



*On her way to the Snow Kirk Inn to meet her part-time ski patrol lover, Daphne becomes lost in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Taking a wrong turn and crashing over a cliff, she's severely injured and trapped until an off-duty firefighter rescues her.*

## **Meet Me At The Snow Kirk Inn**

By Annalise Chamberlain

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MEET ME  
AT THE  
SNOW KIRK  
INN

**ANNALISE CHAMBERLAIN**

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Weasel

Garrett was barely able to see fifteen feet ahead in the swirling snow but recognized little bits and pieces of the landscape through the window. He followed Moss Creek, which followed alongside the old road. Garrett had made mental notes of the mileage so he could find the exact location directly parallel behind his house, the next place he'd picked to stop and listen for the horn.

He felt confident that it would be the most sensible position to get a handle on the horn to begin with. From there, he anticipated the horn should be louder because he was maybe a mile or so closer to it. He only hoped that the horn was still working and coming from the direction he thought it was.

At times, Garrett would have to adjust his path with the Weasel when the road became obliterated with snow and deepening drifts. The sturdy tracks kept him skidding along on top of the snow, as he automatically scanned each side to stay on the road. More trees and rocks--Garrett picked his way along clear flat snow between brush, trees, and rock on either side of him. If he could see the landscape even a little, he could find his way along the obliterated road. When the old mileage meter indicated he would be parallel with his house, he shut down the loud diesel engine.

Strong winds broke the silence as it tore through the trees. Garrett kept the interior lights on and rolled a window down slightly while blocking the opening with an extra jacket. Garrett listened intently and immediately heard a constant and louder-sounding horn. It was much clearer here across the creek than at the house, but he could tell the horn was still some distance away. Garrett had hope and a surge of adrenalin.

Wildly encouraged, Garrett started up the diesel engine and began up the slight incline as the road rose higher above the river in the canyon. He knew this road followed the path of Moss Creek until it veered into a narrower chasm a few miles ahead. He drove on about a mile and killed the diesel again. Yes, he could hear the horn was still a little distance away, but now it competed with the sound of the rushing river.

Here, the road threaded along a narrow ledge against the mountainside. Garrett decided to drive on for another mile or so to listen from deeper into the canyon. Maybe the horn was a way more up the river. It had become difficult to plot a direction with the river and horn sound being about equal.

As he drove, Garrett became convinced, more than ever, he was tracking a calamity. He dared not think of how bad it could be, and it was his prayer that no one was injured. But his mind wandered into worst-case scenarios which would involve multiple people and children that all needed lifesaving attention at once. No, it couldn't be that bad. But why would anyone in their right mind be driving out here in the middle of a snowstorm?

"It's someone who became carelessly stranded," he muttered. "It's probably a tourist. No local would be out here. And they deserve to be cold. I'm risking life and limb because a dumbass was determined to drive through a blizzard. But why here? What if it's a crime scene?" He was glad he had his Glock pistol with him.

His mind wandered across the litany of possibilities he would soon be facing. His gentler side was in anguish, hoping he wouldn't arrive at a scene where he would be too late. "No one would be out on this dirt road for any good reason this time of year and especially at this time at night. And what will I do with them?" Getting all of them back to his warm house was his only option. "I wonder how many are injured? Has a crime been committed? I hope I'm not too late."

Vignettes of horrifying scenarios toyed with his thoughts as he drove deeper into the canyon. Another half mile and the road opened up into a meadow. He remembered this spot from previous motorcycle rides and four-wheeler excursions during the summer.

Garrett stopped in the field and killed the engine to listen for the horn sound again.

"What's that?" He peered out into the driving snow as something blew across the low beams of the Weasel. Did it look like blue paper or something--a plastic bag or a piece of newspaper? It disappeared from the range of his lights and was gone. Then another similar bit of the same stuff swirled up into the air and disappeared in the dark like a giant white moth.

Strangely encouraged, he thought it probably came from the vehicle he was searching for. Then a fourth piece of the same thin paper danced in the wind. It was time to exit the Weasel and check around. He needed to get a better feel for where the sound originated from right here and maybe capture a piece of that blowing paper.

He exited the Weasel into the knee-high powdery snow. He shone the spotlight around, lighting up several more pieces of the blowing papers. Glancing down close to where he stood, he bent and picked up a smaller scrap of paper stuck in the snow. He shone his flashlight on it and found a long paper receipt with a little mountain scene printed on it. "Mountain Chalet Sporting Goods," he read.

It was a small step in perhaps solving the mystery, Garrett was fairly sure because he surmised it to be papers blown out of a nearby vehicle. The date of the was today. The timestamp showed 3:35 p.m.--an indication of a dire situation.

Garrett wasn't at all surprised now to see more and more papers blowing by in the halo of his flashlight. He recalled his own numerous experiences with Truckee Fire how, in rollover accidents, the windows break out, and the entire contents of a car would be spewed out and onto the ground. These debris trails could go for hundreds of feet, depending on the circumstances. Garrett also remembered scenes when human contents were thrown out onto the ground by those unfortunate souls not belted in.

"Honnnnnk!" The sound was much closer and steady now and not rising and falling on the wind. Garrett knew he had reached his destination. Next, he would get out on foot to find the location of the horn. But what he realized made him sick. Garrett's thoughts alerted him to the potential of not being able to reach the victims. "The



river," he said aloud. "The horn sound is below me for sure, and it's near or in the river." He couldn't believe it. Finding the exact location would more challenging than he anticipated.

The Weasel was lit up brightly and could be seen from several yards away, even in this blizzard. He walked carefully towards the sound and found where he knew the meadow's edge dropped into a steep angle down to the river.

Garret's 1500 watt flashlight illuminated the way for about 100 feet before disappearing in the snowstorm. He knew if the weather got any worse, it would be unsafe for him to venture far from the Weasel without a tether rope to follow back.

So he walked about 50 yards from the Weasel to where he knew the meadow would fall away steeply down to the river. He could still barely discern the lights of the Weasel, which was his stopping point. The vehicle horn was below him and closer to the river than to the meadow where he was standing. How far from the river, he had no idea. But he was familiar enough with the terrain to walk to the edge but not over it.

Only because Garrett had been up and down these roads, dozens of times in his youth, were the pitfalls familiar to him. He knew the edge of the meadow fell away like a cliff in some places. It wasn't so steep in others, all the way to the river about 300 feet below. He couldn't imagine anyone arriving at the river's edge except one way--they went over the edge. Somebody drove off the road from right around here because of the snowstorm.

But that didn't answer what they were doing driving up this canyon in the first place. Garrett started over the edge and found an area that wasn't too steep to climb down. His gloved fingers grasped on to partially buried tree limbs and trunks as his feet found purchase against rocks as he picked his way down towards the river.

When he was about two-thirds of the way to the bottom, his flashlight reflected on some red plastic he recognized as pieces of broken tail-light plastic. The horn was constant and loud now, and knew Garrett knew he was only another hundred feet or so from the vehicle below him.

The river was running full, he knew, but he remembered a substantial gravel bed that he and friends followed on their motorcycles while seeing how far they could ride up Moss Creek. He'd driven way further up the river than this point on the gravel bed. He hoped the river hadn't eaten up all the gravel because his idea was to drive the Weasel along the gravel bed and get directly below the doomed vehicle. Garrett began the hike back up to the Weasel.

A bit winded, Garrett pulled himself back up the rocks and branches as quickly as possible and drove the Weasel back down the canyon road a short way until he managed to find the trail leading to the river.

Moments later, he was following the riverbed back up to the spot where he had hiked down. The wreck would now be remarkably close by, and if he were lucky, he would be able to extricate and load the victim or victims in the Weasel much more quickly. And he prayed they were alive.

It was abundantly apparent to Garrett that someone had simply driven right off the road, across the meadow, and careened over the edge to the river because of driving blind in this storm. Bodies of children and dead babies were scattered everywhere--It was hard not to let his imagination run wild now.

Garrett hopped down from the Weasel and began hollering, "Halloo! Anybody out there? Shout out if you can hear me!" He hiked up the bank, grabbing onto branches to hoist himself along through heavy brush and snow.

"Halloo! Does anybody hear me? Anyone in the car?" Nothing but the sound of the river, the wind, and the horn. Well, duh, it'd be pretty hard to hear someone yelling over the sound of the horn blaring. He knew he was mere feet from the vehicle, and he hoped anyone alive out there would hear him know help had arrived.

Pointing his flashlight at the sound, he saw a reflection of metal and a flash of color a few feet away. It was bright green--neon green. The horn sounded like it was on the fade, and he was relieved that at least he had located the wreckage before it ceased entirely. Garrett said a prayer in his head for the person or people inside--that they would all be alive.

What Garrett had to do now was work his way over a few feet to the crashed vehicle's open window. He could see the reflection of his flashlight on the side of a white SUV wedged between some broken tree trunks and limbs; nose pointed down at a steep angle into a large tree trunk.

He could tell by the damage it had rolled over many times. All the windows had broken out, and the top crushed. His heart sank, but Garrett's training kicked in to immediately assess the vehicle, its stability, and how many people were dead, injured and alive, and how badly injured. He needed to confirm that there was nobody thrown outside the vehicle, freezing on the mountainside.

Through the broken driver's side window, Garrett confirmed the green flash he'd first seen was a jacket. He pulled hard, trying to open the driver's door, but it was too bent to budge. Garrett wasn't able to force it open. He pulled himself over to the passenger door and found the same type of damage--too bent and jammed to open. He had a crowbar he might have to use back in the Weasel.

Garrett was worried about gaining access to the interior of the vehicle without the jaws of life. He stepped up onto a broken tree branch and shone his flashlight into the cab of the SUV. What he saw was one person in a green hooded jacket, hanging nearly upside down. The jacket hood covered a person's head, which was facedown and pressed against the horn on the steering wheel.

Back to the driver's side, Garrett reached in and squeezed the arm, "Hey there!" The driver was unconscious, or worse, dead. It was the type of accident that would be miraculous to survive. He shook the jacketed arm again gently. No response. Garrett gently pulled the hood back that covered the driver's head, where he viewed a beanie and a long, blondish bloody ponytail.

"God in Heaven, please help her--and me," he prayed, as he saw it was a young woman whose entire face and a beany hat was red and sticky with blood. Garrett pulled off a glove with his teeth and slipped his hand inside the neck of the jacket, feeling for a pulse. Cold. Amazingly, his fingers detected a slight but regular pulse through the skin of her cold neck. She was alive at least for now, but he hadn't a clue on the gravity of her injuries.

Garrett knew it was a young woman with a head injury at the very least. She was unconscious. Not good. How he wished he had someone with him. Garrett then shone the spotlight around outside and around the vehicle. The glassless windows did nothing to protect the occupants from the shocking cold. He didn't see any other passengers. He hoped nobody had been thrown out, but in this darkness, he couldn't be sure. He had to look around quickly and get inside to the one person he knew was alive.

And it was agonizingly clear he couldn't follow any kind of safe extrication protocol. If he didn't get this girl removed and back to the Weasel, she'd die. She might die anyway. That left him with few options. Garrett had to remove the woman from the vehicle, get her over to the Weasel, and warm her up before she froze to death or died of her injuries.

If the woman's neck or back were broken, he could paralyze her by moving her. Or she'd die, and he might be the one killing her if he carried her. Garrett heard his dad's voice in his head, saying, "Son, you can only do the best you can do."

"Don't die on me, girl." Garrett talked to her as if she was near and dear to him because, in a sense, she was. He continued, "Hey there, I've been out trying to find you. What happened? Why were you doing way out here so far away from home?" Garrett felt terrible about all of his dumbass remarks and began explaining to her how he had come to the smashed vehicle.

He kept the one-way conversation going not just for her, but it calmed Garrett to hear his voice. He knew she probably couldn't hear a word he was saying over that endless horn, but he'd throttle that thing soon enough. The sound of his voice gave him courage, and maybe she would feel his presence subconsciously. Garrett's goal at the moment was to find a way to get her out of here before she froze or succumbed to her injuries. He needed to work fast. It had to be a minimum of three hours she hung here, head against the horn. The golden hour and long since come and gone.

"Thanks for honking the horn, honey. Sorry I kept you waiting." Garrett felt guilty now for lying in bed, reading his novel, taking a shower, and not starting the hunt for the horn much sooner. He could

see a single snowboard thrown across the back seats along with a laptop, boot, goggles, and a variety of snow gear. There was a single duffle bag and what looked like a book bag, and Garrett spotted one large paper coffee cup from Starbucks. "Maybe only one victim," he hoped.

Garrett wondered if the snowboard had struck her head as the vehicle rolled, explaining the blood soaking her hair and jacket. "I'm driving the bus that's going to take you home, Sunshine. You don't have to do a thing besides lay there. But wake up if you can." God, that was pathetic.

Garrett gingerly worked his way to the rear of the vehicle that was miraculously resting nearly right side up. It seemed stable enough, and, thankfully, he was able to easily open the back door hatch, unlatch and pull a single rear bench seat out onto the snow. Then he crawled down the through-way between the two passenger captain chairs to the front seats.

He pushed aside the ski gear, some empty shopping bags, clothes, shoes, purse contents, and saw the blue and white tissue he'd seen blowing across the clearing back up the hill. The Explorer creaked and shifted slightly. He wasn't too worried about it sliding further toward the river because it seemed well-pinned against the large tree trunk.

Garrett held onto the woman's waistband as he unlocked her seatbelt so she wouldn't slide further down in her seat or onto the floor. Next, he checked her left arm and shoulder, and it didn't appear to be fractured. He put his hands firmly under her armpits and was able to drag her butt off the seat and onto the floor.

Pulling her backward, he stretched her out straight into the space between the front and rear captain seats. She moaned slightly. "Hey, Trixie, you awake? You had an accident, and I've got to get you out of your car. It might hurt a little, so just hang in there." Feeling pitiful for his horrible pun, Garrett knew she wouldn't remember and was thrilled to hear her moan. Proof of life.

"Okay, girl, we're finished with part one. The next step is going to be a little tricky, but you can do it. I know you can. I'm going to be

gone just a few minutes, okay?" No sound. "Don't move. I'll be right back."

Garrett hiked the short distance back to the Weasel below. It was still snowing heavily, but there was enough tree canopy that he could see better than out in the open. Garrett clamored into the back of the old Weasel and unhooked an aluminum stretcher from the wall. He had no option except to, by hell or high water, get the woman strapped to the light-weight litter and drag her back to the Weasel. He knew he couldn't carry her dead, unconscious weight, and remain balanced with his bad ankle. He could immobilize her with the attached Velcro straps, and then he'd drag the stretcher along the bank, down to the creek bed across the snow to the Weasel.

A few minutes later, back at the wreck, Garrett removed the woman's hood and wrapped her head in a field dressing he'd brought along from the emergency supplies. He was able to slide the stretcher under her at least partway and pulled it out the back of the Explorer partially. The Velcro straps were excellent, and Garrett secured the girl on the litter in no time. Fifteen minutes later, he was back at the Weasel and tied the stretcher in its place to the big eyehooks on the floor of the vehicle, behind his seat.

By this time, Garrett was exhausted. The woman wasn't heavy, but he was shaking from exertion, ankle pain, and the sheer effort of the haul, which was a grueling task getting her down to the gravel bed without letting go.

He'd worked his way, foot by foot, lowering the stretcher behind him and over rocks, not letting it get away from him and slide down the hill. He paused every few feet to ease his burning lungs and limbs, pressing on to get her back to the warm heater in the Weasel as soon as he could. Time was always the essential element in rescue, and time was running out.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Key West

Arriving back at the grandparent's bungalow, Bob, and Mary, with Garrett and Riley in the backseat of the Jeep, offloaded the cleaned, fileted fish along with their few belongings. When the sun went down on Key West, the stars came out, and the town buzzed with life. People revived from the sweltering heat and moved from inside to outdoors on their verandahs, lawns, back porches, and patios. They fired up their barbeques and stereos and began assembling the evening cocktails. The air was still muggy but had cooled off from the sun setting, and the smell of plumeria and jasmine was heavy and blended with the scent of briquettes and fire starter.

"Can I make you a cocktail, Riley?"

"I'd love it." She was sitting in a white wicker chair with her long legs stretched out in front of her. Mary had loaned her a pretty turquoise sundress so she could clean up after the seasick misadventure. She had dumped her laundry in the washer so it'd be ready when she left.

"I'm just throwing together a salad and some sourdough bread," Mary called from the kitchen through the open side door.

"How about something tropical?" Garrett loved how Riley looked in the turquoise off-the-shoulder peasant dress.

"Sure! Make it anything fruity. Surprise me, Garrett."

"Perfect. I'll make you Mary's favorite drink. It's called a Painkiller and has all the flavors of the Keys plus a secret ingredient!"

"Mmm. Well, if I can trust you not to poison me, I'll try anything once." She laughed. Garrett assured her she'd love it and set out two tumblers on the black, granite bar. He filled them with POG and

coconut juice with a healthy addition of English Harbor rum, a splash of lime, and a sprinkling of nutmeg served on the rocks with a wedge of sweet pineapple on the rim.

"Here's yours, Holy Mary--his favorite pet name for her since childhood." Garrett laughed as he set the drink on the counter where Mary could sip it while she prepped the salad. He carried the other one, plus a beer, out to Riley and Bob, who held court at the grill.

"Thanks, Garrett." Riley took a sip and rolled her eyes. "It's delicious! I love it, Garrett!"

When it was a perfect time, Bob yelled for everyone to get ready as he slid the perfectly barbequed tuna and hogfish filets onto two big serving plates. With generous scoops of homemade fresh tartar sauce, courtesy of Mary's divine cooking, he served up the barbequed Yellowfin and Hogfish. Then they passed around the crisp garden tomato, and romaine salad, homemade green goddess dressing, crunchy garlic baguette croutons, and Garrett kept up with the never-ending cocktails. The four had a hilariously fun evening laughing at old memories and getting to know Riley.

Riley shared how she had been born "the little caboose" as a shock to older parents in Raleigh, North Carolina. "I have two way older brothers that live in the Raleigh area. One is an attorney, and the other owns a landscape company." She continued, "I went to live with my eldest brother and his wife when my mom died five years ago, which had been the plan under such circumstances. My dad died when I was ten. The experience was like growing up with six parents!" Riley shared her schedule to begin her first job as a licensed RN in two weeks at Raleigh General Hospital's Med-Surg unit.

It was a magical evening. Garrett loved Riley's easygoing personality and dry humor. He could tell she enjoyed a good laugh as well as being a genuinely thoughtful person. He believed she would make an outstanding nurse.

He hated that it was getting late, and he knew Riley must be tired. "I should be getting back to my hotel," she turned to Garrett and continued, "I don't want to wake my roomies. There's four of us nurses to a room at the hotel." Nobody had a ton of money, and it was splurge just to make the trip to the Keys. None of them wanted



to waste it on individual hotel rooms, although it would have been nice. They were planning to crash at the older three-star hotel late every night and be gone all day swimming, para-sailing, shopping, eating, and reveling in all the beach activities.

"Sure, no problem, but they're probably out on the town enjoying the famous nightlife." Garrett stepped inside to grab the Jeep keys while Riley thanked Bob and Mary profusely for the invitation, outstanding food, and wonderfully good time.

Mary was an insightful woman who recognized the attraction between Riley and Garrett. She thought of the many more outings they had planned and suggested they could pick Riley up at noon tomorrow and take her to the beach with them and later, to a famous bar they were introducing to Garrett.

"Yeah, Mary, that would be fantastic if you can stand to have me around for your entire trip!" Riley couldn't believe the incredibly fun time she was having with her new friends from the charter boat. Bob and Mary waved as Garrett and Riley drove off to the Surfside Hotel on the other side of the Key.

One day after another, they asked Riley to join them for an outing. She never declined. She was as crazy about Garrett as he was her, and she made it the perfect foursome. On Friday evening, the night before their flight back to California, the four of them made reservations for Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville.

They ate loads of spicy coconut shrimp, scallops and kept the island rum cocktails flowing. After two or three Jimmy Buffet Iced Teas, Garrett announced to the restaurant loudly, "I can't go home, Riley, I've fallen in love with you." Riley was overcome with laughter, but said, "I'll stay if you stay!" She felt the same way.

"Happens all the time. That's how I got here," the silver-haired bartender shouted across the room. Twenty years ago, I came to Key West on vacation, met a girl on vacation, and neither of us went back to the mainland." It was a common thread amongst the locals as others spoke up, eager to share their story.

Later on, back at the bungalow, Riley and Garrett sat on the wicker sofa out on the veranda. It was heavily warm and dark, and Riley whispered, "I feel like I've known you a hundred years. Do you

believe in former lives?" They made a plan to see each other again at Christmastime, four months away. Garrett would get time off, and Riley agreed to fly out to his parent's home in Truckee and spend a week. The perfect spot to guarantee snow at Christmas.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### Antigua

The summer after your accident, I decided I needed a break from this biome of a mountaintop and took a trip to Antigua. Some of us guys from Timberline chose to do a group adventure. Jerry, Brad, and Corey, and I took two weeks off for some profound rest and relaxation. It was my first attempt at trying to get over you, Daphne. I had both waited for and wanted to forget you. It felt like a death, and I needed to figure out a way to cope.

I didn't know if I should share our entire personal story with your parents or let it stay between us and, perhaps, save your dignity. I had no idea what I was saving, though. We weren't criminals. I mean, what's with your parents? I asked myself over and over, what would Daphne want? In the end, I chose *privacy*. Now, I feel it was a cop-out because you may never have known how I honestly felt.

Moving along, Daph, we four fools got reservations for two rooms in an older hotel on Antigua that was only a block away from the most mind-blowing beach and cove you could ever imagine. There were grass cabanas on the beach, turtles and tropical fish in the bay, endless cocktails and beer delivered oceanside under the coconut palms. Paradise.

Staying in Antigua was the first and most tremendous relief I felt from mourning your loss in my life and the first actual vacation I'd had in ten years. I know you think my life's a holiday, but everything becomes work if you do it day in and day out for years, as I have at Timberline. But the way of the young man is also the way of the young woman.

By the second day of kite-surfing, snorkeling, and buzzing around the bay on rental jet skis, we had become acquainted with

some smokin' hot ladies on what I call "our" beach. They were locals who hung out and swam at the cove every day--young ladies that were eager to show us where to have the best of a great time on their island. All we had to do was bring them along and pay for their drinks.

They were amazingly beautiful with latte skin, big brown eyes, no tan lines, and long, wavy black hair. It was as if we had landed on the island of Shangri-La! You laugh. I know you think it's the same thing at the ski resort, but this was not a working vacation. Ours was a 100 percent dude-vacation on steroids, and it was like, what goes on in Antigua, stays in Antigua.

I'm not going to lie, Daph, I'm a weak man. I got a deep, albeit temporary, faux crush on a lady by the name of Cherish. If you've ever read historical accounts of the first white men landing on the Cook Islands in 1777, we were those men to the bone.

The women swam naked with not one shred of self-conscious decency. They made it seem natural that they were swimming naked every day in the ocean on their native island. Why shouldn't they? Didn't all native women swim naked? Every time we hit the beach, there they were. We each had a local girl to share our beach towels. But wait, it gets even better.

When the sun went down, these women knew all the hotspots on the island. We'd hit one bar for dancing, the next for cocaine and Jamaican weed, another bar for the very best conch fritters and crab cakes to die for, another for the best Cavalier sipping rum, rum punch, and cocktails.

We'd order drinks for all of us, and when we ran out, we called for more. By that time, we'd partied hard until the wee hours of the morning at all these bars dotted here and there around the island, and got so drunk and wasted we didn't know how we made it back to the hotel. It certainly wasn't under our own power.

Cherish, however, had a battered, 1988 Toyota Tercel, and I suppose those four women stuffed us four in, and all eight of us somehow made it back to the hotel. The next morning, we'd all wake up late with a massive hangover and an island girl in our beds.

What's not to love? They'd bring us aspirin and Bloody Mary's, and we'd repeat each day like the day before."

Daphne rolled her eyes. "Why am I smelling disaster on your breath?"

"Baby, you're not just smelling disaster, you're smelling a fucknado."

Mick continued. "Early on, the four of us became cute, carefree little brown island boys, and we were loath to leave. But we all had work ahead of us for the same company--the one I'm the boss of. It dawned on us way too soon that we'd have to say adios to the ladies and Antigua and take our merry little peckers back home.

Fast forward to around the beginning of March, I'm sitting at my desk in the lodge, and I get this letter, with a *registered return receipt* request addressed to yours truly. I had to laugh. Cherish had sent me some pictures or something and wanted to make sure she knew I opened it.

I hadn't heard from her since the summer, and I honestly thought I'd never hear from her again. Of course, we all made the same declaration to those island women when we left, same time, the same place, see you in June! Well, here it was March, and she was sending us an invitation or a reminder for June or something like that.

My beaming white ass felt tickled pink as I sliced open that thick envelope all decorated up with stamps from Antigua, and pulled out some thick, creamy stationery. 'Oy vey, what's this?' A photo fell out from between the pages.

It was a photo of Cherish holding what appeared to be a newborn baby. I mean, a very white-looking newborn B-A-B-Y boy wearing just a blankey with his little Yankee Doodle displayed front and center. What the hell? The photo intended to showcase the boy parts, and Cherish was standing on the same beautiful beach where we all met, smiling like the proverbial Cheshire cat.

With that feeling of holy shit hitting the fan, I read the letter, which, as you might have guessed by now, was from a British Antigua attorney. Yes, from Barrister William A. Winterford, who informed me that I was the father of a son born to Cherish Delgado on March 5. His name is DeShawn Delgado Atwood, and he was

obviously, by the photo, half white and half Islander. I did the elementary math in my head and realized that I, very well, could be the father. Barrister Winterford demanded very cordially that I submit a paternity test to his office within thirty days, adding, 'better contact your solicitor, too.' Why didn't I think of that myself? But you know who I called first? Yeah, Corey, Brad, and Jerry. And I started with Jerry.

I got out my cell phone with this feeling of pleasure not being up to my eyeballs in shit all by myself."

"Jerry, bro." Mick greeted his friend warmly, per usual.

"What's up, Boss?" Jerry replied, the voice of cheerful innocence.

"I need you to stop by my office after you're finished up. If you have a minute now, come on over." Mick guessed if he were in the building, he'd be over in less than a minute. He was right on. Jerry, with his jubilant personality and chubby cheeks, had those guileless boyish looks. He blithely waltzed into the office without a care in the world.

"I'm am so going to enjoy fucking up your day, buddy," Mick thought to himself. "Might as well share the pain." There was a carcinogenic black spot on his heart that was feeling good about inflicting misery and anxiety so he wouldn't be alone.

"Sit down, Jerry." Jerry sat slouching in a chair across from Mick's desk in his usual laid back stance. Mick had always liked fucking with Jerry. He handed the folded letter to him and said, "Jer, take a look."

Several pregnant seconds passed when a picture fell onto his lap. "Holy shit, Mick. Is this supposed to be your kid?"

"Check your mail, bro. I haven't called Brad and Corey yet, but that's a general idea. We got set up like the little schmeckles we are, and what are the chances someone else is going to be a dad?"

"Fuck me, Mick! You mean me?" Jerry choked out. Suddenly, the day had turned very dark. "I can't believe it. You don't mean me?" Mick sat there with a grim but satisfied look on his face. Misery, indeed, loves company.

"And that's how it started, Daphne."

"DeShawn, huh? And you're DeDad? I'm sorry, Mick," and Daphne started laughing uproariously, smacking her leg with her hand over and over.

"Ha, ha, Daphne! More like I'm DeDick and DeFool!"

"So how old's your little buddy now, Mick? And Daphne enunciated Mick with a hard "k."

"Very funny. He's DeFour." They both laughed.

"Mick, I don't know whether to congratulate you or have a good cry on your behalf. What happened next?"

"Short-story-short, I got the paternity test here on my end and sent the results to the Barrister Winterfuck in Antigua. He wrote back, affirming that I was, indeed, the father. My attorney engaged the lab where my DNA was taken to verify the results of Baby DeShawn's swab, and in record time, it was official. I was, indeed, a brand new dad!

Okay, so now that I know I have a son in Antigua, what am I supposed to do? First thought--money. Yeah, send money. But there was already another letter winging it's way to America in care of my new attorney here in Truckee, Buck Janson. You met Buck at Timberline Valley Inn, and I'm pretty sure I introduced you."

Daph nodded, her shoulders trembling, trying to hold a straight face and concerned expression.

"C'mon Daph; it's not that funny. Every time I'd see that name on the phone--my attorney's name, Buck--I'd think fuck, and my asshole would pucker up. I had no idea where this was going, but I knew where it had already been if you know what I mean."

So Buck shares with me that Cherish's attorney, on behalf of DeShawn, wants a cheque for 20,000 American dollars to cover the cost of her prenatal and postnatal care by her local physician, and the hospital bill for her delivery costs. After that, he asked for the legal portion of my earnings, based on the State of California's child support percentage calculator.

But I digress. I need to back up this scintillating story and tell you that out of the four of us bros on vacation; Jerry was the only one that didn't produce offspring. Cory and Brad both made babies on that unforgettable island vacay. Within days of my letter, Cory's and

Brad's letter arrived on the same stationery. Jerry kept waiting and waiting.

I felt a certain amount of kinship and brotherhood with my homies at that point, knowing I wasn't the only idiot in the group. Cherish made sure she had all the correct information which she obviously obtained going through my wallet while I was indisposed, which was a fair share of the time. Cory and Brad had the same experience. The Antiguan attorney had copies of all of our driver's licenses, employment info, social security cards, and passports. Everything in our wallets and luggage was documented and copied in high def! Go figure!

Cory and Brad have girl babies. You can't imagine the consternation they felt when each of them had to address their serious, live-in girlfriends that they had some 'splaining to do. The three of us returned to Antigua that June with huge egg on our faces. We three each had a baby that was about five months old.

Jerry, not too surprisingly, chose not to go along for the shits and giggles. With his get-out-of-jail-free card, he tried to distance himself from the shame and damnation we'd brought home. But Jerry's girlfriend was, of course, friends with Brad and Corey's girlfriends and found out about our escapade with the island girls. She knew it was just the luck of the draw that Jerry didn't have a new baby and broke up with him within days."

"Does he still work for you?" Daphne inquired, choking back the laughter.

"Yeah, he does. I told him I wanted him to be the DeShawn's godfather, so he'd always feel a part of our experience. He agreed it made sense since he was the only one that dodged a bullet and that he would be honored to be DeShawn's godfather as well as the other two babies. It was the least he could do.

So, by now, the three of us have made peace with the British barrister as long as we follow the rules. We each send monthly cheques to our baby mamas, and when the little shits turn traveling age, which is ten, we'll all get them for the summer and possibly one holiday each year."



"What about seeing the baby, Mick? How did that go for you--for Cherish?" Daphne's maternal instinct surfaced, and she finally quit laughing.

"We stayed at a different hotel when we got there, and we all shared one room so we could adjust to our lowered income and indulge in mutual purgatory for each other's immoral behavior. We all vowed to keep each other strong. We stayed at Pineapple Beach, a lovely family resort near Turtle Bay. The ladies all knew about our arrival well in advance because of our mutual barrister and the island gossip chain. Buck, by the way, also represents Cory and Brad.

We arrived in Antigua for the second time in the late afternoon and had an appointment scheduled to meet the babies the following afternoon, giving us a little time to adapt to our jet lag. It would be our new annual vacation spot for the next few years, and we booked a week at a hotel that had luxurious pools, but no beachfront. Nah, we weren't going to hang with the women. No way. We were there to meet our children. Buck had warned us to be decent and behave ourselves, or he'd fire us.

Our meet-and-greet event was poolside at the Pineapple Beach Resort. We were easy to spot--three guilty-looking white American guys sitting under a cabana drinking icy green bottles of Wadadli beer. And when they arrived, you would have thought time stood still. Here come these three ravishing Island women looking fresh as they did nearly a year ago, each carrying a lighter-skinned baby. Two babies had little pink bows in their hair. My baby had a small blue cotton cap on his head.

I'm quite sure we were observed by many hidden smirking faces amongst the employees at that resort, but the women couldn't have been nicer. There's was no blame, no shame, and no humiliation; only kindness and laughter as we each held our respective baby. And for all of us, it was the first time we'd ever even held a baby, let alone our own. Now, I have to add; we'd all shared a lot of anger and pain throughout the entire trip to Antigua over how we'd gotten swindled. But when we met those babies, we all melted into a communal pool of goo.

My son, DeShawn, was the most precious baby of all three! He had the hugest brown eyes and darkest eyelashes against noticeably light skin. When I held him, he was quiet and chewed on his chubby fist, looking up at me like he was mine. When he got hungry, Cherish simply held him in her lap and pulled out a big brown breast, and that little beggar zeroed in on her beautiful brown tit. That baby was as beautiful as a heavenly cherub.

The other two couples wandered off and were sitting privately in the shade of the cabanas, holding their babies. The women seemed composed and proud that they had executed this magical feat of producing adorable and perfectly behaved babies for white men. I wondered how many times they'd done it before. Did DeShawn have siblings?

That's about it, Daphne. But I've got to say; those women had no dishonor. They actually expected that they would be cohabitating with us in our rooms again after the meet-and-greet. We were a strong front this time and declined the offer, remembering Buck's strong admonition to keep our pants zipped. No swimming naked or we'd be having a repeat scenario, no attorney. We told the mamas, no. They said they would come back the next day, which they did--and the next, and the next, until we returned to the USA.

Now, our three kids are four-years-old. They receive monthly cheques from each of us, and, I believe, they all lead a splendid life with their moms in Antigua.

We fellas return to Antigua every summer to see our kids. It works for now, but I'll be happy when I can have DeShawn here with me for the summers and beyond. Cory and Brad feel the same, and Brad is considering moving to Antigua if he can get a decent job. He's fallen in love with the woman, the baby, and the island. She has one other child that's two years older, white, and adorable, and he's willing to be father and husband to the family. This summer, he may not be coming back with Corey and me.

Daphne, this has been one of the most humbling experiences in my life, as you might imagine. When us guys' 'situation' got out in the community, courtesy of Buck, hell, were we the laughing-stock of this town. It starts with, 'Hey, you wanna hear a good story?' I

swear, the first time I went to the Goldminer after the baby news, Maddie asks me if I was planning any more island vacations and starts laughing like a crazy ape. And then she pipes up with, "What's DeTrouble, Mick?" When I don't laugh with her, she says, "You okay? And then whispers loudly, "Is it DeBaby?"

Give me a break. I've heard all the DeMick-DeDick jokes; you can't possibly imagine how many."

After Mick's rendition of his predicament, Daphne couldn't control herself. She said, "Mick, I gotta go pee, or I'm going to have an accident," and she departed for the ladies' room in the restaurant, laughing as her pumps clicked across the wood floor.

Mick jumped up and ran over to the front desk. One of his good friends, Ryan, was working at the computer doing check-in. "Ryan," he whispered, "can you get me a room key?"

"Yeah, no problem, Mick, what's the rush, dickhead?"

"I need to have a private meeting, dingus."

"Yeah, right. A high-level board meeting with the devil in a blue dress?"

"She's an angel, asswipe. Thanks for the key." Mick tucked the card for room 214 in his pocket, ever the man that thinks ahead, and he was back sitting in the same position as when she left.

"How does it feel being here at the Timberline Valley Inn again? Good? Not so good?" Mick inquired.

"Mick, I've got to say, it feels like home. This entire day has been cathartic and healing in so many ways you'll never know. It's answered so many questions I've wondered about these past five years."

"Daphne, what about us? Did you miss us?" He picked up her hands.

"Of course, Mick, I missed you with all my heart. I missed you from the depths of my soul since our first winter together, every single day until the next time we girls drove up for the opening weekend. But I didn't share this with you for obvious reasons. I know how vital it is for you to have no-strings. You're a free spirit, and that's okay. I'll always respect your wishes, but it did break my heart when I realized it was over between you and me."

"What do you mean, you realized it was over?" Mick exclaimed.

"You never called me, Mick, and in the meantime, we grew up. As much as I loved you and the memory of you, as I got older, I realized that I wanted a devoted, monogamous husband and at least one kid. Every single spring for four years, on the last day of snowboarding, I would die at the thought of not seeing or hearing from you for another eight or nine months. But that's what you wanted. All I did was live for another winter of snowboarding at Timberline and being with you every single weekend."

"Ah, Daphne, I can't believe it! There aren't enough words to describe how sorry I am that I didn't live up to the man I should have been. But give me a chance, Daph, let me be that one faithful man in your life." Mick leaned over and kissed her lightly on her soft, beautiful lips and yanked her against him.

"I'm so sorry, Babe." He kissed her hair over and over. "I love you with all of my heart. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. You've got to understand I wanted to be! But I'm here for you now. What about now, Daphne?"

Daphne hugged him back with similar urgency. She felt the familiar pull of the crazy intimacy they used to share as Mick kissed her deeply. "Mick, down baby, we're in public." It was difficult to realize it was five years later, and she was a keynote speaker here at Timberline Valley Inn, all mature and everything. People from the symposium were still wandering about even though it had concluded for the day.

"Daphne, come with me for a bit."

"What? Cocktails?" She responded.

"Maybe later. Just come with me." Mick was feeling desperate to get her alone--just the two of them. Daphne followed Mick as he led the way to the elevators.

Not exactly sure where he was leading, but slightly dubious, Daphne followed Mick to Room 214. It was a familiar room. He scanned the card over the reader and opened the door for her to enter first. It was an exquisite room, as she remembered, with a distant view of Lake Tahoe.

She, Rachel, and Cindy had stayed in this very room. They had been in Timberline Valley rooms so many times over the years. They made numerous, great memories--memories with Mick, Cindy, Rachel, hot-tubbing, dressing up for dinner, Christmastime, and the beauty of Timberline Inn, laughing and drinking themselves silly, getting high, snowboarding till they dropped. Yeah, they were fun girls, all right, and Mick was a delightful boy.

She walked across the room and opened the French doors. It was warm and lovely outside. The distant lake was cobalt blue and smooth as glass, like the sky in the afternoon sun. Sailboats dotted the lake, and an occasional speed boat cut a white line across the water, pulling a tiny skier. Summertime was as beautiful as winter, in its unique way. It was one of those perfect paintings of an afternoon in the mountains.

Mick stood behind her and encircled her with his arms. She clasped his hands in the front. "I've missed you, Mick. It's been five years." She paused. "I haven't been with a man since you."

"No way, Daph! Really? Ah, Daph, I'm so sorry. I wish I could say the same--that I haven't been with a woman, but I screwed up over and over while missing you as life itself. My life was empty without you."

"Mick, it's okay. You've got to realize by now, I know you. You haven't changed that much, and for that, I'm grateful. I wouldn't want to change you."

"Daph, make love with me!" Mick blurted out spontaneously. "Let me make love with you like we used to. Let me show you, Daphne, how much I love you. Daph, you know how good we are together."

Instead of answering, Daphne simply continued gazing out across the panoramic view of the mountains and lake. After a long and thoughtful pause, she turned around and said, "Mick. Turn on the shower."

Mick nearly swallowed his tongue as he abruptly turned and tried to walk into the bathroom with a semblance of decorum. "Daph, you never cease to amaze me." He muttered. He knew the drill, and he knew she remembered.

During the hotel years at Timberline Valley Inn, Rachel and Cindy, Mick, and Daphne always shared a table and ate dinner together at the Timberline restaurant. As they pre-planned it, Mick and Daphne would eat fast, and before Rachel and Cindy finished eating, they would scamper up to the girls' room where Daphne would turn on the shower. Then they'd lock the door and tear their clothes off.

From the bedroom door, Mick watched Daphne pull off her clothes in front of the French doors. "I'll be right there," she called.

The rooms on this wing of the Inn had lovely, large walk-around showers. There were beautiful teak benches on two walls of the shower. A basket on the counter contained a variety of high-end, full-sized body wash, shampoo, and conditioners. There was even a cabinet stocked with toothpaste, two toothbrushes, hairspray, deodorant, mouthwash, disposable razors, shaving cream, and disposable makeup remover pads. A blow dryer sat on a shelf beneath the sink.

Mick undressed quickly and laid his folded clothes on the luggage rack straps in the closet. He couldn't hide he was fully aroused, and more than a little self-conscious as his dick led the way to the shower. He sat down on one of the teak benches and laid a washcloth across his lap. That didn't do much good. He crossed his arms over his lap. Better.

"Mick, I may have gotten a few years older, but I'm still human," Daphne announced as she walked into the shower. "And, Mick, I haven't had sex in five years, so how does that make you feel?"

He didn't say what he wanted to. "Really bad, Daphne, I'm so sorry. Why?" As he thought, "I'm the luckiest asshole in the world," but replied, "inhuman and guilty as sin, Babe, but I can't imagine how you must feel," Mick added with a smirk as he stepped into the spray of the two showerheads. But I have the cure for the disease when you get in."

Daphne stepped in and pressed her naked, gorgeous body against him in a serious way. Just like old times. "I was hoping so."

He grasped around the biceps of her firm arms and kissed her gently on the mouth; he opened her mouth with his tongue and

stroked the inside with his for several long moments. When he withdrew, Daphne reached for the body wash and poured a quarter-sized stream into her hands, rubbing them together. Mick was now busy caressing her neck with his tongue and jumped when her hand encircled his manhood in a businesslike grip. His legs locked automatically and his ass clenched hard in response.

Her soapy hands were more magical than his own as she gave him a few meaningful, long, soapy strokes where he needed it. Mick went wild in her slick hands, out of control in her strong grip. Just when he was about to lose it, she let go and let the warm shower jets spray between them. He relaxed slightly and gathered his equilibrium.

Daphne knew Mick thought he liked to be in charge, but it was a battle he had seldom won. Predictably unpredictable, Daphne dropped to her knees and wrapped her tongue around the head of his dick while grasping his buttocks in both of her hands. Her exquisite lips drew him into her glorious mouth, and she went down on him deep into her throat only once, and as she was lifting her head up, he came with a shout. She finished him off until he grew soft and relaxed his knees to sit on the bench.

Feeling his legs go weak, he sunk slowly onto the teak bench. She sat down beside him and rested her head on his shoulder. It was like five years had never passed, like Daphne's accident had never happened, and they were at it again at their usual Christmastime rendezvous. How could it be five years later?

It didn't take Mick long to regroup. He pulled Daphne onto his lap, and she wrapped her legs around his back and her arms around his neck. It was a gentle embrace as Mick kissed her mouth and her neck.

Knowing that it was Daphne who now needed special attention, he was confident he could take all the time he needed to get her where he wanted her--begging him to finish her up. Mick's hands wandered down her back, massaging gently, slowly. He stroked her lower back in circles with his fist, remembering how she loved it. He could tell she was heating up. Her legs wrapped tighter around him as the minutes ticked by. He was feeling hard and tight, and his balls were aching.

Daphne slipped her hand into that warm space between them, gently steering him into her. She squeezed her calves against his back, driving him into her deep and held that position, rocking slightly.

"My God, Daphne, slow down!" He shouted, alarmed that he would have another PE that would leave her laughing at him. She was an incredible tease, but now it was his turn to leave her weeping. Mick stood up with Daphne, still attached, said, "Now, what are you going to do?"

"I'll show you what, Daph. He lifted her off of him at great sacrifice and turned her around. He found the spot against the tile that had got the most shower spray and steered her there. Then he turned her around, so the water beat against her back. He stood behind her and lifted both her hands above her head and planted them against the tile. "Put your hands up high on the wall, Daph."

She did, with a whimper. "Mick, hurry up." With her glorious ass resting against his lower abdomen and rock-hard erection, he reached a hand between her legs to maneuver. He drove in deep and held still for a few moments without moving, then gently withdrew slightly, repeating as he picked up the pace. Mick knew she liked it. It was one of her favorite positions.

She was panting hard and growling at him to hurry up. But Mick was dictating the pace right now. He reached around and stroked a nipple with one hand as he moved faster. "Mick, now! He didn't oblige her quite yet but kept working on one nipple with his thumb and forefinger and exchanged hands for the other side. As he did so, she began crying, "God Mick, you're going to kill me. Hurry up!"

"Oh yes, baby, you're going to get there, it's just on my terms, my time. Try to relax and remember what we do," and he laughed while he massaged her desire while driving her crazy with need. He knew he wouldn't fail, and she screamed out his name, "Mick, god, Mick, Mick, I love you." She buckled at the knees in waves of orgasms that went on for minutes. He held her as long as he could and then emptied into her with a yell. They both collapsed on the benches. Hopefully, the shower had drowned out their cries of pleasure.

In another fifteen minutes, they were at it again. This time was a little less frantic. "Mick right here, do me here." She had her back to



the wall now and wanted him to take her from the front, standing, which he'd certainly enjoyed obliging her in the past. He slid in easily and felt her naughty little hand softly wrap around and cup his balls, holding and squeezing gently, while he fucked her. The fuck ended abruptly with, "Daphneeeeeee!" He came hard in spasms and had to sit down.

Thoroughly waterlogged and wrinkled, the two exited the shower and toweled off and crawled into bed under the feather duvet to snuggle and soon fell soundly asleep.

Hours later, Daphne awoke first. It was dark out. When they got in bed, it was still light and bright in the mountains. The sun went down around 8:20, so she figured it was maybe about 10 p.m. The clock said 2:30 a.m. Mick was curled up beside her, snoring lightly.

She got up, used the restroom, and quietly got a bottle of water out of the fridge. Feeling refreshed but sleepy, she crawled back in bed and spooned against Mick's back. When she was almost asleep, Mick turned over. Mick was asleep but left his dick on duty when Daphne snuggled against him. They made love two more times before dawn.



*On her way to the Snow Kirk Inn to meet her part-time ski patrol lover, Daphne becomes lost in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Taking a wrong turn and crashing over a cliff, she's severely injured and trapped until an off-duty firefighter rescues her.*

## **Meet Me At The Snow Kirk Inn**

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