

Baring it All

Chapter 1

... BAM! BAM! BAM!

“Damn, who is beating on my door like that?” She carefully rolled up the wad of bills she was counting and placed them inside her pocket. She got up from her bed and swiftly tied the sash on her pink silk robe. Annoyed, she walked into the living room to the front door. She looked out the peephole before turning the knob and pulling the door open. “What are you doing here?”

That’s when she felt it. The cold steel knife as it slammed into her chest. It was pulled out and plunged in again and again. She never felt the other repeat stabs. She was dead before her body hit the floor...

(A few months earlier)

I boldly walked through the double steel doors of Chocolate Paradise intent on getting a job. Chocolate Paradise was the city’s premier adult entertainment nightclub. I’d never had any formal dance training and I certainly had never worked in a strip club before but I felt that I was sexy enough to pull it off.

About six months ago I slowly packed up my boxes trying to draw out the inevitable. It’s amazing what you can accumulate on a desk in a year’s time. The first things I packed were my books that I used to read during down time. Then I packed all my pictures. I almost cried when I came to the picture of my grandmother. She’d been so proud that I’d finally managed to keep a job more than a few months. Well, at least this time, I wasn’t being fired. The company had gone bankrupt and everyone was given a pink slip and three days notice.

You see, I’ve been on my own since I was 18. I’m an only child and my momma never really seemed to care about me. So much so that she never bothered to tell me who my father was and I’m not sure she knows. Momma loved so many men and she loved sex. But I’m nothing like her at all. Granny says I look like her but other than high cheekbones, and a rich cocoa brown skin tone, I never got a damn thing from my mother. She’d left me to be raised by my grandmother just a few months before my high school graduation. Granny was a big help, she spoiled me really but I wasn’t going to let Momma make me a burden on her. So, three months after graduation I packed up and moved out on my own. I’d bounced from job to job until ending up here as a front desk reception. Now all that was over.

When my box was packed I said good-bye to the others in my office and left the fifteenth job I'd had in ten years. After putting the box in the back seat, I drove to my apartment where my landlord was waiting for me with even more bad news. My rent check had bounced. After telling him I'd check on it and get back to him, I went to the phone to call the bank and find out what was going on.

The third person I was transferred to finally told me that my paycheck had bounced causing all of my other checks to bounce as well. That meant the severance check I had in my purse was no good either. I had less than \$100 dollars in my savings account and no prospects. I promised my landlord I would get him a new check soon but I had no idea how.

Since I didn't want to sit in my apartment depressed, I decided to hit the clubs and do my best to party my troubles away. No matter what, I always seemed to be just fired, just hired, or in between. Even when I was working, the money was minimal. I lived in a tiny studio apartment and drove a fifteen-year-old used car. As I sat at the bar wondering when my ship was finally gonna come in, I gave the bartender my order for a third Cosmopolitan.

"Hello, pretty lady."

I turned my head and looked down to see James Mixom standing beside me. James is only 5 feet 2 inches tall, too short for a man in my opinion and definitely too short for me to take him seriously. That was too bad because he was actually kind of handsome in a boyish sort of way. His peanut brown skin tone was accented with a tiny mustache and goatee. His hands were small, his arms were short, and everything about James was small. That is except his penis. The little pervert had shown it to me once when I refused a date with him. It looked like a long black snake. Too bad it had to belong to James.

"Hi, James, how are you?" I said with minimal enthusiasm.

"I'm great now that I've run into you, Marissa."

I rolled my eyes towards the ceiling and took several long sips of my drink, hoping if I got drunk enough he'd just disappear. I looked down again and he was still there. "So, what are you doing out tonight, James? Did your wife say you could come out and play?"

"Very funny, Marissa. I'm my own man I don't need permission to leave my house."

I chuckled to myself and took another sip from my drink. "So what **are** you doing out tonight? I asked.

"Going to a party, wanna join me?"

I think he was smiling at me but to me it seemed as if he'd just bared his fangs. Normally when Tiny Tot Dracula is smiling at me, I would have said no immediately. But tonight I was feeling depressed and there didn't seem to be any better prospects in the bar so I decided to tag along.

The party turned out to be some sort of private swing party. In every corner of the room people were making out in various stages of undress. Some were completely naked and having sex as if they were the only people in the room. I was livid that James had brought me here and I retreated to the den and found an empty corner to see if I had enough cash to take a cab home.

I'd just counted out three dollars in change when a man who could have been Denzel's twin walked up and offered me a hundred dollars for a strip tease dance. I looked around the room and there were several strippers at the party who I recognized from Sugarfoot's Club down on the strip. He flashed me a movie star smile and slowly counted the money out by 20s, then handed it to me. I was flat broke and had no way home so I reluctantly agreed to do the dance. It turned out to be not so bad and I really enjoyed the attention. There was no touching just dancing until I was completely nude. Then I quickly rushed to the bathroom to redress. Before I left I spoke to the hostess and she invited me to dance at her private parties for the next few months. Once I even went onstage at Sugarfoot's Club during amateur night.

Chocolate Paradise was ten times classier than Sugarfoot's club and when I saw the ad in the local trade paper, I knew I was ready for this and willing to do whatever I needed to get the job. The private parties brought in just enough money to keep me in debt but I needed and wanted to make much more. I'd spoken with the owner, Marcus Thomas, by phone the day before and felt really excited about meeting him. I'd grown weary of dead-end desk jobs and decided it was high time I used my voluptuous body and exuberant sex appeal to get the job I wanted.

I dressed appropriately for my interview with Marcus in a short knit purple spaghetti strap dress. Purple is my favorite color because it's the color of royalty. The dress was complimented with a strapless purple lace bra and thong underneath. My large thighs, wide hips and juicy 38D breasts are why most brothers refer to me as thick. My makeup looked good enough to have been done by a professional makeup artist and I allowed my straight black hair to hang down naturally framing my face.

It was just a little cooler inside the club than outside and my nipples hardened as I walked in making them stand out even more. No woman in my family has hair on her legs so pantyhose were not necessary. Strap sandals with high heels highlighted the shapeliness of my legs. For the finishing touch I'd put on my favorite Victoria's Secret Love Spell lotion to make them look smoother and sexier. You could not tell me that I wasn't looking hot.

With my ass wiggling, I walked inside the club and looked around squinting to be able to see in the dim light. There were tables all around with a large runway stage in the middle. I could imagine myself showcasing on that stage. A long pole ran down the middle of the stage area and I shuddered as I imagined myself sliding sexily up and down it.

Over towards the left was the typical club bar with dozens of bottles of alcohol, barstools, and glasses hanging from the ceiling. For several minutes I looked around savoring the club atmosphere.

“Can I help you, Miss?”

A woman’s voice startled me. I turned around and there stood Sheila Sommers, I recognized her from the posters out front. The advertisements stated her initials stood for Super Sexy and she was the club’s headlining dancer. From what I’d heard Sheila was one of the first dancers here and the one who everyone wanted to emulate.

Sheila was 5 feet 10 inches tall and I guessed about 135 lbs and she carried it well. Her hair was in a long weave that was upswept in a genie ponytail. She smiled at me as she stood a few feet away with her hands on her curvaceous hips.

“I have an interview with Marcus. I’m a dancer.” I added as an afterthought.

“Oh, you must be Marissa. He’s expecting you. I’ll take you to his office.”

She led me through the club to the back and walked into the office without knocking. “This is your interviewee, Marcus,” she said as she ushered me in.

Marcus sat behind a huge mahogany desk in a large black leather chair. His presence was impressive and intimidating causing my hands to perspire from nervousness.

Across the room from his desk was a luxurious black couch decorated with overly stuffed leopard print pillows. The carpet was thick black pile with gold fleck accents. An ecru color was on the walls, which were hung with framed pictures of erotic art that showed beautiful black people making love in sexy and adventurous positions. The whole room oozed sex more than any place I’d ever been in.

Marcus looked up from his desk and smiled at me showing teeth that were white like a string of expensive pearls. “Hello. Please come in.” He said. His voice was deep and the vibrato filled the space between us. Damn, he’s sexier than the room I thought.

Marcus Thomas, the owner and proprietor of Chocolate Paradise was in his early 30’s; standing 6 feet 2 inches tall, with caramel-colored skin, and a sexy baldhead. His build was stocky, sort of a like a football linebacker, and he looked as if he could stand to lose just a few pounds around the middle. But he was still very sexy. From what I’d heard he’d opened this club with money he’d won on a lottery ticket and without any business training and only a high school education, he’d built it into his own private showplace.

If he wanted to, Marcus could boast that Chocolate Paradise’s clientele had more celebrities, politicians, sports stars, and all around big ballers than any other in the city. Hell, maybe even the country. Rumor was the dancers at Chocolate Paradise were some of the highest paid in the industry. I was determined to take a spot among the ranks.

“Hello, I’m Marissa Rogers. We spoke on the phone.” I extended my hand to him. He took it and completely covered my small palm with his then gave my hand a gentle but firm shake. When he released it he motioned for me to take a seat on the couch across from him.

He then instructed Sheila to close the door as he walked around the front of the desk eyeing me as he moved. I knew I was looking sexy and I was enjoying his eyes on me. I tried not to fidget and reveal how nervous I was. “The interview process is simple here, Marissa, I look for sexy women who I believe my customer’s would find equally as sexy.”

I smiled and sexily crossed my legs getting comfortable on the couch.

“I need you to take off your dress so we can see what you have to offer.”

This was a request I’d never heard in an interview before and I was slightly taken aback by it. Well, except that one time but it wasn’t part of the interview. It was just because I wanted to screw my new boss.

Standing up I noticed that Sheila was still in the room. But since I’ve never been shy I quickly raised my dress over my head and pulled it off revealing my sexy lingerie.

“Nice, very nice.” Marcus looked at me and nodded his head. “Now take off the lingerie.”

I looked over at Sheila then at Marcus for approval. He smiled at me so I did not hesitate; I was becoming strangely aroused at the thought of standing there naked in front of BOTH of them.

Quickly I unsnapped my bra with the front clasps. My breasts sprang out. My nipples grew even harder as the cool air hit them directly. Then I slowly pushed my thong down over my shapely hips, passed my thighs, down over my knees and calves, stopping momentarily at my ankles and stepped out of it. I stood there naked except for my sandals and placed my hands on my hips. For effect I slowly turned around.

“That’s good, turn around once more Marissa. Now sit down on the couch and spread your legs”

Marcus’ sexy voice turned me on and I quickly obliged. I became excited at the thought of his eyes on me. Grateful that I had taken the time this morning to trim my pubic hair into a nice triangular shape that pointed downward I spread my buttery thighs.

“I like the triangle, Marissa. Is this your work or do you go to a salon.”

“I did it myself.”

“That’s impressive. You’re a very talented lady.” He looked over at Sheila. “What do you think?”

Sheila smiled and licked her lips. “She is very sexy, I think she’s just what we are looking for.” Sheila walked towards me on the couch. “Would you mind if I touched you.”

I did not know what it had to do with the interview but I was so aroused that I nodded my head yes. Sheila took my breasts into her

hands and kneaded them like bread dough. I felt myself moisten and stifled a moan.

“No gel, those are definitely real. They are very perky. How old are you, Marissa?”

“I’m 28.”

“Good, that means you have a few more years before gravity takes over and your tits start to sag.”

Then she gently ran her French-tipped nails across my stomach down to my crotch. I was both surprised and intrigued. I have never been in an interview quite like this one but I was enjoying the process. Sheila spread my lower lips with her fingers then she looked over at Marcus and smiled.

Marcus walked slowly towards me on the couch with my legs spread. He motioned for Sheila to move over, and knelt down in front of me. He seemed to be examining me the way a gynecologist would. He slid a finger into my hole and fingered me. This time I let the moan slip from my lips.

Suddenly, without any warning he began to eat me out. He was gentle at first then rougher. I ground my hips into his face and leaned my head back. I completely forgot that I was in a job interview and no longer cared if I got the job Marcus was licking my spot and I was thoroughly enjoying the exchange. Just as I felt myself nearing climax he suddenly stopped. I looked down at him and he smiled then wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

“You’re hired.” He stood up quickly. “We need someone who’s not afraid to take risks, you’ve just proven that’s you.” He walked back around and sat in his office chair. I sat on the couch a little stunned then slowly I closed my legs.

“You can get dressed now, Marissa. Be back around 6:30 tonight to get ready for the evening show. Sheila will give you the rest of the details.”

Marcus began thumbing through the papers on his desk. I slowly began to reach for my clothes. I was happy I had the job but I was feeling a little frustrated. He had stopped just as I was about to explode. I decided to finish the job myself once I was back in the car. I slipped on the dress and carried my underwear in my hands.

“Thank you, Marcus. I really appreciate this.” I didn’t know if I was thanking him for the job or the tongue-lashing but I was happy about both. Without ever looking up he nodded his head and waved good-bye.

Sheila led me out of the office back into the main club area. “Before you leave let me show you the dressing room. That’s where you’ll come each night before the shows to change.”

“Uh, yeah, sure.”

As we walked through the club she pointed to the right. “That’s the D.J. booth. Bring whatever music you’d like to dance to and Corey will

hook you up. If you can't find something you like, ask him, he probably has it in his collection."

I followed her down a long dark hallway then a spiraling staircase into the dressing room. Inside was a long mirrored area with small dressing tables in front of each one. On the other side was a row of lockers.

The dressing tables reminded me of Momma. She always had a large dressing table with a big mirror where she sat and put on her makeup. I would sit on the floor every evening that she allowed and watch her paint on her beautiful face. She would make jokes and I'd laugh. Those were the happiest times we shared before she left. Suddenly feeling sad at the thought of Momma, I decided to listen to what Sheila was saying.

"This will be your locker, here's your lock, and your keys. Make sure you lock up anything of real value. Things have a tendency to walk away around here, if you know what I mean. You'll probably want to leave 3 or 4 outfits here and at least one change of clothes. It's best to wear costume jewelry when you dance. Anything else will disappear, trust me I know."

"Thank you. I think I can find my way back out."

"Do you have any questions?"

"No, it all seems pretty straight forward." I shifted my weight from one foot to the other.

"Are you in a hurry?" Sheila sat down on the bench in front of the lockers. Her ample cleavage contained a pack of cigarettes and she reached in and pulled them out. She thumped the pack against her palm until one fell out. After it was lit she took a long slow drag from it.

"Yes. I have to take my grandmother to a doctor's appointment." I was lying. I really didn't have anywhere to go, I just wasn't in a particularly chatty mood. I was excited and wanted to get home and pick out my outfit for the evening's show.

Sheila took another long drag from her cigarette and blew a circle. "Sorry, I didn't mean to keep you. I'll walk you out." She said as she stood up.

As we walked to my car she filled me in on the rules and the other club girls.

"First there's Monica she claims to be strictly dicky but will do the lesbian thing in the VIP area for a paying customer. She has a live-in boyfriend but has been known to fool around from time to time. Monie, as we call her, has sticky fingers so don't leave any money lying around. She's the main reason we have to lock our lockers, but otherwise she's good people. Danesha is my lover but we have an open relationship. I'm a lesbian but I do enjoy being with a man on occasion. We both do, but we are deeply in love with each other. You'll meet Dee tonight with the other girls. She and I have lived together for a few years now. She's the love of my life." Sheila's face seemed to brighten three shades when she spoke of

Danesha. "Then there's Lisa. She just dances...never talks to the other girls, very mysterious...I think she's actually married but since she never talks to anyone I'm not sure. Actually, she never talks to any of the other dancers. She's quick to talk to the bartender, Gerard or a customer. It's women she has no words for."

Sheila went on to tell me that Marcus only liked to have five regular dancers at a time. We each were scheduled to do two or three sets per night unless we were requested in the VIP lounge, or unless Marcus had something "better" for us to do.

The girl I was replacing, Heather, had quit because her boyfriend found out she was fucking Marcus. According to Sheila that was a fringe benefit of the job. Sheila said that most folks at the club mess around except Lisa and Gerard; Sheila explained that he was married and faithful.

"This is an erotic business, Marissa, and after shaking your ass and tits and riding some asshole's dick for a lap dance you can't help but be horny. Marcus has a strict policy that we don't "service" the customer's unless HE sets it up. But fucking amongst employees is encouraged."

The other employees were Corey the DJ she mentioned earlier and four bouncers.

"They usually just stand around in corners trying to look menacing and busy. I don't talk to any of them much except for Danny." She licked her lips as she described him. "He is 5 feet 11 inches tall and stocky with a muscular build. He's big and black and when I first met him he reminded me of a gorilla." Sheila laughed. "But when I took a closer look I realized he's actually very attractive. He's kind of moody and hard to figure but if you want a good time, he's the man to get with. That is unless you prefer women." She looked me up and down and winked.

"Uhm, no. I prefer men." I turned my head ignoring her obvious pass.

Sheila took one last drag from her cigarette before tossing it on the ground and crushing it with her spiked heels. "To each his own, is what I always say. It was a nice meeting you, Marissa."

"Thank you. I think I'm going to enjoy working here." I jingled my keys in my hand, as I got closer to my car.

"I'm sure you will. See ya tonight, girl!" Sheila turned and strolled back inside the club. I watched her until she disappeared inside the huge doors. I hopped into my Accord and started the engine. My face spread as I smiled to myself. This job was going to be the best I ever had. I just knew it. No more dull office politics, or answering the phone and talking to snotty customers. I was finally going to be paid for my best assets.

As my excitement was building I decided not to wear any of the outfits I already had. A trip to the mall to pick out something new was definitely in order. I checked my purse to see how much cash I had on me. Damn! Less than 20 bucks I thought. When I checked that morning I

only had a light bulb and condiments in my fridge. I continued to search through my purse before seeing the shiny white piece of plastic. My Macy's department store card. There had to be some money on it I just was not sure how much. Then I remembered that Granny told me she'd sent in a payment two weeks ago of \$200 dollars to stop the creditors from calling her house. That meant I had at least that much to spend. I grinned as I pulled out of the parking lot and drove towards the mall.

Strutting into Macy's I looked around as I headed for the lingerie department. As I was passing through the women's dresses I noticed a handsome man blocking the aisle. He was loaded down with an arm full of dresses. It appeared as if he was trying to buy out the whole store. I took a detour around a rack to avoid him but he changed course. Just as I got near him, he suddenly seemed to lose his balance and dropped all of the dresses. I stopped abruptly as they tumbled at my feet.

"I'm so sorry, Miss. Give me a moment to pick these up."

I looked down at the top of his head as he fumbled for the dresses. I couldn't believe this clumsy oaf no matter how handsome was holding up my afternoon of shopping. Annoyed I knelt down to help him and rush things along. He picked up a Prada, Ralph Lauren and Donna Karan outfit from the floor as I admired his great taste. Very few men knew how to shop for a woman and I was impressed.

It took about three minutes and we had all of the dresses gathered up. I handed them all to him as we stood and I smoothed out my dress realizing I had never bothered to put back on my underwear and it was clinging to my hips. I felt his eyes on me and I looked up.

"Excuse me. I didn't mean to stare. You are a very beautiful woman."

Normally, I would have been annoyed and gone off but as I looked into his dark brown eyes I felt flushed and flattered. I was used to men looking at me and paying me compliments but this felt different. I actually felt myself blushing. "Thank you."

He shifted the dresses and extended his hand. "Excuse my manners, my name is Travis. Travis Leonard."

I took his hand into mine and shook it. "Nice to meet you, Travis. I'm Marissa."

He smiled broadly at me. I felt his eyes roaming me from head to toe taking in every inch of me as he stared. "Marissa, that's a beautiful name for an equally beautiful woman."

"Thank you again Travis." My face became hotter and I wondered if my dark skin was turning burgundy as I blushed.

"Sir, I can ring up the rest of your purchases, if you'll bring them over here. Mr. Leonard?"

A cashier was waving his credit card and motioning for him. He looked down at the dresses as if he'd forgotten he was holding them, and then he looked back at me. "I'll be right there." He was speaking to

the cashier but his eyes never left mine. "Don't go away, this will only take a minute." He said.

I watched him walk away admiring the view. Standing 6 ft 4 inches tall he had a medium build. Thick enough to be sexy, yet thin enough to not be considered bulky. As he walked I could see his back muscles through his shirt and I admired the natural waves in his closely faded hair.

When he was done making his purchases Travis walked back over to where I was standing. I admired the coming view as much as I'd admired him going. His skin was the color my Granny referred to as pecan tan. When he smiled his whole face lit up and his dimples made tiny caves in his face.

"Would you like to get a cup of coffee?"

"Sure, I'd like that very much."

We walked out into the mall and stopped at Star-berks. It was an obvious rip off of the Starbucks chain and I'd heard the guy who started it might end up being sued but the coffee and the atmosphere was very nice. We both ordered a caramel mocha latte with extra whipped cream. Travis laid his large bag of dresses on a nearby chair, and then pulled out my chair for me to sit down before joining me.

I watched him take a sip of his coffee, leaving a small cream mustache on his upper lip. Fighting the urge to lean over and lick it off I handed him a napkin. After wiping his face, he smiled at me showing off his dimples. "Would you like anything else? A cookie or a brownie or something?"

"No, the coffee is fine."

There was a pregnant pause between us. Travis was looking into my eyes as if he could see my soul. He smiled, sipped his coffee, wiped his foamy lip, and then took another sip. Finally he spoke again.

"I'm sorry, Marissa. I'm not very good at dating. I am just a bit nervous."

"Is this a date?" I said, flirting with him.

"I'm not really sure. I don't have much experience with it." He laughed lightly.

"I find it hard to believe that a man as handsome as you doesn't date much." I glanced over at the dresses and a thought occurred to me. "Unless...Well..."

He noticed me gazing at the dresses and looked down concentrating on his cup. "Unless what Marissa." He said without looking up.

"Are you gay? Is that why you bought all these dresses?"

"Oh no. I don't date much because I've been really focused on my career."

"What is your career? Are you a drag queen?"

He laughed loudly causing several other patrons to turn and look at us. I smiled but I was still waiting for him to answer the question.

“On the contrary, Marissa. I am a minister. The dresses are for my...” He paused for a moment. “They are for my mother.” He said.

“Wow. A minister. That’s interesting.” I waited for the sermon I felt was imminent but it didn’t happen.

“Yes, it’s a family tradition beginning with my ancestors in slavery. What do you do, Marissa?”

“I’m a dancer.” I said without thinking.

“Really? What kind of dancing? Tap jazz ballet?”

I looked down at my cup avoiding his eyes. There was no way I was about to tell him I’d just taken a job as an exotic dancer. “All of those.” I lied.

“I love to watch dancing, Marissa. I used to attend productions at the local theatre where my sister danced. She was really good. There’s just something about watching someone become one with the music. It’s breathtaking...almost mesmerizing.”

I nodded my head in agreement. I really didn’t know what he meant since most of my dancing had been just booty shaking at a dance club but I enjoyed hearing him speak.

“I would love to see you dance sometime, Marissa. When is your next production?”

“Uhm. Well, I’m in between gigs right now. But I’ll let you know.”

“Great. That means we’ll be talking again.” His smile revealed his dimples and I blushed again.

“Yes. I would enjoy seeing you again Travis.”

We sat in Star-berks and talked for about an hour. Travis was fun and exciting. If he had not told me he was a minister I never would have guessed it. He wasn’t stuffy or uptight. He made me laugh with silly jokes, and he laughed at my even sillier jokes. He told me interesting adventures of his life in college and even seemed interested when I talked about all the different jobs I’d held. He was surprised and amused to learn that in less than ten years I’d been a telephone operator, department store photographer, customer service representative, vacuum cleaner salesman, administrative assistance, waitress, cable television installer and even an Avon lady.

I probably could have sat there and talked with him all afternoon until I looked at my watch realizing the time. “Oh no. It’s getting late and I have to go to wor-...uhm I have an appointment.”

“I’m sorry, Marissa. I didn’t mean to keep you.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper and a pen. He handed them to me and asked. “May I have your phone number? I’d really like to see you again.”

My home phone had been turned off that morning, so I gave Travis my cell phone number. I was hoping it would still be in service when he called. I waved good-bye and rushed back to Macy’s to finish my shopping.

After choosing the perfect outfit for my first show, I searched for a register laid my choice on the counter and handed the salesgirl my card. I waited nervously until I heard the familiar clicking of the receipt signaling an approval. I signed my name and retrieved my bag silently thanking Granny for saving my ass one more time.

Once I reached the parking lot I checked my watch. It was already 4:00 pm. I had gotten caught up with Travis and lost track of time. I was going to have to rush home take a quick shower and get back to the club.

Travis piled the dresses into the backseat of his Jeep Cherokee then climbed into the front. He'd spent the past few hours searching for her dresses and he was tired. He hated shopping especially for women's clothing. Travis was still a little miffed that she refused to come along but the sales woman had been a big help. Besides meeting Marissa had made the trip worthwhile. He smiled as he thought of her. Travis thought she was one of the most beautiful women he'd met in a long time. She was funny and smart and she had completely captivated him. He reached into his pocket to retrieve her number when he felt the letter. Pulling it out Travis read it over for the fifth time.

Dear Rev. Leonard,

After diligent consideration and many prayers we the board members of Greater St. Giles community church are pleased to welcome you as our new minister.

Our board was impressed with your education, talents, and accomplishments.

We look forward to welcoming you and your new wife into our church family and working with you to further the ministry in this community.

Sincerely,

Board of Ministries

Greater St. Giles Community Church

Chairperson: Mae Ann Rogers

Travis folded the letter back up. The words "you and your new wife" flashed over and over in his head. He kicked himself a thousand times. He had not gotten used to the idea that he was supposed to be a married man, and had completely forgotten when he met Marissa. He put the letter in his pocket and pulled out the paper with her number on it. He stared it for several moments. Then he slowly crumpled it up and tossed it out into the mall parking lot before driving away.

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