

My Sweet Valentine

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Dedication

To all my fans (even if there is just a handful of you), to my friends and my family. A special thanks to graphic designer Paul Murray who allows the free download of the chains used on the cover. My own graphic designer sings your praises.

Author Note

I will be re-working this and other titles in the New Year (2015) so expect some changes in the coming months.

Inspiration:

After writing *Have a Bloody Christmas* I figured I would stick with the whole horror-themed holiday idea. You'll notice that these two (this and *Bloody Christmas*) are even sectioned out the same. Anyway, since I decided to do the 12in12 challenge I desperately needed another novella for my second month into the insanity, pardon, challenge.

As I'm typing this, it's January 28th and I have 9,000 for this month. I need another 11,000. What you are reading now is my idea-gathering before I actually start

writing the story. That's right this inspiration section is nothing more than me gathering my thoughts.

As for where the actual idea for the following novella (short story/whatever this turns out to be) came from, I'm not entirely sure. I did think of the movie *My Bloody Valentine* and cursed the use of 'bloody' in the title as I wanted to use it. Then I thought of some high school nerd being scorned, going insane and killing his classmates at a reunion. But that's too close to the aforementioned movie so I changed it. I don't know if I'll like it better, I'll get back to you on that.

Part 1: February 10th

Her name was Amber. I have loved her since the day I first saw her in high school. It was September, the first day of school and the weather was balmy. She was wearing the school's uniform kilt and her shirt was a loosely tucked in. Her silky blond hair was framed her heart-shaped face in gentle curls and waves that made her blue eyes light up. I decided then that I wanted her for my future wife.

I wanted to ask her out so much but decided that I had to get to know her better first. Some people called me a stalker but I think I was (and still am) hopelessly in love. She was perfect. Not a genius but smart enough to carry on a conversation, not super-model gorgeous but beautiful in her own way. I wanted her so badly.

This year, I'm going to make her mine.

The middle of winter was always her favorite time of year. It because the snow gave everything a surreal and almost impossible feel to the world. It was as if a tree was not really a tree but a piece of art covered in glittering white masses of fluff. Winter also made her remember the day her husband asked her out which was their first date during their final year of high school.

They had been good friends since the first year of high school when he told some creepy guy she had no interest in to leave her alone. From there they had a lot in

common: the same movies, books and television shows. She did have to admit to herself that he enjoyed some genres more than she, and she would never want to play hockey.

It had been a pleasant surprise when he asked her to dinner one cold Valentine's Day. She had thought she would go through her entire high school career with only one creepy stalker following her with other boys only dating her because she was pretty.

Winter also reminded her of when he proposed four years later. He was finishing his final term in business school and she was finishing her second choice in degrees once she found her original career choice as an English teacher would not work out well. This second choice had been nursing which she took up because of the ability to help people. Despite the tougher regime she loved her job.

It had been after a long day of studying that he insisted on a walk in the park. At first she disagreed to the suggestion but not because of the weather. Walking through snow made her exuberant. But she had a project to finish that was due the next day. He persuaded her in the end and half-way through their walk around the man-made lake in the park he got down on one knee and presented her with a slim gold band with interlocking hearts.

The ring was hollow where the two hearts joined, a jewel was supposed to be present there but he said he had no money for the diamond at the time (she could attest to that, schooling and basic survival without outside aide was expensive) but he knew the ring was the one for her. She said no diamond was needed as the ring was perfect without it.

Two years later, he presented her with a single diamond that fit perfectly into the ring. It had been a gift on Valentine's Day, a holiday that she had started to warm up to since they began dating. Every year he surprised her with gifts: roses, stuffed bears that proclaimed their love when squeezed, expensive chocolates that she loved but would never buy for herself and other such things. He hardly ever gave her jewelry unless it would mean something to them as a couple.

She hoped this year would be no different, but only time would tell. Three days previous, he had been called into the office and was told he was flying to his

company's location in Texas. Depending on how well the meetings went, he might not make it back on time for Valentine's Day.

The telephone ringing brought her out of her thoughts and she rushed through the two-story bungalow to grab the slim portable phone. She took a deep breath and hit the "talk" button.

"Hello?" she questioned smoothly.

"I've missed you sweetie," came the distinctively male voice from the other end.

She allowed herself a small grin as heat rose to her cheeks. Even after being with him for ten years, he could still make her blush.

"I've missed you too Greg," she replied with a little giggle.

"I've got some bad news, Amber," Greg returned with a sigh.

"You can't make it back, can you?" Amber asked before he could speak.

The disappointment must have been clear in her voice since Greg heaved another sigh. Amber imagined him running his hand over his thick dark hair.

"Well it's not looking good," Greg affirmed softly.

"Oh," Amber stated.

She was not disappointed in him, it was not his fault that he worked hard and became the head of his department. It was not his fault that he had to travel to other headquarters to attend meetings every two months. She did miss him though.

"If Henderson agrees to the terms of the contract, I can finish up and be there mid-day on the 14th. There might not be any special surprises thought, but we'd be together," Greg explained quickly.

"That's all that matters," Amber told him in a joyful voice.

"We can always go back to the lake," Greg suggested.

Amber wondered when he would finally suggest that. It had been a few years since they had been back to the place where he proposed.

"That would be perfect," Amber agreed wholeheartedly.

"Good, I'll call once I know for sure if I can make it back," Greg told her.

He was ecstatic, she could tell by his voice. Amber was sure he was thinking of what he could do with such a short time frame.

"All right, I'll talk to you then," Amber returned with a broad grin, knowing full

well he could hear her smile in her voice.

“I love you,” Greg uttered.

“I love you too,” Amber said in reverence.

Exchanging the words of dedication never lost their appeal to them. The words never lost their meaning, or their spark. Amber always felt the familiar burst of emotion that made her warm all over when he said those words.

Dial tone came over the line and with a sigh, Amber hung up the phone. She was just putting the phone in its cradle when the doorbell rang. With a little gasp of surprise she began running to the door, wondering who would be visiting her without calling first. Her friends and family always knew to call as Greg might not be there or she might be at work. She did not have a set schedule at work but neither did Greg. Somehow this worked better for them than if they had a set time to leave and go to work.

She made it to the door and peaked out the peep hole. No one was there. Amber unlocked the door and pulled it open to reveal her empty porch. A burst of cold air refreshed her and she took a single step outside.

Something crinkled under her foot and she looked down. She gaped at the dozen red roses she almost stepped on and swooped down to scope the flowers into her arms. She remained framed by the door as she peered down the street to catch the delivery man before he ran off. She saw no one on the street and because her neighbours had been kind enough to shovel her sidewalk and drive-way, there were no footprints in the snow.

She frowned lightly and stepped back into the house, locking the door behind her before finally staring at the flowers again. A single white card marred the red and she blinked at it before pulling it free from the roses embrace. It read simply “To my sweet Valentine” in exquisite gold script.

Amber chuckled lightly as she made her way to the kitchen. It seemed like Greg was all ready making sure this Valentine’s Day was one she would not forget. A chill came unbidden along her spine but she assumed it was simply from the cold. Red roses only had one meaning after all and she should not be concerned about them appearing on her front step. Greg had been doing sweet little things for her since they

first met...

Valentine's Day, 14 years prior:

Amber pulled her locker door open and glanced in the magnetic mirror she had hung there. Her hair was misbehaving, frizzing out in all directions and she wondered at her own sanity for getting it cut off before school started. She had loved her almost knee length blond hair but her friends said that the nickname Rapunzel would never leave her if she kept it so long. So she had conceited and chopped off close to two feet of hair.

She sighed and forced a large science textbook into her locker. She snatched the math textbook and shoved it into her all ready full backpack. Something crumpled and she hoped the worksheet, or notes would still be in one piece when she made it to her next class. She never thought high school would be so different then elementary school. Apparently a lot changed going from one year to the next.

Her backpack decided to rebel, as most inanimate objects do at the worst possible time. It slipped from the precarious position she had placed it in and she let out a little yelp as she scrambled to grab it before it tumbled to the floor. She almost whacked her head off the metal locker and felt a nail break as she grasped the strap in one hand and prevented the fall.

She felt as though she had just saved a child from a deadly plunge into some kind of abyss and breathed a sigh of relief. She brushed back a curled strand of hair with a grumble and flung her heavy load onto one shoulder. The sound of the locker slamming shut was drowned out by the ruckus of students moving around her. With her locker now locked she turned and almost let out a shout of surprise.

Standing in front of her was the boy that had been stalking her since the beginning of the year. He was of medium height and reed thin with greasy looking brown hair that covered his forehead. His eyes were an interesting shade of brown and despite the smattering of pimples on his face, he had good features. In his hand was a somewhat wilted red rose.

"Hi, I wanted to give this to you," he told her.

Amber blinked at the offered flower with its deep red color and missing petals here and there. She then remembered that it was Valentine's Day and wondered why of all the boys in the school that her creepy stalker had to be the one to give her anything. She had hoped someone else had noticed her but it was to no avail. She didn't think she had become that unnoticeable without her long hair.

"Uh, thanks but that's okay I really don't have anywhere to put it anyway," she muttered lamely.

He stared at her for a long moment and Amber realized she did not even know his name. Amber knew that even if she was acquainted with him, his appearances wherever she went in the immense high school would still disturb her.

"But I got it especially for you," he informed her.

"Uh, thanks, really, but, um," she tried and knew she sounded unintelligent.

"I know it's kind of wilted and stuff but I don't really have a lot of money. I still wanted to get you something though because I really like you," he went on to explain with his arm still extended to offer her the floppy rose.

"That's really sweet and everything but I don't even know you and it's kind of weird," Amber finally admitted.

She tried to shrink back away from him but her locker prevented an escape. Students crowded the hallway but were uninterested in the scene as class would be starting in a few minutes. Class trumped a conversation between two strangers, especially since tardiness was met with detention and no one wanted detention on a Friday.

"Well my name is Russell and I really like you," Russell admitted with a scuffling of his shoes.

"Um, well that's nice but I'm not interested in boys right now," Amber vainly attempted to make him leave.

"Oh, but I still want you to have the rose. Maybe you'll change your mind in a few months or something and we can hang out," Russell insisted.

He thrust the rose towards her again, his grip tight on the stem. Amber would have felt sorry for him if he had not been hiding around her for the past few months. It seemed that whenever she turned around he was there. Even if she was in the

library when her teacher had booked it specifically for a class, he was sitting there a few feet away just staring at her. It was nightmarish.

“That’s okay, really. Besides class is about to start and I don’t think it would survive in my bag or locker or anything,” Amber quickly uttered and looked for an escape route.

There was none. She was pressed against the lockers as he took up all the room in front of her. Unless she was willing to push him out of the way, she was trapped. Besides, pushing him out of the way would be rude and she figured that despite his scrawny frame, he might try to grab her or something.

“Hey man, the girl doesn’t want the rose, just leave her alone,” another voice entered the conversation.

Amber turned swiftly to the sound of the new voice and stared at the other boy who was suddenly at her side. He was a bit taller than Russell and had thick dark hair with deep brown eyes.

“Who the heck are you?” Russell asked with vehemence in his voice.

Amber hoped they would not break out into a yelling match or worse some kind of physical altercation. She had always wished for two boys to fight over her when she was younger but now that it could become a reality, she wondered at her sanity.

“I’ve got the locker beside her. For one, you’re blocking it and class is going to start. For two, I’ve seen you creeping around behind her and it’s not cool,” the new boy said as he crossed his arms over his chest.

Amber recognized him and wondered how she had been so blind as to not notice him before. Between school work, socializing with new and old friends alike and Russell (as she now knew he was called) stalking her, she figured she did not have the mental capability to notice a new face right beside her.

“I’m not creeping around behind her,” Russell denied with a scowl.

Amber wondered if she could slide along the lockers and escape that way. She glanced to the open space on her right and deemed the idea a failure. Her backpack would likely get caught on the locks hanging from the lockers and she would be stuck.

“Even if you’re not stalking her, she doesn’t want the rose and you’re going to make us all late for class. Just go away,” Amber’s locker neighbour commanded and

even made the shooing motions with his hand.

Russell glared at him the grumbled something under his breath. He gave Amber a final fleeting look before turning on his heel and stomping away. Amber let out a breath she had not realized she had been holding and turned to look at her locker neighbour.

“Thanks for that, he wouldn’t leave,” Amber uttered with a smile.

His face lost the angry edge it had before and Amber noticed he had a chiselled jaw with a smidgen of black stubble across his cheeks and chin. His nose was a bit narrow for his sculpted cheeks but he was cute.

“No problem. I wasn’t lying when I said I noticed him creeping around you. He might be weird but he has good taste. I mean, not that it’s a good thing that he has good taste. Let’s start over and forget I said all that. My name’s Greg, what’s yours?”

Part 2: February 11th

Back in grade nine, I tried to give Amber a rose for Valentine’s Day. She rejected it and some other guy told me to go away. I don’t know who he was but over the next few years he started hanging out with her more and more. Because of *him*, I couldn’t get close to Amber. He was the whole reason she kept rejecting me. Over and over I’d ask her out: to dances, to the movies, to dinner, to go ice skating but she said no every time. It wasn’t fair.

She dated other guys, why couldn’t she give me a chance just once? Then she started dating him. Gregory Michelson, the guy who told me to go away, the straight-A student who just happened to be on the soccer team in the spring and the hockey team in the winter. I hated him then and I hate him now. He took her from me and I’ll get him back this year.

Amber huffed and tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. It was past 11PM and she was technically supposed to be on her way home but paperwork had her

sitting at the nurses' station still filling things in. She heard the bell signalling someone needed assistance and waited a moment before another nurse went to answer the call.

Besides the quick steps of the other nurse and the whispering chatter of the two nurses behind her it was silent. A cough broke through the still air and Amber knew it was from an older gentleman who had terminal cancer. They could only make him comfortable until he finally passed. Amber only hoped it was not on the 14th, his ailing wife would never survive the implications of that.

Another cough broke through her thoughts and she rubbed her temples in slight aggravation. She thought back to Greg's surprise gift of roses and allowed herself a small smile as she continued on her paperwork. The coughing stopped and Amber looked up for a moment, listening for the signal that the cougher was failing.

No insistent beeping came through the dead air and she nodded to herself. She peered down at her watch and noted it to be 11:30PM. She let out a little puff of air before going back to her paperwork.

She usually was not so behind on it but the afternoon had been full of demands and she could not do her work in between as she normally did. She was not complaining too much, there was no one waiting at home for her at the moment. This made her both sorrowful and content. Sorrowful because Greg wasn't home and content because he would not be trying to stay up late even if he had to work early in the morning.

Finally Amber finished her paperwork, placed all the files in their appropriate places and waved her good-byes at the other two nurses. The brunette that had replied to the bell had not come back yet but Amber was not worried. The older woman in that room had problems understanding what they said. Her memory was failing and everything had to be re-explained to her multiple times before she understood. It was in vain since the woman would forget again a few hours later then demanded to know why she was in the hospital.

Amber left via the creaky elevator and was soon striding quickly towards her silver sedan. It was coated in a fresh but thin layer of snow. She started the engine to warm it before brushing off the whiteness covering her car.

The air was chilly and the night was silent. Nary a car passed on the street and the slowly cascading snow combined with the dull glow of street lights made her think she was in a dream. She took a moment to appreciate the scenery around her before locking herself into the car and pulling out of the parking lot.

Home was not far away and she walked most days. But Greg worried for her safety at night and insisted she take the car when she would be working late. Even with his absence, she obliged his suggestion. She pulled into the drive-way a few moments later and dragged her weary body from the car.

She noted that there was snow gathering in the driveway and on the sidewalk. Amber knew she would be shovelling it away the next day if it kept up. She did not expect the neighbours to do it every day since they were well past retirement age after all. Amber stepped through the snow wondering when she should get up to shovel and almost stepped on the package sitting on her front porch before she saw it.

She stared at the bright red box that had miraculously remained clear of snow and blinked a few times in wonder. It was her favorite brand of chocolate, a brand that she did not buy for herself because it was too expensive to indulge in every day. A folded white card sat tapped to the box, the same kind of card that had come with the roses from the day before.

Amber crouched down and gently lifted the box into her arms before opening the small card and seeing the same message of "To my sweet Valentine" written in the same flowing golden script. Amber smiled broadly and looked around for footprints besides her own. The snow had covered them and she wondered how Greg was getting her gifts delivered from 1,500 miles away.

She thought about this conundrum as she unlocked the front door and strode inside her warm home. She placed the box of chocolates on the table in the front entrance that was normally used for mail. The door was closed and locked and she was hanging up her coat when she realized that Greg must have arranged the deliveries with a friend before he left.

She chuckled lightly at the thought and pulled off her shoes. They were placed on the shoe rack by the door to dry while she untied her mid-back length curls. Amber

lifted the box of chocolates into her arms before starting to make her way upstairs.

A sense of being watched came over her and Amber half-turned to look at the closed and locked front door. She half-expected to see that someone had snuck in behind her and was ready to grab her on the stairs. No one was there and Amber shuddered before hurrying up the stairs.

After changing the alarm was set to 8AM and she cuddled in bed. The feeling of being watched had left for the most part and she sighed, berating herself for being so easily frightened. The outer wrapping was peeled off the chocolates and she indulged in one before turning out her bedside lamp and going to sleep.

Valentine's Day, 10 Years Prior:

Amber flicked a loose strand of hair behind her ear, happy that her hair had grown back swiftly. Unfortunately it had become curly rather than straight as it was prior to the major cut four years ago. She still had some resentment towards her friends over that since her hair had always been her biggest concern.

It was Wednesday, an awkward time to celebrate the day of love and Amber felt slightly frustrated. She had separated from her most recent boyfriend two months ago and would be alone for the fourth year in a row. She always seemed to fall out of love with whatever boy she was dating around winter time. She assured herself that four boys in four years was not a big deal. Other girls were all ready deep into the double digits now.

Amber shook her head to force the thoughts out and continued on her walk to the bus that would take her home. Disappointment ran through her veins like it was on some crazy marathon when she saw Greg's rusted blue sedan sitting in the student parking lot.

He had been avoiding her all day and not being able to talk to her best guy friend about her problems was frustrating. Tina and Susan were great to rant to about relationships but as the only single one in the trio she could only go so far before they started talking about their Valentine's Day plans with their beaus. Amber was happy for them but it got tedious when they mentioned that they would be going to dinner

and getting gifts from their boyfriends. It was especially tiresome when all she could do was rant and rave about being single.

Amber looked away from the rusted blue sedan to find her bus. She did not notice that the owner of the sedan was trotting up behind her, trying to catch up to her lengthy, quick stride. As her bus came into view, Amber sighed and made her way towards the open maw of the yellow monstrosity.

“Amber, wait up,” came a shout from behind her.

She turned to see Greg bounding up to her. His shaggy dark hair was half-hidden under a backwards blue cap and his blue windbreaker was still open despite the snow blowing around him. She paused with a sense of relief. Maybe he would offer to drive her home so Russell would not try to stalk her again. He still had not taken the obvious hints that she was not interested and still bombarded her with gifts every Valentine’s Day since the rose-incident in grade nine.

“Where have you been all day?” Amber asked in an accusing tone.

“I’m sorry, but I was nervous,” Greg admitted.

He tucked his hands into his pockets and stared down at his shuffling feet. The pose looked awkward on his tall frame and Amber could not help but smile. Then his words hit her and she wondered what he would have to be nervous about.

“Nervous?” Amber questioned her thoughts.

“Yeah,” Greg affirmed.

Amber refrained from rolling her eyes at the comment that did nothing to answer her actual question. Greg swallowed hard and she saw that he was shifting his weight from foot to foot as his shoulders ducked down a bit. Nervous was an understatement, he seemed out-right petrified.

“What are you nervous about?” Amber enquired with a curious tilt to her head.

“Well, you, actually,” Greg confessed with a blush.

“Me?” Amber questioned in awe.

“Yeah, I wanted to talk to you all day but every time I tried to I would get all sweaty and my stomach started to flip flop. Then I decided to heck with it and yeah,” Greg explained as he smiled lightly.

“Okay,” Amber tried with a confused blink.

“Do you want to go out to dinner tonight?” Greg finally burst out.

Amber noted that he looked relieved. She smiled at him and wondered why he would be so nervous about asking her out to dinner. They had dinner at each other's houses all the time and just because it was Valentine's Day did not make their friendly dinners any different.

“Of course, but we have dinner all the time together. There's no need to be nervous. Is your mom making pork chops tonight?” Amber allowed herself a small giggle at his foolish behavior.

He stared at her for a long moment as if he just spotted a rare and new kind of animal that should be watched with caution. Amber blinked and frowned lightly.

“Um, I was thinking more of just the two of us. At a restaurant. Alone. On Valentine's Day,” Greg managed to get out in stuttering sentences.

It finally clicked to Amber on why he was so nervous. He was asking her out on a date, not to dinner at his house with his family. She suddenly felt the fluttery feeling in her stomach that he must have been feeling all day.

“Oh,” Amber merely muttered in wonder.

“So, is that a yes or a no?” Greg tried to joke as he cleared his throat.

Amber felt her heart leap into her throat then start pattering uncontrollably. Her palms began to sweat and she hoped the books and notes she held against her chest would not be ruined because of the excess moisture. Heat rose to her cheeks and she burst into a sunny grin.

“That's a yes,” Amber giggled and nodded.

“Good, I'll pick you up at 6, okay?” Greg breathed out looking exceptionally happy.

“It's a date,” Amber happily laughed and gave him a quick hug before boarding the bus.

Neither noticed Russell watching from his perch on the raised seats of the bus. When Amber virtually skipped inside he hunched down into his seat and watched her pass and sit with one of the girls she normally talked to. Happy squealing came next and Russell scowled. He glared at Greg as the other teen high-fived one of his friends and jogged towards his car with an elated grin on his face.

“Oh God what am I going to do about this mess?” Amber wailed to herself as she looked at her face in the mirror.

Her make-up was light: only mascara and a bit of lip gloss. The knee-length red dress had been saved from its wrinkles with quick ironing skills. Even her shoes seemed to be sparkling along with the simple heart shaped earrings and heart shaped pendant on its silver chain. The problem was her misbehaving hair.

“Mom, help!” Amber shouted miserably from the bathroom.

She heard shuffling in the hall and turned in time to see her mother pop her head into the bathroom door. The older blond burst into a happy grin and her blue eyes lit in mirth.

“Oh honey you look lovely,” mother exclaimed and wrapped her into a hug.

“My hair’s a mess,” Amber bemoaned again and pulled at a strand of mischievous locks.

Mother pulled back from the hug and stared at Amber with consideration. She frowned slightly then gestured for Amber to sit on the closed lid of the toilet. Amber felt the brush run through her hair a couple of times then mother set to work with the unruly blond locks with her hands.

“You never should have chopped it all off in one go,” mother sighed out.

“I know, I know, I’ll never listen to my friends again,” Amber moaned in frustration.

“This happened to me too, I chopped it all off at once and it curled just like yours did,” mother explained as she worked a bit of styling foam into the curls in front of her.

“You could have warned me,” Amber muttered with a scowl.

“Well I didn’t expect you to come back with two feet of hair missing. I was thinking a few inches,” mother sighed out as the curls began to tame under her hands.

“I know, I know, but this is a date with Greg, I can’t look all wild-nature-chick on him,” Amber grouched.

Mother laughed at the thought and finally smoothed down the rest of the lengthy

curls under her hands. They heard the baritones of two males talking downstairs and Amber gasped as mother released her hair.

“Oh God I’m late!” Amber exclaimed as she heard her father talking with none other than Greg.

“Sweetie, he’s only just arrived, you’re not late. Now hold still while I fix your eyes,” mother admonished.

“What’s wrong with my eyes?” Amber blinked owlishly at her.

“Honey, he sees you with only mascara and lip gloss every day. We have to add a bit of umph,” mother explained as she picked up an eyeliner pencil and some glittery eye shadow.

“Why didn’t I think of that?” Amber fretted and followed her mother’s instructions as eyeliner was lightly placed on her lids.

“Experience dear,” mother chuckled and lightly fanned out the liner before gently applying a thin coat of eye shadow.

When she was finished, Amber stared at herself in the mirror. The effect was stunning, a light touch of extra make-up and she felt like a super model. Then a curl bounced out of place and she groaned again as mother chuckled.

Greg nervously laughed as he glanced down the hallway where he could vaguely hear Amber and her mother talking in hushed voices. He was used to talking to Amber’s father but this was different. This was the night he was approaching him as a suitor, not a friend of his only daughter. Mike and Steve, Amber’s older brothers were standing nearby, looking at him with a mixture of amusement and suspicion.

Mike was 19 to Amber’s 17, Steve was 21. Both were tall and brawny as most football players were which made Greg a bit self-conscious about his lean runner’s frame. He had always wanted to add more muscle but that would slow him down on the soccer field and on the track. It would be better for hockey but he all ready had a delicate balance of speed and strength as it was.

Finally the clacking of high heels could be heard and Greg swivelled his head to see Amber come out of the bathroom door. He felt his heart skip a beat and refrained from wiping his moist palms on his pressed black slacks. He could not believe this was

the same Amber he saw every day at school and on the weekend with friends.

“Hi,” he said sheepishly and tried not to kick himself over the lame greeting.

“Hi,” she repeated back and Greg was happy to note that she blushed.

“It’s a school night so have her back by 10PM,” Amber’s father suddenly broke in.

Greg jumped and Mike snickered. Steve smirked and Amber merely nodded.

“Sure, yes,” Greg sputtered out.

“If you don’t, we’ll coming looking for you. Remember, we know where you live,” Steve mentioned with a wink as he crossed his bulging arms over his broad chest.

“Right,” Greg mumbled as Steve chuckled.

“Steve, don’t be so mean,” Amber chided with a scowl.

“It’s okay, I’m used to it. You ready to go?” Greg questioned with a smile as he offered her his hand.

He hoped it was too sweaty. He hoped she wouldn’t draw back from the dampness of his palm with a disgusted look on her face. Then he remembered that her nose crinkled up cutely when she was disgusted and wondered why he would even think of that. The sudden placement of her hand into his own jolted him back to the present and he stared at her.

Her eyes were glowing in happiness and he noticed the eye shadow on her lids. She never wore eye shadow to school. In fact, the only time he could remember her wearing any extra make-up was when she went on important social outings. He gulped and returned her grin. With a nod to her parents, he walked her outside to his waiting car, his stomach curling itself into knots.

Amber seemed completely oblivious to his plight and he was grateful for that. He had meant nothing by rescuing her from that creep back in their first year of high school. But when she had finally turned to him he was struck by how pretty she actually was. He had a girlfriend at the time and was happy to be friends with Amber but the other girl dumped him. Amber began to replace his thoughts of rejection and he realized how much he actually liked her a few weeks ago when they were at the movies with their groups of friends.

He had peered over during a humours part in the movie and her bouncing curls and twinkling laugh made his heart flutter and his breathing stop. Luckily the theater

was dark and no one had seen the dopey grin he knew he had on his face. He realized then that he was always happier with her and made the leap of faith to take their relationship to the next level. He could only hope that he didn't screw things up and she would be by his side for the rest of his life.

Part 3: February 12th

It's taken me so long to finally catch up with her again. I mean, it's only been ten years but she moved around a lot. First she moved for school and I didn't know where she had gone. But when she moved into the big city, it wasn't hard to find her *husband's* name. That bastard had gone ahead and married MY wife.

This year it changes, just like I said before. This year I'm going to get my revenge on that bastard and Amber will be mine for the taking. He'll finally realize just how big of a mistake he made when he told me to leave her alone back in grade nine. And she'll realize what a life she missed out on. She'll see how happy I would have made her. She'll realize just how much she missed and she'll regret not dating me all those years before and finding out sooner. She'll regret missing out on all the lost time.

I can hardly wait to see her smiling face. Those beautiful blue eyes and the perfect blond hair. It makes me sick thinking of all the time wasted because of him. It took me so long to get back to her and I won't waste a moment of being with her now. She'll never leave my side. Ever.

Amber sighed as she pushed the snow down her drive way. She hefted the shovel and tossed the gathered snow into the growing pile on her lawn. She yawned hugely and waved at a neighbour as they drove past in their car. It was 9AM and she was about half way through shovelling the four inches of snow gathered on her lawn and sidewalks.

She wasn't complaining exactly. It was good cardio exercise plus the cold chill in the air made her feel refreshed. Plus when she was done she could curl up by the

fireplace with a mug of hot chocolate and read. She frowned lightly as she pushed more snow towards her lawn. She missed Greg again.

When they cleared the snow together they would collapse into a snowball fight sometime during the process of trying to clean snow. Then they would be soaking wet to finish the chore before running inside. Wet clothes would be flung down at the door and they would go about making hot chocolate in the light shirts and shorts they layered under the heavier clothes. Once the hot chocolate was made, they would snuggle under the big red blanket and read together by the fire.

They would finally venture out of the cocoon around lunch time to eat before snuggling back into the warmth. Amber would reluctantly get out of the cozy position in his arms before getting ready for work or bed. It depended what time she actually worked. She was happier when she was on the day shift because then she could snuggle with Greg in front of the fire place until they went to sleep that night.

She pushed the shovel along the driveway, her earlier enthusiasm gone with the pining for her husband. She was used to this emptiness as he had to travel a lot for the company. It never got easier the more times he did leave and she suspected it never would.

As she piled more snow onto her lawn she heard snow being crunched under heavy boots. She peeked out from under her wool cap to see a tall slim man walking by. His brown hair was tied back in a low pony tail and he struck her as familiar. She blinked a few times as he continued down the street.

She tried to figure out where she had seen him before but by working at a busy hospital for six years she had seen hundreds of thousands of people. Patients, visitors to patients, hundreds of people passed her on a daily bases. She frowned and shook her head at the vague feeling that she should know that particular man but pushed it aside to finish her chore.

An hour later she was curled underneath the big red blanket with a mug of hot chocolate in front of her. She was trying to read but the words were not sticking and she found herself re-reading the same sentence over and over again. Finally Amber put down the book and stretched out to take a nap.

Someone knocked on the door and she jolted, noting that she had in fact fallen asleep for about half an hour. She struggled to get out of the tangle of blankets and almost fell to the floor in her haste. Free from the warmth she shivered as she made her way to the door in a quick trot.

She peered through the peep hole but again, no one was there. She scowled and opened the door. Instead of stepping out in her bare feet she peeked down in curiosity. Sitting on the clean front porch was an enormous white teddy bear clutching a sparkly red heart with the words “I love you” embroidered in white. Amber chuckled lightly and lifted the bear, noticing as she brought it close that a card was tied around its neck.

Amber pressed the bear against her chest to remove the card and it startled her by proclaiming its love for her. Amber giggled again and pulled free the same card that had appeared on both the roses and the chocolate box. She again tried to look down the street but saw nothing but snow and empty streets.

With a small shake of her head, Amber retreated back into the house and its offered warmth. She hugged the bear close to her chest and wondered how Greg’s delivery man was so perfectly timed to get her when she would take too long to get to the door. All of his friends had been fast runners so in retrospect, she knew they did not need her to be delayed for long to dash off before she spotted them.

Amber settled back into the red mass of blankets and snuggled with the teddy bear as she thought of her husband’s cute little surprises. The little surprises helped her through the day when she felt as if something horrible was about to happen even when she knew that was impossible.

The feeling of being watched had not gone completely away either. Amber looked at the bear in her arms and a smile graced her features when thoughts of her husband over-rode the depressing musings. She fell into a light sleep but still wished the house did not feel so large and empty.

Valentine’s Day, six years prior:

Amber rubbed her wilting eyelids for the umpteenth time as she read over her

rough draft of an essay that was due. She checked the clock and saw it to be nearing 9PM. Greg was lounging around in the living room of their shared apartment and she assumed he was seeing if they could afford to live in the apartment another month.

She massaged her temples this time as she felt the beginnings of a headache coming on. She only had five more pages to type and she could call it a night. She bleary continued on her mission and wondered how much caffeine she would need the next morning when she had to awaken early for a morning class.

She heard shuffling from behind her and did not bother to turn. Strong hands fell upon her shoulders a moment later and began to gently rub them. Amber smirked and leaned back into the touch as Greg leaned down and kissed her neck gently.

“Want to go for a walk?” he questioned lightly.

The breath against her ear made her shiver lightly in pleasure. His words hit her a moment later and she turned to stare at him incredulously. He was grinning at her and she frowned lightly. Taking a walk now would mean having to stay up even later to finish her essay.

“I can’t right now. I have to finish this,” Amber told him with a shake of her head.

Greg scowled lightly at the statement and ran a hand through his hair. He looked at the mass of papers and books she had piled around her laptop and Amber saw a thoughtful look cross his face. She assumed the conversation was over and turned back to finish typing.

“The air will clear your head though,” Greg pointed out from behind her.

“I know but I can’t take an hour out. I’ll be up past midnight if I do. You know I have to be up early tomorrow morning,” Amber rebutted.

“It won’t be that long a walk. I just want to go down to the lake and back, half hour tops,” Greg refuted.

“Greg,” Amber whined with a little sigh.

Greg laughed lightly at the whine in her throat then began rubbing her shoulders and neck again. Amber huffed lightly and shook her head, breaking out of his touch. She rolled her shoulders and went back to the work in front of her.

“Come on, you love walking in the snow. Look it’s even snowing those big fluffy flakes you love. It’s a sign,” Greg piped up.

Amber looked out the window in front of her and saw that he was right. Big clumps of snow were cascading down in a swirl of sparkling white flakes. Amber bit her lip and began calculating out how much time it would actually take them on the little walk. She finally sighed and heaved herself out of the chair.

“Fine, but we can’t stay out there too long. I want to be in bed before 1AM tonight,” Amber relented.

Greg let out a little whoop of excitement and rushed to pull on boots, a winter jacket, a scarf and gloves in no particular order. Amber chuckled at his enthusiasm and tugged on her winter boots. She wound a scarf around her neck next then donned her winter coat. She tugged on a winter hat before shoving her hands into gloves.

Greg placed his keys in his winter coat and Amber made sure she had hers. Greg oft times forgot where he put his keys then could not find them. Amber swore there was some kind of black hole in his coats that swallowed up his keys at the worst possible moments and spit them out when he was about to get a new set.

They strode out of the modest apartment and took the elevator down to the main floor. Greg wrapped an arm around her shoulders to hold her close as they stepped into the snowy weather.

The cold air washed over her, chilling her cheeks instantly and tousling the loose hair she had not managed to tuck into her hat. She shivered slightly but a smile came to her lips and she snuggled closer into Greg. Their footsteps crunched in the freshly fallen snow and Amber noticed theirs were the only set of tracks. No one else loved winter as much as she did to brave the snow after 9PM.

The walk to the lake was brisk and only took about ten minutes. The lake itself was situation in a park that was normally filled with children. Tonight there were only a few teens gathered in a group beside the swing set. Amber peered at them and noted that they were actually swinging and not doing anything illegal as she had first thought.

The view of the teens disappeared as they stepped onto the path that would lead to the man-made lake. It only took a few more minutes before the water appeared and Greg stopped on the path to look into the depths. Amber cuddled into him and in the distance saw the other side of the half frozen water.

Suddenly Greg pulled away and Amber blinked in confusion. She turned to ask him what was going on but found him kneeling on one leg in the snow. Her heart leaped into her chest and her throat tightened. Greg smiled at her and she felt heat rising to her cheeks as he pulled a little blue box from a pocket in his coat.

He fumbled with it a bit because of his gloves but finally got it open to reveal a slim gold band with interlocking hearts. The middle of the hearts was empty, as if a diamond should be sitting there but there was no sparkling gem.

It finally clued into Amber that today was Valentine's Day. She had not noticed before as all her attention had been focused on classes. It made her feel silly when she had replied in the negative to the questions about what she was doing tonight. Her friends had looked so upset for her and she had not been sure why at the time.

"Amber," Greg said her name lightly; reverently as if it was a prayer he was sending up to God.

"Oh Greg," Amber muttered back and wondered if he even heard her.

"You've made me so happy these past four years. I want to keep being as happy as I have been. I want to be with you until we both grow so old we have to shout to hear each other. I know there's no diamond in this ring because you know neither of us could have afforded it. But I still want you to be my wife and I promise that we'll never have to think about surviving month to month. So, will you be my Valentine forever?" Greg uttered quickly.

Amber felt tears welling up in her eyes and found that her voice did not seem to want to work. She swallowed hard a few times and nodded quickly.

"Yes, yes, yes," she finally exclaimed in a laugh as the tears tumbled down her cheeks.

Greg stood and kissed her before pulling off her left glove and reverently sliding the ring without its diamond onto her finger. Amber let out a little yelp of excitement and wrapped her arms around his neck, kissing him heatedly on the lips. He wrapped her in his arms and they stood there kissing for a few long moments.

Finally they pulled away and Amber looked down at the ring on her finger with a mixture of awe and joy. The lack of a diamond had not surprised her. Whatever Greg had in his personal savings account would have been completely demolished on the

band alone, never mind affording a diamond.

“It’s perfect, even without a diamond,” Amber told him and reluctantly pulled her glove back on.

“You’ll get a diamond for it, I promise. It may take a few years but I won’t leave it bare like that,” Greg assured her and wrapped her in a hug again.

Amber nodded and decided against arguing with him about the need of a diamond. She would much rather stay cuddled in his arms for the moment. He pulled away slightly but Amber realized it was only to guide them back down the path towards home. She leaned her head on his shoulder and sighed happily.

She touched the ring through her glove and grinned again as the snow fell around them. Someone shouted and Amber noticed it was the teens. They were looking over at them with curious grins. Amber laughed and waved as Greg chuckled along with her when she shouted out:

“We’re engaged!”

Part 4: February 13th

It’s almost here: the day I see her, the day she will be mine forever. I can’t wait. I won’t be able to sleep tonight, I know it. But I just have to wait 23 more hours and she’ll be by my side forever and he’ll be out of the picture for good.

She’ll be so happy to see me after all these years. After I tell her how great I’ve become and how amazing life with me will be. I can’t wait for her to hug me and kiss me like she’s kissed him. She’ll forget all about him though, I know it. I can’t wait.

Amber woke to the sun streaming through her window and remembered blearily that she had forgotten to close her curtains the night before. Well, she thought she had closed them but they were wide open. That made her worried but she pushed that feeling down. Amber grumbled to herself and sat up. She ran a hand over her hair to somewhat calm it before making her way to the window and peering outside.

More snow had fallen during the night and Amber smiled at the sparkling

whiteness. She hugged herself and allowed the warm air of her own breathing fog up the cold window in front of her. Once she was awake enough, she checked the clock and saw it to be 7AM. She groaned and made her way out of the room. The problem with waking up so early was that once she was awake, she stayed awake.

She was off until the 15th and hoped Greg would be back on time to celebrate Valentine's Day. It was the day when everything important happened to them: their first date, their first kiss, their first time moving into the same apartment and their engagement. Amber had almost been tempted to have her wedding on Valentine's Day but moved it to March 1st instead. No one was willing to attend a winter wedding and half her family had to drive a long distance.

Amber shook these thoughts from her head as she finished up her morning cleansing routine and trotted down to the kitchen in her bathrobe to start the coffee machine. Once the coffee was brewing, she darted back upstairs to dress for the day.

As she was pulling on her pants the doorbell rang and she cursed. She quickly threw on her robe to cover her bra-clad chest and ran back downstairs. Just as the previous days, there was no one at the front porch when she peered through the peephole.

She did see footprints in the snow this time and noticed them to be large, wide and heavy looking. She smirked at the male-looking footprints and unlocked her door. She looked down without a second thought to see a bright red bag decorated with pink hearts.

Amber peeked down either side of her street but saw nothing of the special delivery man. The street seemed strangely empty and she realized just how alone she felt. With a mental shudder she shrugged and picked up the bag. Once the door was locked again she opened the bag to see a rather larger black velvet box.

Her curiosity piqued higher as she opened the simple gold clasp on the box to reveal a gold pendent of two interlocking hearts with a diamond at their joint hanging from a gold chain. She smiled and immediately put the necklace on because it matched her engagement ring perfectly. Amber dabbed at the wetness of her eyes with the end of her robe and hoped Greg would make it home tomorrow. She had no idea what she would get him for Valentine's Day but just being able to see his smile

would over-shadow his surprise gifts.

That night Amber shifted through her and Greg's DVD collection for something she had not watched in six years. She grumbled at the sheer amount of DVD's they owned and pushed aside a few comedy films. She let out a little sound of accomplishment when the plain covered DVD case came into view.

Amber sat back on her haunches and popped open the case. Inside was a single DVD with "Our Special Day" written in her own neat hand in black marker. She giggled to herself and popped it into the DVD player. As she settled back to watch her wedding day she snuggled into the big red blanket on the couch and hoped Greg would be back soon.

The house seemed so empty and foreboding without him. She found herself starting at every little sound. Creaks came through the night and she swore that they came from the back porch. She was always too afraid to check in case someone actually was there so would convince herself that it was merely the house settling.

The past few nights it had been worse. She felt as if she was being watched and had closed all the curtains in the house. The feeling would not be alleviated so easily and she found herself looking over her shoulder at the strangest times. She had even locked the bathroom door that afternoon without realizing it.

She sighed and wondered how Greg would feel about finally getting a dog. That was one subject they could not agree on. Greg made a good point about neither of them being around enough to take care of a dog daily. Amber wanted a dog, a big mean looking dog just for protection though.

Amber trusted in the security system but a friend at work told her that anyone could cut the wires of a security system and sneak into a person's house. Even if they didn't cut all the wires the response time for police to get to Amber's part of town was half an hour. Amber knew a lot could happen in half an hour.

She tried to concentrate on the joyous video playing in front of her but found that she could not. She flicked off the DVD and cuddled deep into the blankets wishing for someone to talk to. She wished Greg did not have to travel so much. She hoped he would agree to get a dog. She wondered if her good friend was off work tonight.

At that thought she reached for the phone and dialed a number. The ringing sounded dismal to her and a machine informed her that her good friend was not home. A panic rose in her throat but she pushed it aside and tried to put cheer into her voice.

“Hi Tracy, it’s Amber. Just wanted to see what you were up to tonight. If you get this message at a half decent time, call me. Maybe we can watch a movie or something. Okay, good-bye,” Amber said and was happy the nervousness in her voice did not show.

She hung up the phone. Her voice did sound oddly loud in the quiet house and Amber sighed. She tapped the phone against her leg lightly for a few minutes before placing it back into the receiver and hiding in the blankets again. The wind whispered outside and Amber could swear it was telling her to stay out of the house tonight. Amber wondered where that feeling had come from and shivered in her warm cocoon.

Shadows played in the corners of the room and Amber cowered deeper into her blanket. She pulled the phone in beside her and wished she had someone to keep her company. She wondered briefly if her neighbours were home and shook her head at the thought. They would think she was insane if she asked them over for coffee the night before Valentine’s Day. Amber sighed and listened to the noises in the house.

Nothing but the regular creeks and groans came to her ears and she muttered at her own unfounded fears before pulling herself from the covers. She checked the locks on all the windows and doors before finally making her way up to her bedroom. On a paranoid second thought, she drew an old steel baseball bat from the hallway closet and set it against her bedside table.

Amber changed into a nightgown and settled into bed with her overhead light on. She had closed her bedroom door, a habit she had never done and wished it had a lock on it. She tried to read but the words blurred. Even her favorite chocolates tasted bitter in her mouth and she sighed. She noted the time to be merely 8PM and snuggled into her bed regardless.

After a few weary thoughts, she tried calling Tracy again but got only the answering machine. She did not leave a message this time and decided that she was going to leave the bedroom light on, just for tonight. If Greg happened to sneak in

before she could turn it off in the morning she could explain how afraid she had felt and maybe that would convince them to get a large frightening dog.

With that thought in mind, she turned over and closed her eyes. She knew her sleep would be restless because of her thoughts and the light but she could nap tomorrow once she knew whether or not Greg would be home. If he wasn't home, she would stay over at Tracy's tomorrow night. Maybe then she would feel better and not be so paranoid. After a brief struggle with her own mind, she fell into a light sleep.

Part 5: February 14th, Valentine's Day

Amber twitched and sighed heavily. Something felt very wrong to her but she could not place why. She slowly opened her eyes and noted that she was lying on one side, facing the en suite bathroom with the window at her back. She squinted wearily and knew something looked wrong.

It came to her in a mere instant of clarity: there was not enough light in the room. Only sunlight streamed through the window and the overhead light she had left on had been turned off. Mixed feelings shot through her then and she struggled with them.

Her first feeling was happiness. With the overhead light off, Greg must have returned home and turned off the light before waking her. The second feeling was of deep foreboding. She had no reason to suspect the one who turned the light off was anyone but Greg and yet her intestines were tying themselves in knots.

She noticed the shadow spilling over her covers and it dawned on her that it was the shadow of a man. This should have made her joyful because it should have kicked the feeling of foreboding to the preverbal curb. Unfortunately the shape of the shadow was all wrong. The man was too tall and too slim to be Greg.

Greg was only five feet and ten inches tall, average sized. They were actually the same height and she remarked to him all the time that the numbers for her meant she was above average while for him he would forever be average. He took this with a smile or a laugh.

Despite his average height, Greg had broad shoulders and a thick back. His waist

tapered to his hips and he did have a bit of a pouch beginning now but the rest of his body was built more muscular than what the shadow spilling across her form was revealing to her.

Amber heard the breathing then. It was light and fast, Amber could tell that the stranger standing next to her bed behind her was excited. Amber knew she could not reach the baseball bat if it was still against the dresser. The stranger had probably moved it and even if he had not, there would be no time for her to turn, throw off the covers and grab the handle before he grabbed her.

Or worse: before *he* grabbed the baseball bat and beat her with it. Amber swallowed thickly and wished she had hidden the baseball bat underneath the covers. At least then she would have a bit better chance of fending off the unknown man behind her.

A smell permeated her nostrils finally and she blinked at it. It smelled like old copper pennies and if she had not been a nurse, she was certain she would have smelled it quicker. Being a nurse made her used to this particular smell and she almost cursed her own lack of attention. The figure behind her was either bleeding or covered in blood. If Amber strained to listen, she could hear the blood pattering on the area rug that the man was standing on behind her.

She wondered briefly what would cause that amount of blood to be on a person and knew that the man either had to be bleeding from the throat or would have had to cut someone across the throat. Bleeding from the throat would mean she could just wait him out as he would die in less than five minutes. If he had cut someone across the throat then he could stand there forever. Eventually he would get bored of watching her and attack.

A thought dawned on Amber and she suddenly realized that the stranger behind her was not bleeding from the throat. His breath was not coming out raspy or wet enough. So he had cut through the flesh of someone else's throat and been covered in the spray in the process. He had probably watched the spray until it died down and he knew for sure the victim was dead from loss of blood.

Amber almost jolted upright in bed at that thought. The only person who could be dying in her house would be Greg. Tears came unbidden to her eyes and she squeezed

them shut. Greg was not dying downstairs as he would all ready be dead by now. The amount of blood on the man behind her and the amount of time that had passed between Greg being cut open and her lying there thinking would mean Greg could no longer draw breath and never would again.

She pushed her eyes shut to stop the tears and wondered if the man was leaning over her enough that he could see her profile. If he was, he must be able to see her crying and see that she had been awake this whole time. Amber realized with a spark of knowing that he could not see her face. He was not at the right angle and her head was buried in the pillows.

Anger rose up in her then. Who was he to kill her husband on her most favored holiday during her favorite time of year? What did he gain from it? Amber's tears died and she scowled deeply. Before she could second guess her own actions she let out a roar of fury, threw the covers from her form and over the man. She then tackled the man, collapsing atop the struggling form and releasing a flurry of punches to area where she thought his face would be.

She screamed wordlessly with every punch she laid on the man underneath her. Strong arms clamped around her waist so suddenly that she did not register them until she was being thrown off. Her head slammed into the thick metal foot board of the bed and she lay there dazed for a long moment.

In that moment, the stranger tugged the covers from his bloody person. Amber noted in a daze that she recognized the man as the one she saw when she had been shovelling snow. His hair was brown and messily tied in a pony tail and his eyes were the same shade as his hair. Amber noted gleefully that his nose and lip were now bleeding freely.

She tried to puller herself to her feet but found that her body declined to give her the proper response. The man stood and shook himself like a dog coming out of water and Amber tried to shift away. Her neck and back shouted in protest. Amber let out a little gasp of pain but refused to close her eyes in protest of the agony.

By now the man had turned and was looking down at her with a grin that set his lip to bleeding more quickly. Amber blinked away the haze threatening to settle on her and wondered at how bad her concussion actually was. She hoped it would not

hinder her too badly so she could get out of this situation but knew hoping was not enough.

The man took a step towards her and Amber let out a growl as her only warning. The man tilted his head to a side and almost started laughing until Amber's foot slammed into the juncture between his legs. He doubled over and Amber noted the bloody knife that dropped out of his hand.

When he fell to his knees, she kicked him with both feet in the face. When he fell backwards, she slammed both her heels into his stomach four times. Finally she regained most of her senses and was able to pull herself to her feet.

The world tilted dangerously and Amber felt bile rising to her throat. She looked dizzily at the dresser for the other portable phone but saw it was not there. She also noticed that her baseball bat was missing and scowled at the writhing figure on the floor. For good measure, she put her full body weight into his groin until he screamed and passed out from pain.

She nodded then regretted the motion of her head. Amber leaned against the bed for support taking a few deep breaths before stumbling out of the room. She pulled the door closed behind her and pushed a potted plant in front of it. When he came through the door, she would hear him if she was still in earshot. She was not planning to be in earshot.

She fumbled down the stairs with her head spinning and her stomach lurching at every step. The scent of blood came to her nose again and she turned wildly to look behind her, unbelieving that she had missed the sound of the pot breaking. She lost her grip on the railing and tumbled the rest of the way down.

She landed back first in a cooling pond of blood. She noted with some difficulty that the man had not been behind her and the smell had been coming from in front of her. She slid in the blood as she tried to get back up. She managed only to fall twice more and stained her cloths red.

Finally she was able to get to her knees and stare into the messy lake of red blood before her. Her eyes adjusted to the dim light coming through the window of the front door and she saw Greg's still body crumbled beneath her. He had broken her fall.

Amber's breath hitched in her throat at that and her slick hands came up to cover her mouth to prevent the shout of agony that was threatening to rip from her throat. Greg's eyes were unblinking, unseeing and starting to glaze over. The wound on his throat was at an angle, starting high on the right side, almost behind his ear and finishing so low she was sure it would scrape against his left clavicle.

Amber noticed with stark precision that the wound was almost three inches deep in the middle of his throat and the edges were ragged. The skin around it was blotted with red as was the front of his tan suit and white dress shirt. There was a forming bruise under his left eye and his knuckles were split. Amber took comfort in knowing that he had fought back.

Something crashed upstairs but Amber paid it no attention. She thought it was important but could not remember why when she looked into her husband's dead eyes. She began crying then, thick tears sliding down her face and making rivers through the blood there. She curled in on herself and sobbed out her agony.

Then a thick hand slammed down on her shoulder and something with too much weight to it knocked her over the head. Amber felt her eyes roll back into her head and knew that she would not wake up from this. She fell into Greg's still chest and closed her eyes knowing that she would at least be with her husband soon.

Amber opened her eyes to see her bathroom ceiling staring back at her. She blinked in abject wonder at the simple fact that she had been able to open her eyes. Heavy breathing came from beside her but for the moment she did not want to turn her head.

Pain trailed along her right side, sharp and immediate and she tried to push through the haze of her mind to figure out what was causing this pain. Her side throbbed and she let out a little moan but did not close her eyes. Finally she turned her head to the right and saw the stranger lying right beside her with a grin on his face. She screamed and tried to roll away but an ache erupting along her side stopped her still.

"You'll pull out the stitches if you do that again," the man whispered to her and Amber noted that he had cleaned himself up.

“Stitches?” She stuttered in confusion.

It was her head that had been hit and there was no reason for her to have stitches on her side. There was no reason for her not to be able to feel her right arm. It should be squished under him but she did not feel the pins and needles associated with it. The only thing she could feel was pain that sung along every nerve on her right.

“I sewed us together so we can never be apart,” the man explained with a grin.

Amber stared at him for a long moment the implications of that statement settling into her person. Her throat closed and her vision narrowed to two little pinpricks of detail as her gaze shifted to stare at her own body.

Bile rose strong in her throat as she looked at the stump that used to be where her right arm was. It was joined with thick black thread to the stump where his left arm had been. The precise stitches continued all the way down her side, joining him to her, her to him until they stopped two inches above her obscenely pink panties. She noted a small dot of blood where a needle had entered her flesh at her stomach and realized that he had put her under.

“Who, why, oh God,” Amber tried to mutter out around the thick lump that had settled in her throat.

“My name is Russell and I did this because I love you,” the man said with a light chuckle and shifted to kiss her cheek.

Memories flooded back over her. He was the stalker from high school. His glaring looks as Greg protected her year after year. The shouts of her ex boyfriends when they found Russell trailing behind them on their dates. She coughed and tried to turn away again but only managed to turn her head.

Bile poured out of her mouth as she winced in pain from the stitches. The only good thing about this was that she was in fact left handed. If she remembered correctly, so was he. Amber saw with some absurd lucidity that her right arm was lying along beside her. She almost laughed but the smile turned into a sneer as she picked up the arm and slammed it into Russell’s face.

He yelped at her and tried to grab her own severed arm away from her but she was driven by an animal passion that caused her to keep bringing the limb down on him over and over again. Russell took the blows but did not pass out. Amber realized

the arm was not sturdy enough to do the job and gave him a final whack across the eyes before turning away from him the best she could.

“Better now? I hope so, you are wearing my necklace after all,” Russell muttered after a moment.

“What do you mean?” Amber questioned without turning.

“The roses, the chocolates, the bear, the necklace, they were all from me. You’re my sweet Valentine,” Russell’s words poured over her like molasses.

A glint of silver caught her attention and Amber noticed the knife he had likely used to kill Greg sitting in her immediate vicinity. It was still clutched in his left hand, attached to the arm he had severed to join them. She noted another large knife a few feet away but dismissed it. Amber’s left hand skittered along the floor as he was still talking and she grabbed the deadened left hand of Russell.

Peeling back the fingers one handed was frustrating but Amber knew just where to apply pressure to get the knife to release. It did not clatter to the floor and it merely slid out of the now loosened grip of the dead hand. Amber’s lips pulled back into a snarl. She howled in fury as she turned with the knife in her hand.

Russell yelled at her to stop but she brought it down hard into his eye. She was not sure which eye it was but she did not care because she yanked the knife out and slammed it into his other eye. His right hand came up to grab her wrist and she slashed at it, the flesh oddly malleable under the blade.

Blood poured from the gash on his wrist and she pushed the knife through the center of his right palm before jerking it free again and slamming it into his forehead. He shuddered a few times and his right arm fell weakly to one side. She did not notice as she was too busy pulling the knife from his forehead and pushing it into his throat with a cry of rage.

The knife separated flesh again and she tugged it free as blood sprayed her in the face weakly. She made no notice to this and pounded the knife through his sternum before pulling it free again and cutting into his stomach four times.

With heaving breaths, she stilled with the knife still embedded in his stomach. Amber gulped a few times to curb the light-headedness threatening to knock her unconscious. She did not want to die of blood loss attached to the man who killed the

love of her life. With that in mind, Amber pulled free the knife for the last time and used it to tug out the stitches.

Her body failed her a few times and forced her to pass into unconsciousness but each time she woke with a greater determination and larger anger to hack away at the thick black stitches at her side. When the final one snapped free she lay there for a moment, covered in blood and sweat with her breath coming out in short gasps.

She flung the knife away and heard it clatter against the wall somewhere to her right. She could feel the blood leaking from her wounds but paid them no attention. Instead, she turned onto her left side and managed to sit up. Her hand skittered against the vanity until it found a roll of gauze. This she wrapped awkwardly around her abdomen, over her breasts and around the stump of her right arm.

Partially satisfied, she made it to her feet. The door kept tilting from side to side but Amber paid it no mind. She all but fell out of the bathroom and shuffled to stand before the staircase. Lying at the bottom of the stairs in a messy pool of half-congealed blood was Greg. She let out a grunt of determination and made her way down the stairs.

They rose up to meet her a heart beat later and she felt her tibia snap under the pressure. She felt the bone push through her skin and almost laughed. When she finally slammed against the floor for the second time that day she let out a little breath of relief.

One armed, she pulled herself closer towards Greg's limp body. Amber ignored the pain from the leaking wounds on her right side. She disregarded the agony from her broken leg. She overlooked the ghost pain telling her that her right arm was still attached to her body and could help. She snubbed the throbbing in the back of her head that threatened to take her under again. All she cared about was reaching the body of the love of her life.

Finally she was able to pull herself over him, draping herself over his motionless broad chest. She imagined his arms coming around her and smiled. She scowled a moment later as she remembered the necklace at her throat. This she pulled off with a growl and tossed it somewhere in the home. She did not care where it went because it was not a gift she wanted to own or see again.

She settled into Greg's broad form with a sunny grin coming to her face. Amber snuggled against him and closed her eyes. No movement came from the house but in the distance she could hear police sirens. She vaguely remembered her friend mentioning that people could cut security wires and was in disbelief that it had only been a half hour. Perhaps the neighbours had called when she was screaming. Perhaps the wires being cut had not alerted the authorities until it was too late.

Amber pushed all these thoughts out of her head and snuggled deeper into Greg's dead body. She pictured the smile on his face when he saw her. She could almost feel the gentle pressure of his arms around her waist. She swore she heard his deep voice saying her name and beyond the blood she could smell his cologne. As an ambulance and a police cruiser pulled into her drive-way Amber let out a small breath and knew no more.

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Ending note: Originally *My Sweet Valentine* was to be novella sized. Obviously, that did not happen. At only a little over 14,000 words it makes it into the novelette category. Part 5 (Valentine's Day) was unplanned besides me knowing I wanted to sew Amber and Russell together. Amber was not supposed to retaliate as she did. She was supposed to wake up after the sewing, listen to Russell speak again then die. I'm not entirely sure where she got her strength from but I'm glad it happened.

As promised I'm getting back to you about whether or not I actually like this story. I do, despite some awkward sentences and a slow start, I really enjoyed writing this. I especially enjoyed the ending. Not because it meant the story was over but because it was fun to write. Yes I like writing morbid things.

As stated in the inspiration section (which was really just me rambling again) I am doing the 12in12 challenge and this was supposed to be my novella for the second month. It bled into the third month and gave me an extra 4,000 words. Maybe 5,000 depending how much more I decide to add before sending this out into the World Wide Web.

Am I fretting at being behind my goal for this month again? Nope. Daimin Van Helgrove and his father Demek came through for me again last night (February 6th)

and I wrote a scene with them that spanned over 11,000 words. That brings my total to 15,000 or 16,000 and it's only the 6th.

The scene was when Daimin finally realized how much of an arse he had been over the first 20 years of his life and how much he needed to change to win the love of his soul mate. The scene won't see the light of day until I write and publish the second book in the Van Helgrove trilogy. That's right, the *second* book. Have I written the first? Nope.

As for what I'm going to write to make up the other 4,000 to 5,000 words I need to get this month's quota, I have no idea. I do have a few more fairy tale spoofs to finish for my *Fairy Tales Gone Wrong* anthology I'm planning to put out in either March or April. Namely I have to make Sleeping Beauty a witch, Rapunzel a crazy warrior, and turn Goldilocks into bear poop.

I do find it exceptionally funny that my *Little Mermaid* spoof became a novella and *My Sweet Valentine* barely qualifies as a novelette. It was supposed to be the other way around. Hell, I could almost turn my version of the *Little Mermaid* into a novel. But I won't because then it would take too long to edit it and I would never be able to release it when I want to. Plus my Ariel had her say and is happy with her ending. Eric, eh, not so much.

I congratulate anyone who is actually reading this. And by this I mean this 'ending note'. If you're really that curious about me, I'm both flattered and a little worried. Just don't turn into a Russell, okay?

As for why I wrote this (the actually story and anything else I write), I have no answer. That's like asking why a bird flies or why a person breaths. For me, writing is a necessity. It's something I do almost every day, or at least once a month because that's just who I am. As for why I wrote something so horrible happening on what's supposed to be a happy time of year, go check out *Have a Bloody Christmas* and get back to me with that question again.

Again, I ENJOY writing morbid things. I enjoy writing funny things. I will sometimes combine the two for my own amusement and the amusement of my readers. Why? Because it's fun and really that's what life is about. Life it meant to be

enjoyed and if I enjoy writing about people dying and killing each other than so be it. As long as I'm not doing it in real life, there's no issue now is there?

I'll leave you with one final thought: lock your doors at night and if you live alone get a big scary dog to protect you. You never know who wants to stay by your side forever.

About the Author

Dairenna VonRavenstone hails from the snowy North (Canada) where it's not all that snowy for six months out of the year. She enjoys reading a good story and boasts a personal library of over 1,000 books. Writing came as a hobby to her when she was 10 and she spent the better part of a decade honing the craft, writing an estimated 1 million words and 40 stories (novel-length and short) in various stages of completion. She is assured that most of those words will never see the light of day and be burned in a ritualistic fashion eventually. Dairenna (Renna to her friends) writes to bring joy, happiness and love into the hearts of her fans...or something like that. Learn more about her here: <http://www.vonravenstone.com>.

Other works:

[*Small Slice of the Undead: A Zombie Anthology*](#)
[*Apocalyptic: A Doomsday Anthology*](#)
[*'Tis Hallows Eve: A Halloween Horror Anthology*](#)
[*Have a Bloody Christmas: A Novella*](#)
[*Hodgepodge*](#)

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