seat. Would you mind if I sat with you?" She glanced toward the blonde's yellow legal pad. "I promise not to disturb you."*

*You can disturb me anytime you like, Chase thought to herself. A second later she nodded. "Sure, go ahead. Actually I'm done." Pulling the protective stiff cover over the pages, Chase dropped her pen on top. She really wasn't done but her characters could wait until later that afternoon. She extended her hand across the table and they briefly shook. "Nice to meet you. Chase Sinclair."*

*Seemingly pleased that she had chosen to converse, her booth mate smiled. "I'm Micah Ballard and it's nice to meet you too Chase." While adding two packets of sugar to her iced tea she asked the writer if her name was short for something else.*

*The blonde grimaced. "Yes. Chastity."*

*Micah paused stirring, looking into Chase's eyes. Obviously she didn't care for her birth name. "That's beautiful."*

*Chase then remembered the last time she blushed. It was that Tuesday, the day that Micah Ballard entered her life. Little did she know it would be the day she also exited it.*

"Micah," Chase whispered the name as she continued studying the dark-haired woman in the photograph. "Mic is Micah?" She nodded answering her own question. "Mic is Micah." Thoughtful pause. "What the hell?" She began to pace the carpet. "None of this makes sense. I haven't seen Micah since that afternoon--that night." An image of herself, a couple of friends and Elise, who she managed to steal away from her husband and little ones for a few hours came into focus. They went to the grand opening of a very gay friendly nightclub. Chase still had the photograph of her sister getting down on the dance floor with that voluptuous redhead. They were shocked when she immediately accepted the woman's invitation to dance. Luckily, one of Chase's friends had a camera in her purse.

*Although she slowly sipped her mug of beer, Chase choked when she spotted her earlier eating companion Micah at the bar. Seated to her right, Elise slapped her on the back.*

*"You okay?"*

*"Yes, thanks," Chase answered though her eyes were on Micah who had changed into what had to be the world's sexiest short red skirt. She gasped when those hypnotizing eyes found her. Even from the distance she was able to view Micah's lips curving into a smile.*

*"See something you like?" Her friend Amy teased. "Don't stare 'cause it's rude. Just go over and talk to her."*

*"I know her," Chase said, finally turning away. "I mean I don't know her well. We only talked like thirty minutes, but I met her this afternoon. What a coincidence that I'd see her again seven hours later."*

*"It has to be destiny." Grinning, Elise slid out of the booth so that her sister could get out. "Listen to Amy and your big sister. Go talk to her before she leaves. You might not get another chance."*

*"Yep." Amy nodded her agreement.*

*"You're right," Chase said, talking to them both. In a moment she was making a beeline for the bar. Although a large group of people blocked her view of Micah, she was still aware of the woman's general direction. Twenty feet to the finish line and her process was impeded by another. She would have brushed past her, but it was obvious that the attractive brunette dressed in the world's tightest leather pants wanted her attention. Smiling politely, Chase glanced over her shoulder toward the bar. She wasn't able to spot Micah.*

*"Excuse me, but do you have your phone number because as much as I've looked for it I can't find mine." The older woman appeared serious until a tiny grin peeked through. Chase began to laugh. She'd never heard that pickup line before. It was kind of cute.*

"Really?" Chase grinned back. "Do you want me to help you find it?"

"Ah, that's alright. Now that I've found you I don't need anything else." She winked at the blonde. "Hello, I'm Melissa. You may call me Mel."

The she-devil entering her thoughts Chase's eyes narrowed and she was unaware of the soft growl in her throat. Somehow Melissa coaxed her into joining her on the dance floor. Once the song was over Chase excused herself to go find Micah but unfortunately she was gone. Chase along with her friends and sister searched the nightclub for her, yet she was nowhere to be found. And that was the last time she laid eyes on Micah until today.

So how did this happen?

*I wish that I had never given Melissa Ward the time of day.* Gripping the edge of the dresser for support, Chase gasped. That was the wish she made after blowing out her birthday cake candles. She wished Melissa out of her life.

And she received her wish. This would have, could have been her life if she had never accepted Melissa's dance invitation. One simple little choice messed up the life that she could have shared with Micah, her niece Sam and eventually Caitlin and Russell. Chase had a feeling that Micah was Caitlin's biological mother and she Russell's. During their chat at the restaurant a decade ago she remembered the woman bringing up that she one brother who was raising his daughter on his own. Somehow they must have gained custody of her, because it seemed as though Samantha lived here.

Four evidently wonderful people who were destined to be her family yet never were. She actually felt like crying. Surely her birthday wish wouldn't make this a permanent arrangement. She could be returned to her drab little life at any second. Probably when her rewind birthday was officially over at midnight.

"She screwed this up," Chase whispered aloud, her eyes returning to the portrait of the Ballard/Sinclairs. "This could have been mine and she screwed it all up." Hands gently clasped her shoulders.

"Who screwed what up love?" Micah inquired, sounding concerned. "What's wrong? Did I do something?"

"No!" Chase vehemently answered. Turning to face her would have been spouse, she cupped her cheeks between her hands. "No Micah, you haven't done anything wrong. You're perfect...you're incredible."

She smiled though her concern hadn't diminished. "Okay, so who *were* you talking about?"

Chase struggled for a plausible reply. *I hope in this life that I continued writing.* "A character. It's um, dialogue--possible dialogue for a character in this new story I'm constructing."

"Oh!" She bought it and looked fascinated. "Is this going to be one of your adult oriented stories?"

The blonde raised a curious brow. "Adult?" *Don't tell me I've taken a notion to write porn. At least let it be soft porn.*

"Like *Parade of Tears* and *Lessons in Love*."

"I actually wrote those?" Chase blurted out.

"Um, yeah. Unless you have an identical twin who is using Chastity Sinclair as their pen name and that's their beautiful picture on the back covers of her bestsellers."

"Right." Ducking her head, Chase blushed. She had published novels in this life. Melissa wasn't able to take credit for them this time.

"Can't wait for you to show me some of this new story," Micah commented with a smile. "I know you like to write a significant amount before you share, so I'll be patient."

Chase nodded. "Alright."

"So are you ready? You've probably already guessed it, but I'm taking the entire day off to spend with my favorite girl. So it's just you and me today baby." The blonde wasn't aware of what she was referring to, but nodded anyway. "Great." Butterflies invited themselves into her stomach when Micah kissed her on the mouth. Her mouth dropped open when Micah suddenly removed her robe, which dropped to a heap around her feet. The phrase 'hot damn' was never so accurate and in her thirty-four years she had never seen such cute panties. Cute and hot. Cut, hot and super sexy.

Clinging white cotton Lycra boy shorts with red trim hugged Micah's buns of steel and crotch of umm...well her Twinkie area as Chase's mom used to refer to it when she and Elise were small. A shiny apple created with a bite already taken out of it hovered an inch from her crotch. Now that was some forbidden fruit she wouldn't mind munching on.

Her wife performed an unhurried 360-degree turn so that she could view the back of the panties where 'Bite Me' was aptly written. A grin planted on her lips, Chase's eyes drifted up toward a tanned and flat tummy exposed by a tight white tank top that stopped a few inches past her breasts.

Hands on her hips, Micah raised an eyebrow. Even that was sexy. "You like?"

Chase nodded. "Oh, yeah."

Her eyes on the blonde, Micah jabbed her thumb in the bed's direction. "Take your shirt off and lay on your stomach. Although you didn't finish your breakfast I won't scold you. You get a free

pass on your birthday." She grinned. "I'll be back in a couple of minutes with my tools." Leaving behind a quizzical birthday girl, she walked out with the tray.

Tools? Removing her undershirt and dropping it on top of the robe, Chase stretched out on the bed imagining all kinds of sex toys including dildos, nipple clamps and binding equipment. Did they have a supremely kinky sex life? She didn't know whether she was more nervous or excited. Before she could make up her mind Micah had returned with a large bright blue duffel bag, which she dropped on the bed. Chase audibly swallowed, watching the other woman unzip the bag. She removed a pair of latex gloves from a box and began to put them on, the latex snapping against her skin.

Gloves? Whatever they were going to do required gloves? As she observed, green eyes landed on the tattoo surrounding Micah's right bicep. She was so enraptured with the outfit that she hadn't noticed the tattoo before. It was an armband consisting of tiny red roses with equally tiny green leaves attached. The roses linked along a tribal like vine. Underneath in script red ink was her first name--*Chastity*. Reaching out, Chase grazed the tattoo with her finger. She wanted to ask questions but she figured that she was already supposed to know about the tattoo.

Kind blue eyes followed her roaming finger. Micah spoke after Chase dropped her hand. "I still occasionally get raised eyebrows when people see your name. I imagine they think I'm celibate and proud to let others know."

Chase laughed. "Maybe they think you're a nun who wears street clothes."

"They might!" She pulled various pieces of equipment from the duffel bag, however, none of it looked remotely sexual--bottles of ink, alcohol swabs, some little doohickey sort of in the shape of an L with a thin stainless steel point on it. Chase inhaled sharply when a sealed packet of pre-sterilized needles was placed on a different tray that Micah had brought with her. All right, that was it. She was cool with kinky, but this went way beyond her comfort zone. In her opinion, pain and sex weren't synonymous.

"Uh, Mic?"

"Hmm?"

She had to ask. "What is all of this for?"

"Your tattoo. Have you changed your mind?" Obviously, she witnessed the blonde's blank expression. "Last week you mentioned that you were finally ready to get a tattoo and you wanted me to do it on your birthday. You even had your design picked out. However, if you've changed your mind that's cool baby. I understand."

"No, I want to." *I am crazy. I hate getting a flu shot and now I'm willing to participate in the tattooing of my skin? Shit, this is gonna hurt like hell!*

"Are you sure?" Micah searched her face for a sign of hesitance.

Chase smiled. "I'm sure. So you know exactly what I want, right?" *Please don't let the design be large.*

"Yep, I'll find it." She rifled through the bag and a second later pulled out a thick sheet of paper, which she handed to Chase. It was a hand drawn picture of a tribal tattoo with a heart in the middle, done in shades of blue and purple. The tribal designs attached to either side of the heart almost looked like its wings. Within the perfectly shaped heart (no matter how hard she tried, Chase had never mastered drawing a heart correctly) was her spouse's first name. Micah within her heart--that was fitting.

Laying on her stomach, Chase figured that the tattoo was supposed to be placed on her back--more specifically her lower back considering Micah had tugged her shorts down, the crack of her butt almost exposed. Looking up at Micah, she smiled while hoping that she had experience. Her evident confidence assured Chase that she knew what she was doing. However, just in case...

"How many tattoos would you say that you've given to date?"

Proceeding to set up, Micah thought about that. "Well, Pam, Lynette and I opened our beauty salon/tattoo/piercing business eight years ago, so I might do twenty tattoos in a year so over an eight year period roughly 160. Though it might be closer to 200." She grinned as she gently pinched Chase on a nether cheek. "I've never had a complaint so you have nothing to worry about love."

*A partial beauty salon owner--she probably did do my hair.* "Not worried."

"Yeah, you are. You think it's slipped my mind that you're terrified of needles? I have to drag you kicking and screaming to get a flu shot every fall." Micah snickered. "Last year Caitlin held your hand and promised you a lollipop."

Chase attempted to conceal the reddened embarrassment on her face. "Kicking and screaming? Please."

"Maybe that's a slight exaggeration, but your palms are clammy because you're so apprehensive." Pulling her left glove off, Micah pressed her hand to Chase's. Just as she had suspected they were cold as ice. "Baby are you absolutely sure you want a tattoo? I won't lie to you, it doesn't feel great."

Chase nodded resolutely. "I want it." Folding her hands beneath her chin she waited for the other woman to start. A minute later she heard singing and mistook it coming from a radio until she quickly realized that the performer was Micah. Her voice soft and tranquil proved to quell an abundance of Chase's fears. A bittersweet smile curved her lips. *I wish that this could last forever.*

She survived. Thank goodness she survived! Having taken a snappy bath together in that amazing shower with several showerheads, which felt as good as fingers giving a massage, both women were now dressed for the day. The tattoo covered with a bandage that she could remove in a few hours was sore, but Chase expected to live. Looking over her shoulder to check it out in the mirror, she was happy with its appearance. Too bad when she returned to her life, the tattoo would no longer exist. Chase shook her head. She didn't want to think about going back to reality because it was depressing.

"Ready love?" Micah asked with car keys swinging from her fingers. She used her free hand to link her fingers with the blonde's.

Chase gave the warm and slightly calloused palm pressed against hers a squeeze. "I'm ready Mic."

One word could describe their day together and that word was stupendous. Chase admitted to herself that it would have been stupendous if they had just stayed home and watch television since she had Micah back in her life, even if only for a little while.

During the day she surreptitiously discovered information about their family. She had been correct about Samantha. They had custody of her and had since nine years ago when she was seven after Micah's older brother passed away having suffered a major heart attack. Sam's godmother as well as her aunt, it was apparent that she and Chase would get custody. Since the girl's maternal side of her family wasn't in contact with her, gaining custody hadn't been a problem.

As for Caitlin and Russell, Micah was indeed Caitlin's biological mother with sperm she and her partner selected at a bank after many hours of research. Two years later, Chase used the same sperm donor for the conception of Russell. That way the two children were blood related siblings.

Speaking of their children, mostly of what they saw when they ventured to the movie theater involved animated characters, so their first stop after leaving the house was to watch a more adult appropriate movie. Chase couldn't remember the last time she went to the movies and everything about this trip there was excellent. Holding hands with her wife while they watched what turned out to be an enjoyable film, eating buttery popcorn with just the perfect amount of salt, and occasionally leaning toward each other for a kiss in the dark, their mouths tasting like butter. It being 10:30 on a Thursday morning they practically had the stadium to themselves.

Chase hadn't come close to finishing her breakfast so despite eating a significant amount of their medium tub of popcorn she was hungry by the time the credits rolled. Driving to a park near the theater Micah surprised her with a picnic style lunch, which she put together earlier that morning. As they ate the lovingly prepared and delicious meal, Chase asked Micah to tell her about the first time they met. She began to speak about how they met at that busy restaurant.

"Oh, I mean the second time." Chase smiled while dipping an apple slice in a rich caramel sauce. "At the nightclub."

"Oh!" Micah returned her smile as she scooted back to lean against a tree. Crooking a finger at the younger woman, she waited until Chase settled between her parted legs with her back pressed her front to start. "I was seated at the bar nursing a martini when I felt eyes on me. I looked around the room and soon found you seated in a booth with your friends and El. Our eyes connected and before I knew it you were headed in my direction." Pausing, she softly chuckled. "My heart was beating so fast. I couldn't believe my fortune--I found you again."

I lost sight of you when my ex-girlfriend tapped me on the shoulder. We had broken up six months ago but she couldn't accept that it was over. As politely as I could, I told her to leave me alone but of course she wouldn't listen. She was still bothering me when you arrived at my side. I formed an idea and I hoped that you would play along. Wrapping my arm around your shoulders I pretended that you were my girlfriend. You smoothly put your arm around my waist and stepped into the role as my girl.

She was steaming and I thought smoke would come out of her ears when you kissed me on the mouth. Without another word she stormed away and luckily she never spoke to me again. In fact, I rarely saw her. For a while I called you ex-girlfriend repellent." Micah chuckled again. "So I asked you out, you said yes and the rest is history. The following year we vowed our love of each other in an awesome commitment ceremony and I've been blessed to spend the last decade loving you." She ended her story with a soft kiss on Chase's cheek. "By the way, I love you baby."

Turning around and kneeling on the checkered picnic blanket, Chase brought Micah's face closer to hers and settled her now caramel tasting lips on her wife's mouth.

Snuggled together on their blanket, they talked for while before they decided to check out the swings and monkey bars. They had a contest to see who could swing the farthest up. Chase won so when they returned home Micah owed her a foot massage. The first thing she said once they crossed the threshold to their home was for Chase to remove her shoes and socks.

The blonde smiled. "You don't really have to give me a foot massage Mic."

"It would be a pleasure to massage your little feet."

"Do you have a foot fetish?" She smiled when she teasingly inquired that.

Walking up to her, Micah hotly whispered, "I have a Chase fetish. I'll meet you in the den." A light slap on her wife's rump and she was headed up the stairs for supplies.

Ten minutes later Chase's nude feet were planted on a towel covered pillow resting on top of her wife's lap in their large and comfy den. Photographs of their immediate family and relatives from the Sinclair and Ballard side covered the walls along with art pictures. However, these weren't pictures created by famous artists (at least not yet) but the works of Caitlin and Russell. There

were also a few painted or colored by Sam from her younger years and a couple with more recent dates. All of them had been placed in frames with the artist's name and the date the piece was completed scrawled in the right hand corner.

A thin layer of oil on her hands, Micah had the smaller woman softly moaning as her thumbs rotated on the soles of her feet, gently easing away the ache that Chase hadn't realized existed. Closing her eyes as was instructed; she listened to the Maroon 5 CD that Micah had put on when she joined her in the den.

Her cheeks flushed and her private region slick with need, Chase forced herself to remain still toward the end of the massage while her spouse concentrated on her toes one by one. Sandwiched between her thumb and forefinger, each toe was rubbed and then given a slight tug, which sent a tingle straight to Chase's center. Opening her eyes she found Micah's, the beautiful blues staring straight at her. Nimble fingers stroked lazy patterns across her feet and Chase shivered in response.

For ten seconds she forgot how to breathe when her right big toe was sucked into a warm mouth, fingers continuing to play with her foot just shy of tickling her. Keeping eye contact, Micah laved each toe, cool air meeting them as she moved to the next.

"God," Chase breathed. "Would you kiss me?" She asked, sounding too shy for having been partnered with the other woman a decade. Not questioning it, Micah tossed the pillow on the floor before pulling Chase into her lap. Straddling her thighs, the blonde leaned forward to receive her kiss. *Sunday Morning*, one of her favorites from the band started to play as their tongues met. She moaned into Micah's mouth when the woman moved her closer by pressing on her bottom. Chase was scarcely aware that she had begun grinding against her human chair. Sifting her fingers through short blonde hair, Micah nibbled and suckled a bottom lip before letting it go.

She freed Chase from her blouse and bra, careful not to disturb her sore back. The bandage removed, Micah had moisturized it with a non-fragrant lotion. "You okay sweetheart?" She indicated the tattoo with a single light brush of her finger against it.

Chase softly smiled. "Yes. Just incredibly horny."

"Then we should do something about that." A busy mouth left damp trails behind as it leisurely traveled from Chase's mouth, her jaw, her throat where it thoroughly bathed a racing pulse point and was sure to leave a hickey in its general area, down her chest between her breasts and finally erect nipples anxious for attention. Chase arched back grinding harder against her wife while a hot tongue flicked across her nipples. Though great for outdoors where they helped in keeping her from being arrested, her pants had become an annoyance.

As though reading her thoughts, Micah unbuttoned and unzipped the chinos. With a bit of clever positioning, they were able to get the pants along with Chase's underwear off without her having to stand up. Their lips reunited in an ardent kiss as fingers found her exposed lips, swollen and thickly coated with her natural juices. The blonde trembled as the fingers acquainted themselves,

tracing back and forth until they glistened with her moisture.

"Please Mic," she whispered against a mouth damp from their kisses. "I need you inside me."

Love filled eyes gazed at her. "Whatever you want baby." Micah slowly, almost agonizingly entered her, both of them moaning as they began a dance, their bodies swaying back and forth. Thrusting within her, Micah left her mouth, heading straight for her neck where she sank her teeth with just enough pressure to leave faint marks. Releasing continuous moans, Chase pushed her hands underneath her wife's shirt in search of skin, needing to feel Micah's warmth. She wanted to assure herself that this long terrific day culminating in the most pleasurable experience wasn't a dream. She wanted so badly for this to be real--for the past ten years that she had no recollection of with Micah to be real.

"Turn around sweetheart," the older woman requested with a smack on Chase's mouth. Once the blonde turned away from her, but still seated on her lap, Micah gently pulled on her legs until they were stretched on either side of her thighs. This left her further exposed and without hesitance Micah took advantage much to her delight, revisiting her womanhood, slipping in and then just to the brink of coming out. Kisses were scattered along the nape of Chase's neck and shoulders as she pressed into her lover. One hand free, Micah stroked her belly and steadily moved toward her breasts, hefting and massaging them, her fingers teasing the pinkish nipples.

"You're breathtaking baby," Micah whispered, briefly sucking on a nearby earlobe. "You're my exquisite Chastity." Her thrusts became faster keeping in sync with her spouses rocking. Hooking her arm behind Micah's head, the blonde turned her head, enveloping her lips. Tears stung her eyes as an orgasm loomed ahead. Oh, how she wanted, needed, *craved* for this to be her real life. Micah, Samantha, Caitlin and Russell--she needed them to be her life.

Salty tears combined with their kisses as Chase brought her legs closer, clenching Micah inside of her while she shuddered and softly moaned her release. Melissa Ward may have broken her heart but within a few hours Micah Ballard had miraculously begun repairing it. When her wife asked if she was all right, she nodded unable to speak. Moving her around so that she was sitting sideways, Micah embraced her. Though she tried to contain them, the tears slowly slipped down her cheeks until her internal well broke free. Shoulders shaking, Chase allowed herself to be held and loved.

Chase realized that her birthday wasn't over just yet when an excited Russell told her about the casual dinner party they would be having that evening. He hadn't meant to spill the beans though. It just slipped out while she assisted him with his homework, which was to draw one object or animal whose name started with letters A-F. Russell had been creating a duck with his yellow Crayon when the information rushed out. Micah supplied her with the rest of the details.

It was supposed to be a small family get together, which suited Chase just fine. She wanted to spend what time she had left here with Micah and their children. By 5:40 the wealth of catered food had been delivered and set up in the kitchen buffet style. The delicious aromas permeated the house as the birthday girl helped to uncover each dish, itching to sample them yet refraining.

Just about anything she could think of that she loved to eat was in the buffet. Micah was an amazing and thoughtful person to have orchestrated this.

Everyone who had received an invitation had arrived by 6:15, each of them bearing gifts. Fortunately, Chase knew all of them except for Micah's mother. Since she wasn't aware of her name she took a chance and called her Mom. In response, the older woman who her wife bore a strong resemblance to warmly embraced her as she wished her a happy birthday. The other guests were Chase's parents, Elise and her husband and their nineteen year old son who Chase thought of as a little one when she looked at her own son.

Not having spoken to her parents much in the last few years, especially after her split with Melissa, it was a bit awkward for her when they arrived. One look at her father had Chase thinking about those photographs that she had received of him and another woman. Granted he had been duped and it only happened once, but one time cheating on her mother was one more than enough. Keeping the information to herself, she also kept her distance from her parents.

Chase tried to remind herself that in this reality he never would have strayed because Melissa didn't have a reason to trick him. Surprisingly, as the evening progressed not thinking about the affair wasn't a difficult task. She along with everyone else was enjoying the casual family dinner party and Chase discovered that she had missed her parents. It caused her to wish that she could fix the strained relationship that they truly shared.

And speaking of wishes when the birthday cake lit with two candles (a '3' and a '4') was rolled out, the blonde silently made another wish.

*I wish that this glimpse at a life that could have been, would become a reality.*

"Mommy?" The little girl freshly tucked inside her twin bed decorated with pink-based Dora the Explorer sheets called.

On her way out of the room, Chase turned back around and knelt beside her bed. She learned that usually Caitlin and Russell were in bed by 8:00, but considering her birthday party they were allowed to stay up until the guests left. After their baths, Micah was tucking in their son while she attended to Caitlin.

The child looked quizzical. "Aren't you gonna tell me a story?"

Oh, did she usually do that? Chase nodded with a smile. "Of course. I'm sorry. What kind of story would you like to hear?" She glanced toward her daughter's bookcase, which was next to her desk that held a large painting of Dora the Explorer on its surface. A prolific artist, Samantha had made it for her. Chase wasn't exactly sure how she knew that, but she did. The bookcase was filled with classics such as *The Snowy Day*, *Pinocchio*, and a book with a collection of Dr. Seuss stories. On a row by themselves was a series of children's books written by Chastity Sinclair.

It blew her mind when she found out that she had first dabbled in and then succeeded writing

tales specifically for young readers (although adults read them as well) about a small group of youngsters who were time travelers, which they had discovered how to do during the first novel. Her latest book in the series having been released late last year, there were now six of them available for purchase. Apparently, she had been working on number seven, but it wasn't quite ready yet. Micah had mentioned that fans (including herself, Sam and Cait) were anxious to read the further adventures of the time traveling quartet.

"Want me to read you *The Cat in the Hat*?" Chase offered.

Caitlin shook her head. "Could you tell me one? I like when you make the story up as you go along."

"Okay kiddo. Who's our main character? Is she a princess?" Young girls were fond of princesses, right? Evidently Caitlin wasn't one of them. She wanted the main character to be a cowgirl. Softly chuckling, Chase thought of possible openings.

"Her fuchsia boots crunching pebbles beneath them, Kitty Keen strolled up the steps to Bailey's Bar. Blowing into town mere hours ago, she heard that the saloon, which looked rundown from the outside, sold the best milk in town. Kitty loved milk whether it was chocolate, steamed, whole or 1% 'cause she was aware that milk does a body good and to be the extraordinary cowgirl she was, she needed a good body..."

The lights turned out, they relied on the moonlight to view each other as they cuddled in bed. Brushing her hand against her wife's cheek, Micah asked her if she had enjoyed her birthday. Chase scooted closer to kiss her before she spoke in the affirmative.

"Perhaps the best birthday of my life. In fact, I'm sad that this day has to end." She glanced toward the clock. 11:08. In less than an hour all of this could and most likely would cease to exist. Though for the most part Chase was happy for this glimpse, a smaller part wished that she had never been offered a taste because it was painful to accept that this wasn't real.

"Don't worry love." Micah's teeth gleamed as she grinned. "It would be a pleasure to make you breakfast in bed tomorrow morning because you are my queen and if I play my cards right you will continue to be my queen for at least fifty more years. Nothing would make me happier."

Chase wanted to cry again. *Damn, why does she have to be so sweet?* Wrapping her arms around Micah, she buried her face in her neck hoping that the other woman wouldn't notice the falling tears.

"I love you Chastity."

Taking a deep breath, she kissed the tender skin of her neck. "And I love you Micah." Determined to stay awake, Chase didn't capitulate to her heavy eyelids until 3:12 in the morning. Until then she watched Micah as she slept, as though trying to memorize every detail that made up her lovely wife. She was amazed to have still been in that bed at 12:01, yet didn't have hopes

that she would get to see daylight.

She was correct.

She detected the aroma of sweet and sour pork and chow mein upon awakening. She cleared her eyes of sleep before checking the digital clock. 7:26 p.m. It wasn't necessary for her to look at the bed to know that she was back in old lumpy.

"Hey, you're awake. I was about to throw iced cold water on you. The tray of cubes is sitting on the kitchen counter." Grinning, Elise leaned against the doorjamb. "Get up, throw some water on your face and meet me in the living room birthday girl. Chinese is still hot. I brought *Shall We Dance* and *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*."

Pushing the covers back, Chase sat up, grinning at her sister. "Those are girly movies."

Elise playfully rolled her eyes. "In case you hadn't noticed, you *are* a girl. Deal with it." With that said she left the bedroom.

The morning after her return to reality, Chase used her new Dell to search for her could have been wife. Though surprised that the search engine returned with so many people named Micah Ballard, it didn't take her too long to find the right person. However, only her phone number was listed. Grabbing the cordless, Chase hurriedly dialed the number before she lost her nerve. As it rang she had no idea what she would say. Her stomach in knots she was partially relieved when the answering machine kicked in after four rings.

*Hello. You've reached Micah and Samantha. Obviously we aren't able to come to the phone right now, but if you'd be so kind to leave your name, phone number and a brief message after the beep we'll get back to you as soon as possible. Thanks and take care.*

**BEEP!**

Hitting the end button without leaving a message, Chase dropped her phone on the kitchen table. She would call again, but not today, tomorrow or even next week. As she listened to the message, the blonde decided that she had to get her shit together first. Regardless if anything happened between them or not, she didn't want Micah to see her at that moment because she had some self-improvements to work on. Chase realized that this would take time.

Checking the time in the bottom of the computer screen, she logged off and finished her orange juice before heading toward the front door. For now she had to get to work.

**Three months later...**

Fingers effortlessly flowing along the keys, Chase didn't answer the phone until she finished the sentence. Caller ID filled her in on who was calling before she hit the talk button. "Afternoon sis.

What's going on?"

"Is this really you?" Elise sounded befuddled.

On such a roll that she could carry a conversation and type, Chase resumed creating her story. "Really me?" The writer glanced down at herself. "I believe so. Why?"

"I'm having a hard time understanding that today my sister did something so out of the ordinary. Did you actually invite Mom and Dad out to dinner tomorrow night? They just called me shocked. Mom sounded like she had been crying--joyously crying that is."

The blonde chuckled. "Yes. I'd cook but I wouldn't want to be arrested for accidental homicide. You need to check your voicemail because I called to invite you and the hubby too."

"O...kay..." Elise replied in slow motion still unable to wrap her mind around the fact that her baby sister had finally reached out to their parents. She had begun to believe that it would never happen. She supposed that in a way it made sense because Chase had been making changes in the last few months--in fact, the changes started immediately after her birthday.

She stopped drinking, which Elise had been very happy about. She started writing again, had submitted four short stories to magazines and was now working on a novel length story--something else that big sister was thrilled over. Also, she began exercising; eating properly (and more frequently) and as a result had regained most of the weight she had lost after the breakup along with some muscle. And one of the biggest shockers, Chase had chosen to start seeing a therapist. At first she went twice a week, but since she was making progress she was down to one visit per week. Positive was her new middle name and Elise couldn't be any prouder.

"We will definitely be there," she said, a smile in her voice. "Dress?"

"You know me. K.I.C.--keep it casual. All of the info you'll need is in the voicemail El."

After they ended the conversation, Chase finished her current chapter, saved it and then closed the notebook. Eyes moving to the flashcard that she had printed Micah's phone number on three months ago, she picked up the phone. It was time to try again. This time it was answered on the second ring. However, the person on the other end of the line sounded more like Samantha than her aunt.

"Hello. Is Micah there?"

"No, I'm sorry. You could try her at her salon though. Did you want an appointment?"

"Sure! I don't have the number handy." Chase grabbed her pen and the flashcard. "Do you know it?" Jotting down the phone number, she thanked the teenager for the information before hanging up. She hoped that she would have an opportunity to see Samantha again. She had wished that at least Caitlin existed, but apparently Micah never conceived her.

Dialing the number, Chase asked the receptionist for the address to the salon. She had intended to make an appointment, but she really didn't need anything done. She just wanted to drive the twenty something miles to the salon and for better or worse have a chat with Micah. After three months of rumination, she wasn't sure what would come out of her mouth.

Walking into the posh and busy salon, Chase headed for the waiting area sitting between two other women. Finding an issue of People magazine, she opened to page 12 and covered her face with it. Peeking above the top of the magazine, she scanned the stylists for Micah. Her heart leapt when she found the woman at one of the stations near the back. Her brow etched in concentration she was trimming a client's hair.

*She doesn't have any color in her hair*, Chase randomly thought while forgetting to conceal her face with the magazine. Though still glossy and gorgeous with the slight curl, Micah's locks were wholly black. The receptionist interrupted any further thoughts.

"Excuse me," the young woman politely stated. "Ma'am do you have an appointment or are you a walk-in?"

Chase put the magazine back on the glass table. "I was a walk-in, but I think I'll come back next week." She rose from the chair as the receptionist asked if she was sure. The blonde smiled. "Yes, I am."

"Would you like to make an appointment?"

She shook her head. "No thanks. I'll be back."

She never left. She left the salon yet she never left the block. Visiting the Subway down the street, Chase felt like a stalker as she sat in her car waiting for Micah to emerge. An hour later she did. Once she pulled out of the parking lot, the writer followed. She figured that the woman was driving to a lunch destination and within minutes her guess was confirmed when Micah parked at a restaurant. Since she didn't want to interrupt her lunch (and wanted to stall anyway) she cut her ignition and again waited.

Evidently, Micah called in an order because it didn't take her long to exit with four plastic bags in her hands. And evidently unless she was extremely hungry she had picked up food for others as well. Willing herself to get out of the car, Chase moved a second later and walked toward Micah just as she was putting the bags in the backseat.

"Uh, hello there," the blonde greeted in a shy tone.

Shutting the door, Micah looked up with a pleasant yet curious smile. "Hello back at you."

*Hurry up and explain yourself before she thinks you're bothering her to beg for money or sell her something*. Chase glanced toward the clear sky. "Nice weather we're having." *Moron*.

The older woman softly chuckled. "Uh huh. Is there something that I can do for you?" Blue eyes squinting, she appeared thoughtful. "Do I know you? You look familiar." Obviously unafraid Micah took a step toward Chase.

*That's the perfect opening,* Chase reminded herself. *Use it.* "Um, yes you do. I mean you really don't know me, but you've known of me. Before--ten years ago we met once. Well twice if you want to get technical."

"Your name is..."

"Chase--Chastity."

A smile brightened Micah's face. "Sinclair. Chastity--the beautiful name."

Like last time, Chase blushed. "I um, I looked you up. Three months ago I found this helpful website and plugged in your name. It came back with your phone number and I talked to your niece on the phone earlier today and she provided me with the phone number to your salon. Now here I am."

"So you followed me here?"

*She's gonna think you're a freaking stalker.* Reluctantly, Chase nodded while hoping that Micah didn't pull out some mace. "I know it sounds weird for me to track you down after all these years but I had to tell you something."

"Must be important."

"I think so."

"Okay. I'm listening."

With a deep inhale Chase thought of where to start. "Okay. It's going to sound so crazy that you might have an urge to run away from me as fast as you can, but if by chance you don't will you promise to just listen to what I have to say? No interruptions?"

Micah graced her with a soft smile. "I promise. No interruptions."

"Cool." After a brief pause she was off and running. "The last couple of years haven't been so good for me so three months ago when I had a birthday my sister gave me a cake and I made a wish as I blew out the candles. My wish was that I had never given Melissa--my girlfriend of eight years and my ex of the past two, the time of day. This is where it gets crazy. My wish came true and somehow time altered itself where we were concerned--we meaning you and I.

When I said that your niece gave me the phone number to your salon, she didn't tell me that she was your niece nor did she share her name because she didn't have to. I already know that her

name is Samantha and that she's the most mature, intelligent, terrific sixteen-year-old kid that I've ever met. When we saw each other at that nightclub it should have been the beginning of our future together, but I met Melissa before I got to the bar. When I did get there after dancing one song with her you were gone.

However, if we'd connected again we would live in a lovely home by the lake in a town with a population of maybe three thousand. We're not far from the bustling city where you work at the beauty salon/tattoo/piercing business you co-own with your longtime friends Pam and Lynette. The peaceful atmosphere perfect for it, I usually work at home since I'm a freelance published novelist. And I have our children Caitlin--who has your beautiful eyes--and Russell our youngest one at five, to thank for it. They were the ones to inspire with what would have been a popular series of children/young adult literature.

Though I was only given this glimpse for a day, I knew that after ten years of being together--nine of those in marriage--that you and I were in so much love. I haven't seen you since 1995, but during that glimpse I felt the love that I had for you. It felt so damn incredible that I wanted to cry--I actually *did* cry more than once.

Those hours were both excruciating and fantastic. Excruciating because I learned what I had been missing during the past ten years. I learned that you, Sam, Cait and Russ could have, would have been my greatest loves. And it was fantastic because you opened my heart and I didn't think that was possible. You've had a tremendous impact on me without even being aware of it Micah.

That's why I'm here. I needed to tell you and I needed to thank you. I was so caught up in cynicism and hatred that somewhere along the way I became blind to the fact that true faith and love do exist. So Micah, thank you."

Although Micah opened her mouth to speak, she appeared speechless. "Wow. That's... a lot and... unexpected. Could it have been a dream?"

"No, it couldn't have because I found out too much information. For example I know about Sam and how she came to live with you. There's no other way that I could have known that and I swear although you have no reason to believe me, I haven't done a background check on you nor have I been stalking you--until day."

Despite the amazing story that she had just been told, Micah was able to chuckle. "At the nightclub I thought you were coming over to me and watched your progress until--"

"Your ex of six months arrived at the bar and she broke your concentration," Chase quickly interjected. She could have laughed when the other woman's eyes opened comically wide.

"Uh, yeah." Micah suddenly grinned. "What happens next?"

The writer shrugged. "In reality I detoured by accepting my future ex's invitation and once I made it to the bar you were missing."

"She wouldn't leave me alone and then I spotted you dancing with someone else. She was giving me a headache and you seemed occupied so I paid for my drink and hurried out of there before I ended up decking her. So maybe if I hadn't allowed her to run me off..."

"Maybe if I hadn't accepted Melissa's invite..."

A corner of Micah's lips turned upward in a half smile. "If, if, if. Too bad we aren't really allowed to rewind. A lot less mistakes would be made."

"But then we couldn't learn from our mistakes. Mistakes suck but they teach us."

The half smile switched into a full one. "That's so true Chase."

"So...I should go now. I've taken up enough of your time. You're on your lunch break and the food is getting cold. Thank you for listening to me." She was about to head toward her car when Micah called her back.

"You're just going to walk away?"

Chase slowly nodded. "That was my intention."

Cocking her head to the side, Micah gazed at the younger woman thoughtfully. "Let's say that your glimpse was real. It would seem that some force was trying to reconnect us, so you don't think we're obligated to...I dunno...explore?"

"Explore what?"

"This."

"What is this?"

It was Micah's turn to shrug. "Hell if I know." Both women laughed.

*Take a chance Chase. You've come this far so you might as well.* "Micah I'm going to ask you something that I should have asked when we ate together and talked at that restaurant. Better late than never--would you go out with me sometime? That is unless you have someone or you're just not interested."

"If I was romantically involved or just not interested I wouldn't have brought up exploring." The dark-haired woman grinned. "So the answer is yes Chastity. It's a date."

**The End**

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