

Saturday, September 24th, 2016

Morton Grove

Chloe could hear laughing and giggling.

Both concerned her - in more ways than one, she feared. As she walked into the living room, she saw her mother sitting on the floor with Becky cross-legged beside her. They were both looking through a photo album.

". . . Chloe was about nine in that photo - she loved to wear not very much," Cathy explained.

"I've noticed - Chloe has a very nice body, but she's not as beautiful as you, Cathy."

Chloe tried to hide her giggles but she failed miserably as her mother and dependent looked up at her.

"You showing embarrassing photos, again, Mom?"

"You did tend to get yourself into strange situations," Cathy replied evenly.

"I suppose, I did."

"I liked the one of you lying at the bottom of the stairs, drunk!" Becky laughed.

"I did many stupid things as I was growing up."

"You haven't exactly stopped, honey," Chloe's mother pointed out with a grin.

"Growing up or doing stupid things?" Chloe queried, knowing the answer.

"Both, I would say."

Chloe left them to it and she headed off to get a drink.

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It had barely been two weeks, but ever since she had introduced Becky to her mother, the two had been inseparable. Becky loved going to see Cathy who, in turn, was overjoyed whenever Becky was over. Chloe suspected that her mother missed having a little girl around. Becky was the proverbial breath of fresh air and Chloe could not wait for her to meet her father - he was due home in the next few weeks, an event that Chloe was overjoyed about.

One problem with her mother was that she was enjoying embarrassing her daughter - Becky loved to hear about Chloe when she was a little girl, a time which Chloe looked back on with embarrassment. To make things worse, Curtis would join in with his own memories of the younger Chloe, much to her chagrin. Curtis and Becky got on well like a house on fire and Becky was always laughing at his jokes

which he kept clean, once he learned of Becky's hatred of blasphemy and dirty words.

Then, that same day, while Becky had been looking through more embarrassing photos, Mindy and Dave had appeared with Joshua. Chloe smelt a rat - she had seen Dave and Mindy spending a lot of time with her mother since their return from the UK. Chloe had called her mother out on it but she had been put down almost immediately and she had quickly given up. Joshua was a little confused as to why Dave and Mindy had followed him in - they were just dropping him off and rarely came in.

Joshua looked at his girlfriend and he read her expression - he began to smell a rat, too.

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"Shall we put them out of their misery, Cathy?" Mindy asked with a sly grin.

"Nah - I'm enjoying seeing Chloe squirm," Cathy replied fiendishly.

"Mom!"

"It's fun to get my own back on my cousin - she used to like keeping secrets from me," Curtis admitted.

"Spill, brat!" Chloe growled at her cousin.

"Stick it, Chloe!" Curtis growled back with a big grin.

Chloe stamped her foot in frustration causing Mindy to laugh out loud.

"Please!" she begged as she dropped onto her knees and she gave her Mom the puppy-dog eyes treatment.

"This is so pathetic," Cathy laughed.

"Get in the car," Dave said as he picked Chloe up off the floor.

"You're lowering the tone of the neighbourhood, Chloe."

Chloe, Joshua, and Becky - all three very confused - climbed into the back of Mindy's new Jaguar F-Pace while Curtis joined Cathy in her Jeep. Chloe's demands for information were ignored as they headed north Glenview but Chloe and Joshua were both confused as Mindy turned left onto Glenview Road instead of continuing north up Waukegan Road. A couple more miles and Mindy took a left and then a right onto Fielding Drive.

Finally, Mindy pulled up outside the second to last house on the left.

Fielding Drive

"What are we doing here?" Joshua asked as Dave and Mindy climbed out of the F-Pace.

Behind them, Cathy and Curtis were heading towards them from the Jeep.

"You moving, Mom?" Chloe asked.

Cathy did not answer as Mindy literally dragged Chloe up the paved path and two steps before inserting a key into the front door of the property. Becky pushed past Chloe and Mindy but she only made it two feet before she stopped dead and her jaw dropped open in surprise. Chloe stopped dead behind the young girl equally mesmerised by what she was seeing.

The floor was a light oak and from the foyer, you passed directly into the living room which was double height and a wooden staircase in the same light oak led upwards before turning back on its self to an open landing. Many windows allowed massive amounts of natural light into the room, making it feel large and airy, despite it only being big enough for a couch and two arm chairs. To the left of the foyer, Chloe could see into a dining room which held a wooden table for six people to sit comfortably. As with the living room, there were large windows to the front and side.

Chloe's curiosity was aroused and she walked through the dining room with Becky and Joshua in tow. They passed through into a kitchen.

"Bloody hell!" Joshua exclaimed as he looked around.

The kitchen had a light tiled floor with medium oak cabinets around two sides with a central island and a stunning bay window with a circular glass-topped table for four people. There was a large five-hob gas cooker, a microwave, and a giant fridge with ice-maker. Through a door was a laundry and utility room which led to a two-car garage at the rear of the property. Then they came full circle into a family room with a door which opened onto the back yard.

Chloe was speechless and her face showed confusion. It was beginning to dawn on Joshua who was just as speechless. Becky dragged Chloe up the stairs onto the open landing with Joshua following.

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The penny finally dropped as Chloe stopped outside the master bedroom at the top of the stairs.

The double doors were closed and there was a small ceramic plaque on each door. The first read: 'Chloe' in sweeping letters. The other door had a plaque which read: 'Joshua'.

"Chloe!" Becky called out as she studied a similar plaque attached to the bedroom at the end of the landing.

The plaque read: 'Becky', and there was a peanut at the end of her name. Chloe could not take anymore and she just burst into tears as she collapsed to the carpeted landing. Joshua was stunned and he just held his girlfriend as she cried.

"Your Mom and me, we talked about you both having a place to call your own a while ago. We found this place, some months ago, and we were saving it for Christmas - but then Becky appeared and that apartment is just way too small for the three of you," Mindy explained. "This house is yours, Chloe and Joshua. You have both done so much for us all and you both deserve this."

Chloe just mumbled as she tried to speak. Instead, Joshua spoke for all of them as Becky appeared struck dumb, also.

"Thank you," the sixteen-year-old said, his voice wavering with emotion.

"You mean this is our house?" Becky asked tentatively.

"Yes, honey," Cathy said. "That's your bedroom."

Becky pushed open the door and she screamed with joy. The bedroom was light and airy with pink walls and a mauve carpet. The bed was just as pink. There was a large collection of stuffed toys against one wall - mostly ponies.

"You even have your own bathroom," Curtis said as he showed Becky into the bathroom which she would use (although it would be shared with the occupants of the next bedroom, should there ever be any).

The little girl squealed with happiness.

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Chloe had finally regained her feet and she pushed open the double doors with Joshua to get a first look at their new bedroom.

The room was painted a pale blue with a white coved ceiling. The carpet was a pleasant beige and a large triple window looked out over the back yard. Chloe had her hand over her mouth as she took everything in. She squealed almost as loudly as Becky had as she took in the master bathroom. There was a large oval whirlpool bath set in the corner with a window to each side. There was also an enormous shower which could easily hold two people at once.

"Show them the basement..." Curtis said.

"Basement?" Chloe asked. "There's more?"

"Come on," Curtis said as he took his cousin's hand and lead her back downstairs.

Joshua and Becky followed with Becky holding Joshua's hand tightly. At the bottom of the stairs, they turned right and stopped at a small door which had been completely missed on the first trip around. Curtis opened the door with a flourish and he waved Chloe down the staircase into the basement.

"Woah!" Joshua exclaimed as he took in the large recreation room which was painted in light cream colours to accentuate the lighting and the few windows which let in natural light.

"I don't know what to say. . ." Chloe mumbled.

"That's a first!" Curtis chuckled.

"I love it!" Becky exclaimed as she smiled hugely.

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Chloe, Joshua, and Becky spent the next hour examining every nook and cranny of their new home while Mindy, Dave, Cathy, and Curtis loitered around the kitchen talking and watching as the small family dashed about together at first, but then individually.

Joshua loved the kitchen, as did Chloe, and they both enthused about what they might cook in there. Becky loved her bedroom which was much bigger than that in the apartment and she also loved the back yard which was not large but adequate. The family room had a large wall-mounted 48-inch flat screen TV which was connected up to several hundred cable channels.

"Do you think we've done the right thing?" Cathy asked.

"Means that the current neighbours can live their lives without hearing bed springs above them, morning, noon, and night," Dave pointed out.

Curtis sniggered.

"They have a little girl to bring up and they all need their space," Mindy said. "They are young, but I trust them and they can behave in a mature fashion. . ."

Mindy paused as Chloe ran into the living room and pounced on Joshua, bringing him down onto the couch. She was giggling as she allowed Joshua to tickle her.

". . . sometimes - just not today, apparently!"

"The looks on their faces are well worth it," Cathy said happily. "Becky has been through a lot and she needs this just as much as Joshua and Chloe do."

"I'm glad that Chloe is happy," Curtis admitted. "We never got on well when we were younger but Chloe has been like a big sister to me ever since we began to support one another in *Fusion*. I love her more than ever and I think she deserves this."

"Well said, Curtis," Dave said approvingly as the boy blushed.

"I agree," Cathy admitted. "It's good to see you two getting along. Now - we need to be getting along. *Chloe!*"

The sixteen-year-old stopped her giggling and she walked into the kitchen. Mindy dangled a set of keys in front of the wide-eyed teenager. Chloe reached for the keys only for Joshua to stop her.

"Me man of house," he stated. "Me get keys."

Chloe giggled and she stepped back as Mindy handed Joshua the keys with a grin. However, Joshua held out his other hand.

"What?" Mindy asked.

"Where's the map to the minefield, the machineguns, and the razor wire?" he replied.

Everybody laughed as Mindy scowled.

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Chloe was still struggling to understand what had turned her Saturday upside down. Only a few weeks before, she had gained her first car, as had Joshua. Now, they both had their first home. Chloe's emotions were struggling to cope with it - she was still struggling with the loss of her child - then there was Becky. For the three of them to have a place which they could call their own was amazing and Chloe was humbled that there were people who loved them enough to do something so special.

Joshua was just as moved and he had hugged both Mindy and Cathy very tightly and there had been tears in his eyes. The young man had been through a lot in his short life, at one stage he had been homeless and living on the streets. A home of his own had always been a dream, but for it to become a reality was almost unreal for him. He loved everybody who was part of his life and as far as he was concerned they were all his family. His old life was gone and his new life was the best that he could ever have wished. He was in love with the most beautiful girl he could imagine and she loved him back just as much.

Becky was loving every minute of her new life. Every morning, she was reminded of her past life as she saw her bruised face and body in the bathroom. But it meant less and less to her as the days went past and she enjoyed her new life of safety where people loved her. While she never really wanted to fight again, she was happy to undergo the training. The training was safe and while there was pain, it was controlled and people were looking out for her safety. A month back, a family and a home had been so far away as to be a fairy-tale. But thanks to Chloe, that fairy-tail was coming true.

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Joshua suggested that they order a pizza or two for an early dinner so that they could christen the new house.

Mindy agreed and she nipped out to get the pizzas and some bottles of coke. Curtis went with her to help, leaving Cathy and Dave to watch over Chloe and Joshua. Becky was in her bedroom enjoying her new toys. Joshua had no idea that he had been nudged towards the suggestion - Curtis could be crafty when he wanted to be. Maybe Curtis was spending too much time with Megan!

Mindy and Curtis were planning something else with which to surprise Chloe - but not just Chloe.

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Forty-five minutes later, Joshua and Chloe were getting annoyed.

"I'm hungry!" Becky complained.

"Should have been no more than twenty minutes," Cathy complained.

"Maybe Mindy got stopped for speeding," Dave offered quite reasonably as he struggled to keep his expression neutral.

Then, a minute later, there was a knock on the front door.

"About flipping time!" Chloe growled as she demonstrated her new-found fondness for the British language.

She jumped up off the couch and she yanked open the front door expecting to see her mentor and her cousin with pizzas and drink. She had the perfect sentiment too - instead, she froze and then her emotions overflowed for the second time that day and she burst into tears as her father stepped through the doorway. Chloe never saw the grinning Mindy and Curtis behind him - her attentions were fixed on her father as the lithe girl jumped into his arms and she wrapped her long legs around his waist.

"Daddy! What are you doing here?"

"I came to see my little girl and her new home," Ryan Bennett said as she hugged his daughter.

"Ryan!" Cathy exclaimed as she glared at Mindy and Curtis.

Chloe dropped back to the floor allowing her mother to hug her husband. Ryan and Cathy exchanged a long and sensual kiss together before they both remembered that they had company. Then the ever vigilante Cathy Bennett pulled away from her husband and she scowled. She had noticed something different about her husband's dress blue uniform - instead of three gold stripes on each arm beneath a gold line star, there was a fourth gold stripe.

"When did you make E-6?" Cathy demanded.

"I was frocked two weeks back, honey. Thought it might be a good surprise for you," Ryan replied with a grin.

Cathy smiled enormously.

"You made Captain!" she exclaimed before there was a forced coughing sound from over by the family room. "Oh, hell!"

Chloe quickly turned and she pulled Becky forwards.

"Peanut, this is my father, Ryan," Chloe said. "Daddy, this is Rebecca but she prefers Becky and I alone call her Peanut."

"Hi, sir," Becky said as she smiled up at the tall man who smiled down at her.

Captain Ryan Bennett, United States Navy knelt down and he looked into Becky's deep brown eyes.

"Hello, Becky, you call me Ryan, okay?"

"Yes, sir - err, Ryan."

Becky giggled as Ryan smiled at her.

"You're just as lovely as Cathy described you, Becky."

Ryan stood up, lifting the blushing Becky off her feet and he carried her through into the kitchen, dumping her onto the counter in the centre of the room where Mindy and Curtis had placed the pizzas.

"I'm hungry - let's eat!" Ryan declared.

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"Thank you, Mindy," Cathy said as she forced the teenage vigilante into a reluctant hug. "You knew, Dave?"

"Of course."

"It's so good to have him back, you know."

"I noticed. Chloe's almost overflowing with emotion," Dave replied.

Chloe was talking non-stop as she chatted to her father while stuffing pizza into her mouth. Becky was chipping on with comments about her rescue as Chloe explained everything that had happened over the previous few weeks. Joshua took a moment to talk to Mindy out of earshot of the others.

"Mindy, you are the greatest, you know that, don't you?"

"Of course, I do!"

"I mean you are the best friend anybody could have. You are like a big sister to me and Chloe. You brought us back together and you have helped us through some turbulent times and helped us to be together. We owe you everything."

Mindy was feeling weird inside as Joshua spoke. She hated people thanking her - it made her uncomfortable. She loved to do things for people but they were always so damn thankful!

"You know I love you both. You are the family I never had. For reasons unknown to me, I let Chloe drive all over me but she keeps me sane in my darkest hours and I am thankful for having her around. You are both selfless and you look after everybody in *Fusion*. You care, both of you. Now you can both enjoy some time in your own home with your new daughter."

Joshua hugged Mindy tightly, ignoring her growls.

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It was like a mini party.

Dave could only see happy faces - even Mindy despite all the hugs which she was tolerating. He was very pleased to have been able to help set Chloe and Joshua up with a home. They were a true family and they loved Becky just as much as she loved them. Dave knew that Joshua and Chloe would be just as happy with Becky as he and Mindy were with their own sons and daughters. Being a parent was hard but it was damn rewarding. Ignoring the temper tantrums and the sometimes-bad behaviour, you had wonderful young people who loved you and enjoyed having somebody that they could talk to and spend time with.

Joshua and Chloe would make brilliant parents.

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"You deserve this, Chloe," Ryan said to his daughter as she showed him around the house. "I was horrified, frankly, to hear about your miscarriage and I wish I could have been here for you."

"Thank you, Daddy, I know. It was horrible, but with everybody helping me, I got through it. Becky is not a replacement and I don't see her that way. I see her as a new start to our lives, for all three of us."

"You've grown up so much in just three years, honey, and I am so very proud of you."

"Don't - you'll have me in tears again."

"I mean it, Chloe - you and Joshua make an amazing couple, both masked and out in the open. While I had reservations about the boy you were fucking. . ."

"Daddy!"

". . . I saw how much he loved you. Joshua seems to have curbed some of your more wayward tendencies which can only be good for the world in general and everybody's sanity."

Chloe felt her face turning very red as her father chuckled.

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Becky had refused point blank.

Neither Chloe nor Joshua were surprised.

Eventually, Chloe went with Cathy, Ryan, and Curtis to go pack some clothing. Mindy and Dave left Joshua and Becky to their new home and they headed back to their own where they hoped to find their own wayward children and Hailee keeping them all from blowing up the house. It had not been a surprise that Becky wanted to sleep in her new bed, in her new bedroom, in her new home.

"You leave them a surprise beside the bed?" Dave asked his wife.

"Box of ten - should do them till the morning," Mindy replied with a laugh.

Fielding Drive

It was weird.

It was just Joshua and Becky, alone in the house for the first time.

"You okay, Becky?"

"Yes, thanks, Dad."

Joshua almost missed it.

"What did you call me?"

"Dad - is that okay?"

Joshua just nodded, unable to think of anything to say. It kind of made it official: he had a daughter and he was her father. What was Chloe going to say?

"Can I go for a bath? I really want to try it out."

Joshua found towels in a cupboard in the bathroom and he ran the bath, adding copious amounts of bubbles. Becky was quick off the mark and almost before the water was ready, she had vanished into her bedroom and dumped her clothing before returning to the bathroom where Joshua was just turning off the taps. Becky almost dived into the bath in her haste but Joshua caught her before she could have an accident - that would never do.

Soon she was splashing away while Joshua turned down her bed and closed the curtains. He switched on her bedside light and turned off the main overhead one. After fifteen minutes, he coaxed the happy girl out of the bath and then found a distinct lack of pyjamas so he just wrapped her in a dry towel and then encouraged her to get into bed. Leaving Becky to talk to her ponies, he headed down to the kitchen and he found the relevant supplies to make hot chocolate for them both.

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By the time, Chloe returned on her own with several bags of clothing and other personal effects, she found the house quiet.

Chloe went upstairs to find her boyfriend and Becky watching a DVD on the TV in the little girl's bedroom.

"Hi, guys!"

"Shhh!" Joshua said. "Twilight and the others are about to foil Sunset Shimmer's plan for attacking Equestria!"

Chloe laughed as she sat down to watch the end of the movie. Becky grinned up at Chloe as the movie ended.

"You okay, Mum - I can call you that, right?"

Chloe just squealed and she nodded, unable to speak. Tears formed in her eyes as she looked at Joshua. He simply nodded.

"Dad let me take a bath - it was brilliant, although there might have been too many bubbles."

"Dad?"

"Yeah, Dad - him."

Becky felt a little confused and she could not understand why Chloe and Joshua hugged each other tightly. She was also surprised to see Chloe crying again - she had done a lot of that during the day,

"Night, Peanut," Chloe said as she pulled Joshua out of the room.

"See you in the morning."

"Night, Mum. Night, Dad."

"Sleep tight," Joshua said happily as she pulled his daughter's bedroom door closed behind him.