

# CHATTERTON PLACE

THE INHERITANCE

BOOK ONE

By Patricia Carol Garlitz

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Smashwords Edition

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## Dedication

Dedicated to my loving family without their support

I'd still be just another author looking to

Be published

Cover by Charlotte Alire

Table of Context

PREFACE

CHAPTER ONE THE INHERITANCE

CHAPTER TWO CHATTERTON PLACE

CHAPTER THREE DARK EYED PORTRAIT

CHAPTER FOUR THE DECISION

CHAPTER FIVE WHERE TO START

CHAPTER SIX STEP BY STEP

CHAPTER SEVEN HANDLE WITH CARE

CHAPTER EIGHT AN DANCE UNSEEN  
CHAPTER NINE OLDER BROTHERS  
CHAPTER TEN VIP WEEKEND  
CHAPTER ELEVEN EMMA'S FIRST COTILLION  
CHAPTER TWELVE SUSPICIONS  
CHAPTER THIRTEEN THE OLD BARN  
CHAPTER FOURTEEN LAUGHTER MAKES GOOD MEDACINE  
CHAPTER FIFTEEN AN OLD LOVE STORY  
CHAPTER SIXTEEN A BROTHERLY INVASION  
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN THE ROSE LADY  
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN CHRISTMAS AT CHATTERTON PLACE  
CHAPTER NINETEEN DARKEST BEFORE THE DAWN  
Chatterton Place Saga continues  
Contact Patricia

## Preface

Michael Chase stood motionless before the window in the dark room, safely out of sight of his defiant wife forcing sleeping bags into the trunk of their little car in the driveway. Pinching his blue eyes closed, he leaned against the window frame and silently reprimanded himself for not being able to convince her not to go; they had heatedly discussed this trip to examine a plot of land that her Grandmother had never mentioned, for nearly a week.

Emma never spoke of her Father's side of the family at all. It was her one saving grace when she met his father. How his father had known of her connecting to a strange family living in southern Utah, Michael would never know, but her lack of knowledge was the only reason his father had even considered giving him permission to marry her. Of course he too had to promise to ensure she never found the secret.

It was a promise that had carried them back and forth across the United States, to seven different locations, ten different job positions, and dozens of different homes. Even through the birth of four children ... the first three in rapid succession and then Jason three years later. With the exception of a few must returns: the death of her mother, and then a dear Aunt a few years later, he had managed to keep Emma out of Utah for nearly twenty years.

Where had he gone wrong? How could he have known a simple moving truck repair would leave him jobless in Salt Lake City. Shaking his head he reminded himself; it wasn't the moving truck repairs that had cost him his job, actually it hadn't cost him anything he had merely been notified that the Hotel deal his company had in the works had fallen through, taking his position with it ... Oh but there was a light at the end of the tunnel; they could find him a position there in Salt Lake. There, where he really didn't want to be, furthermore his family was homeless. The money he had deposited on a new home in Reno, had left them with little in the bank, and was

going to take months to retrieve. He was grateful when Beth; Emma's younger sister, offered to move into her own basement in order to make enough room for his family on their main floor. Then the job crunch came along and Rob her husband lost his construction job. Overnight he had become the sole bread winner in the house.

Spring brought new job prospects, and few more coins in his pocket. Allowing the innocent trip to a local swap meet, where a precariously placed china plate caught her attention and before he knew it she is the proud owner of a set of chine dishes she insisted would match the one they had packed all over the country. The set of dishes they had feasted on their first year of marriage, but had been carefully tucked away when money became more available. He knew she clung to them for memories, but thought they were their memories of a year spent without children. Never had he heard the story of the china's journey to this country, until she compared the two sets. Suddenly he was sick to his stomach thinking how he had carried the catalyst with him the whole time.

When she discovered the envelope marked; return for reward, at the bottom of the crate, he hoped it would include returning the dishes. But he should have known better. His father's stern warning echoed in his head for hours when she returned from the Attorney's office declaring she had just inherited land in southern Utah.

That twenty year old warning had returned to haunt him. "Keep her out of Utah son or run the risk of her discovering her true destiny." He had not seen his father's eye's glow with such intense hatred, since he would sit at the edge of his bed reciting the dark story of the legend to him as a goodnight story. A nightmare was what it really was. Perhaps it was more in his father's head than in real life. Because when Mike attended school in Southern Utah, the family members he had met that recalled it; looked upon it more as a myth or made up legend than the reality his father had always placed upon it.

Glancing back out the window, he pondered why he had never told her of the story. Now it was too late. Now she would think him crazy, manipulative, a poor loser. And a loser he surely was to come, for if the demons were real; it was his promise to father that he would put a stop to it; to her if need be, before the world was lost forever.

## CHAPTER ONE THE INHERITANCE

The dark clad figure that rose from the tailgate of the rickety black truck the moment her tires hit the soft shoulder of the road, carried no resemblance of the eighty-year-old man Mr. Becksted had said would meet them. Half praying she hadn't taken the wrong cut off Emma hesitated before rolling down the window. The valley had been so beautiful from the lofty spot at the top of the mountain pass were she had stopped to overlook her Grandmother great secret, that she

had lost track of time. If she were lost, the real caretaker may soon give up hope of her coming, and the secret Chatterton Estate will have to wait another day to be found.

"Thought I might have to come up and get you there for a minute." The man's deep voice rattled recklessly her empty stomach, but her anticipated arrival was soothing to her wondering soul.

"You're Mr. Mason I presume." Emma felt her voice fell short of hospitable, but after a nearly six-hour drive, during which she had spoken rarely she felt it understandable. What was not was the way her trembling fingers was unable to snap the seat belt free from across her chest.

"And you must be Mrs. Haager's daughter." His horse voice fell silent the moment she adjusted to look up at him. "NO", his heart cried silently.

The black eyes that filled her delicate face lay no resemblance to the fair faced old woman— Mr. Becksted had asked him to show around the property. It was obvious she was not related to Mrs. Haager. His mind was whirling faster than the innocent smile developing beneath her perfect nose. In the background the first line of an old Steve Lawrence classic spewed from the radio in the cab of his truck— echoing his hearts sentiments— "Go away little girl— I'm not supposed to be alone with you."

"I'm Mrs. Chase." She corrected his misconception, "Mr. Becksted called, didn't he?" His steely blue eyes shadowed darkly beneath the broad brim of his black cowboy hat, toyed tantalizingly with her memory, yet she was sure they had never met. Nothing about this man was forgettable. The heavy sheepherders coat camouflaged him to some extent but even it could not hide his massive shoulders and extreme height. The overwhelming masculinity and power emanating from his dark figure caused the frailty her older brothers had played upon to become real to her again.

"Ch - Chase?" The taut voice he repeated her last name with expelled more disbelief than strength. "I - - I mean" He forced himself to shake off her mystical spell sweeping up his spine. Stepping back he made room for her to open the door she seemed to be fumbling with inside.

Clearing her throat, she twisted her feet to the pavement and stood up. Closing some of the distance between them she felt less vulnerable and an equal collaborate in the conversation. "Mr. Becksted called, didn't he?" The question still sounded more like a plea to her ears than a question.

"Yes. No." Realizing he was sounding like a silly schoolgirl, he swallowed hard and grabbed for the upper hand in the conversation. "Damn it Girl! Of course he called, what in the hell do you think I'm doing here if he hadn't?" As usual, he had over done it. The barked demand had her tilting back on her heels, with signs of fear filling her face. "I ... I was expecting someone older." Much older he thought, awed by her youthful grace.

"So was I. Mr. Becksted said—"

"He was talking about Dad. He's been gone since last January."

She was so busy searching her memory for an incident to pin the familiarity of his features that she was only half listening to his explanation but the mention of his Father's death triggered an instinctive reaction for his loss. "I'm sorry. I know what it's like to lose your Father." Her voice softened, as did the tension on her face.

Since he was unsure how to proceed, he decided to let her take the lead. "It did take me a bit by surprise when Mom called me to the phone and Mr. B. started to ramble on like we were old friends." Surprise wasn't quite the word he meant but it would have to do, he thought, bending down to brush the red dust clinging to the knees of his black jeans. "So I guess you're anxious to see this place?"

While scanning the lush spring beauty the secluded valley held, she brushed the heavy morning dew from her rosy cheek and pondered the meaning of "Anxious". It slightly described the excitement growing in the pit of her stomach, but more adequately the trembling a bit lower, burning like a virgin's passionate wants - Fear mingling sweetly with lust. Yes, oh Yes, she was anxious to see this place - this land held in secret captivity from her sight - from even her Fathers sight, by a woman she felt could hold no secrets. But why she had chosen to keep it a secret was the real reason Emma had come for. And why she couldn't convince her husband of that left her bewildered.

Owning a piece of land - any land - was more than she could wish for. It was one of her illusive wants that lay just beyond her grasp, across yet another of Michael; her husband's invisible lines. Refusing to think of how many hours she had spent counting her excursions across those lines in the past week, she focused on the many more spent sleeplessly trying to figure out what had caused her Grandmother to keep the inheritance silent. Somehow, somewhere she had to have told someone about it, Emma thought allowing her eye to continue the thorough scan of that portion of the valley exposed to her. *It's too large to have just forgotten about it.*

"Mrs. Chase." His deep voice interrupted her thought, had the words actually crossed her lips. "Are you ready to go?" The intense scrutiny he was giving her face sent waves of weakness washing across her spirit. All men are the same thing she thought shifting her position to divert his burning gaze from her breasts. They size you up, only to better understand how to pin you down. "Tell me first, Mr. Mason," she lifted her chin in defiance to meet his harsh stare. "Have you never met a woman from the city before?"

The direct assault caught him off guard, leaving him speechless, "I - A - Like I said! I was expecting someone much older." Somehow, he managed to stutter out his apology, but it was lost among the snickering giggles flowing loudly from the car's interior. Startled he diverted his attention to where the noise came from, so did she. She had nearly forgotten the girls, tucked away in the car awaiting an indication from her that it was safe.

Casting a look of surprise in her direction, he stepped a bit closer to the car and bowed at the waist for a better view of his unannounced audience.

"Sorry. I should've introduced you before. These are my girls, Shelly and Crystal."

He had been so caught up in a twenty-five-year-old memory; it had not occurred to him that she might have children ... least of all teenage children - girls - who each expelled their Mothers youthful poise.

"Hi." Responded the shimmering blue-eyed blond shyly, from the far side of the front seat.

"Sorry we laughed at you but Mom has never said anything like that before." Shelly; Emma's black-eyed reflection, remarked between chuckles from the back seat.

Feeling the blood rush to her cheeks, Emma had to agree with the girls. It wasn't like her at all to make such an argumentative statement, but three older brothers and a husband, was where she planned to draw the line for allowing men to tell her what to do.

"Who's who?" He questioned looking from one to the other.

Laying a delicate hand across the back seat, the black-eyed beauty, with hair just as dark falling softly about her shoulders, flashed him a warm smile and said. "I'm Michelle."

Tipping the rim of his hat in response, he looked to the other and understood the purity of her name. "So you must be Crystal?"

A mischievous twinkle in her eye and a brisk smile was his only answer, as she asked, "Are you really a cowboy?"

"What she means, is there still cowboys?" The more mature voice drew his attention to the backseat again.

"You might say so."

"Of course, there are still cowboys!" Emma imposed, embarrassed by their lack of knowledge about the world at large. "Someone's got to supply Mickey Dee's you know."

"Not me though." He rose to address her. Squaring his broad shoulders, he removed the daunting hat from his head and ran his long fingers through the thick blue-black mat beneath, causing waves of loose curls to appear. "After all Southern Utah is known as the land of milk and honey - not big Mac's."

"You raise milk cows, don't you?" Crystal's observation interrupted Emma's desperate attempt to place his face among those of the Vision, but it wasn't right. They were different - old. No, she thought turning away from his softened gaze, not old - their clothing was out dated but their faces were young and old alike. Still it wasn't there she had seen him. Too many other questions

filled her mind right then, to search through ten years of working with the public for a time and place. If we've met, he probably wouldn't remember me anyway she thought, besides the question sounds too much like a come on, to be coming from my mouth.

I should have listened, she thought kicking at the pink sandstone sand beneath her feet, while the girls covered her retreat with idle chat. She sighed softly feeling the pull of two very different worlds at her heart. The girl's flood of questions soon blurred into the background, as the previous Sunday billowed into view of her mind's eye.

Shortly after entering one of Salt Lakes largest flea market a flash of light had caught her eye. Side stepped the blinding glare, she considered what she saw behind the blast of sunlight. Unconscious of the growing excitement in her chest, she had impatiently pulled at Mike's arm hoping to get a better view of the glossy object. Then momentarily the flea market crowd cleared and she saw it. Precariously placed atop an old crate on a flimsy folding table that swayed with an onslaught of people the way her bottom lip had started to quiver, sat a delicate replica of her Grandmother's China. The rapid pace Mike's long legs demanded made absolute identification impossible, but the emotional cords the brief sighting stroked deep within screamed for attention.

Gazing into different faces as Mike continued his lengthy stride toward some undisclosed destination, with her elbow neatly tucked into the crook of his arm. She pondered for a moment what those people knew that made their eyes sing with joy, and she feared she might never find it. When suddenly she recalled the way the sun danced across the china plate's smooth surface, and she stopped immediately. "Wait."

"For what?" Mike responded tugging at her arm— his clear blue eyes glistening impatiently.

Dare she say it knowing fully well, how he felt about buying something that belonged to someone else? A moment of indecision and once more he towed her on unwillingly. "It's like my old dishes."

"What is?" He responded coolly not pausing to listen to what she was really saying, in his pursuit of something only he knew.

"That China plate back there." She whispered, pointing over her shoulder. "It's like my set."

"So?"

"So! I want to look at it."

"We'll look in a minute. I have to get to the computer guy before he's all sold out."

"Another program," she whispered under her breath. Glancing over her shoulder as he steadily marched her forward. Fear suddenly flooded her senses. It won't be there when we get back and he knows it.

The silly piece of china, as he would call it, would most definitely go against his view of holding onto sentimental family items she thought, but it represented her very roots. If it matched!

The odds were against her, not once had she come across a single piece matching her Grandmother's unique set. Several times she had found pieces that held the soft crimson rose pattern with its crisp emerald leaves pointing out at the fluted gold trim. Once she even came across a small cup that held the romantic blue ribbons, woven into a braid beneath the fluted gold trim, but never had she found anything that held both within its shimmering boundaries.

"Please Mike!"

"In a minute Em. In a minute." It was easy enough for him to pay little attention to her childish plea, but her desperate tone had suddenly unlocked years of forgotten pain. Memories of her childhood flooded her thoughts and blurred her vision. Emotions of a frightened child washed over her, dulling her senses to the crowd pushing against her, as he relentlessly led the way.

Mentally picturing herself as a child climb onto her sweet grandmother's lap, she was filled with warmth and a sense of security that was only to be found there. Hour after hour, she was content to sit listening to the whispering tones of her Grandmother telling the story of the china's great journey, and the people who had brought them to the Promised Land. Lost in the descriptive narration of people and places, made larger than life by her Grandmother's flare for words, Emma would lose herself and the agonizing pain of having her Mother in the hospital again.

Then came the times she shared that broad lap with her younger sister; Beth, during even more hospitalizations, and later she stood at the side when her youngest brother; Jake, was cradled there. After his birth, only one additional hospital stay separated them from their Mother and soon her renewed health sliced at the precious time spent listening to the stories in the loving woman's home. Soon she was off to school and an expanding world to discover. And all too soon, the grace was taken from her altogether. Only in that loss, had she discovered her Mother's lap held just as much warmth and understanding.

It was with her blessing and support that Emma had stood against her Father after his Mother's death, and demanded to keep the partial china set. He wished nothing except his memories, and her Aunt's wanted only the best. The un-chipped remains of her family's prized possessions had been placed in a tattered box, marked Goodwill. She could have had anything within the old woman's home, but to her they meant more than the house itself. They represented the old woman at her best. Her lap full of children, their heads filled with her stories.

The question of it being a match should have been the only thing left to respond too. But Mike's reaction to such an inquiry, kept forcing inlets into her thoughts, clouding the decision at hand.

She and Mike, Her emotions and his logic, like oil and water they found little ground in common, and yet against all adversity together they had stood through nineteen years of

marriage. Of those who knew them, some called it a miracle, but most referred to it as compromise. It was only she that knew the full cost. Beyond his many invisible lines, logically drawn in the sands of time, lay some of her most treasured wants. The china plate fit into one of those categories.

Recalling again the warmth shared on her Grandmother's lap; she unconsciously began to smile. It was an acknowledging smile. For if the plate matched it would not be for herself, she would buy it. It would not even be for her children that someday may inherit it. This she would do for her Grandmother and a memory she refused to let be swept beneath his logical indifference.

Life itself seemed stacked against her. She had only traveled but a few steps after breaking free from his grasp. When the borrowed clip of Shelly's holding her long black hair close to the back of her graceful neck, snapped free and crashed to the asphalt drive. She knew she had to stop and retrieve it— It wasn't hers to lose. Sweat beaded beneath her arms. A mixture of anticipation and a coat, he had required everyone to put on before leaving home that morning.

His stinging words of reprimand attacked her self-worth, even before his soft penny loafers appeared where the bow had lain. "Christ Em, sometimes I think the kids have more sense."

Swallowing the yearning to be treated as a grown-up, she pushed back the soft strands of hair that had fallen gently about her porcelain complexion and gazed up at him, with those big black wanting eyes of a child on Christmas. Tiny droplets appearing beneath her thick lashes was her only form of telling him how much she disliked being talked down to, under the inquisitive gaze of strangers?

Standing up she squared her shoulders for the lecture. She knew she must take responsibility for the tossed appearance of his naturally well-kept golden hair and the square appearance the deep breaths of cool air had added to his already broad chest, but the glowing pink hue slowly appearing beneath his slicing blue eyes, she could blame on the unexpected warmth of the day.

"Oh Mike PLEASE! I have to see it!" When his square jaw softened, she knew she had won - at least the ability to examine the supposed replica. The minute the mournful sigh creased his emotionless lips, "Oh all right," she refused to hear the reluctance of its tone and shot off again in pursuit of the treasured item, leaving his remaining words of caution to fall ineffectively upon the ears of the unconcerned crowd.

Reaching the table at last, breathless in fear someone may have already snatched it up, her heart rejoiced, then fluttered with resolution. "It does," pressed across her bow shaped ruby lips, drawing the attention of the white haired man standing at the far end of the wobbly table, talking a rather plump woman into buying an iron skillet. His smile was inviting as she reached to stroke the plate's glossy surface, wondering what the remaining items still wearing their crisp newspaper coats beneath it looked like.

Mike's watchful words snapped her hand back with a gentle slap. "Careful!" He was reminding her of the broken coffee mug earlier in the day, but she had already fallen deep into the plate's enticing spell. There was no turning back she had to have it.

Standing silently at his side, she forced her free hand into the coat pocket and toyed with the weathered bill hidden there. It was the last of her smaller than usual paycheck. The rest had been surrendered to him the day before to meet their obligations. Guilt trickled from her conscious mind - she knew it wasn't right skimming money from the top before turning it over to him, but it was her sanity money, the change required to send the kids to the show, or steal a chocolate bar when he wasn't watching. Yet if she pulled it out now, he may never trust her to cash her check alone again.

From the corner of her eye, she watched as the elderly man carefully folded the tendered bills and slipped it into his breast pocket, before strolling their way. "Nice isn't it?" His voice was jagged but soothing at the same time. "It's China you know?"

"Could be." Mike's skeptical tone sent shivers down her spine, but he was right, they were looking at only one piece.

"Why haven't you un-wrapped the rest?" Her question clarified Mike's but what she really wished was to know if the singular ten-dollar bill in her pocket was going to be enough.

"Well ... To tell you the truth. I'm all thumbs." He responded holding up his hands, like that really was the case. "Afraid I may break them." He finished.

"Is it a set?" Mike spoke up, wishing to make the point more for Emma's sake than the salesman.

"I don't know." The gentleman's voice smoothed with practice. "The wife picked them up outside an old house, in the avenues." Emma knew he meant perhaps the oldest portion of Salt Lake, and that alone made her want the china even more— it increased the chance of it being about the same age as her Grandmothers set. "She ain't here but if you'd like to look, have at it." Again Emma reached for the delicate plate and again Mike's voice stopped her.

"What do you want for the box?"

The round face of the fat man grew even broader as he pinched his lips together tightly, considering his cost.

"As you can see its real china." He repeated, stroking his chin.

"Might be Real china." Mike said reminding him once more they were only looking at one plate.

"Twenty" the fat man finally responded.

Emma's heart plummeted and she felt Mike twinge beside her. She was sure he was about to walk away. If that was to be the case, she had to touch the plate just once. Teetering forward, at last she was able to stroke its smooth surface, but it was anything except her Grandmother's warmth in that touch. She felt as if she were struck by lightning. Energy surged up her outstretched arm and exploded before her eyes. A picture flashed in her head, then it was gone.

She jerked her arm back with such force her elbow was thrust into Mike's firm rib cage. "Ten!" blurted from his red face and he grabbed his stomach. "Sold" Briskly flew from the fat man's thin lips immediately. Whirling around Emma looked into Mike's shocked face. She wanted to tell him not to buy the dishes but stopped short recalling the picture she had seen.

It wasn't very clear, nor a place she recalled ever seeing before but amongst the large well lit home and the numerous people wandering about, she found familiarity. Blankly she was left staring into Mike's clean shaven face. "It's YOURS" he proclaimed still rubbing his chest "All you had to do was ask."

Quickly the round faced gentleman wrapped the single plate and snugly secured it back into the wooden box, as their rather one sided conversation continued.

"You know I can never tell you No."

Emma was sure Mike's last statement, was added for the benefit of the salesman, more than her. "Thank you." She responded anyway, throwing her arms around his neck and tugging him down for a grateful kiss. When he pulled her even closer and smothered her mouth with his, she understood his generosity. When sex had become a game of reward, she couldn't remember but it had managed to get her many things she otherwise would have never received.

She could tell the wooden crate wasn't exactly light, still she offered to carry it. Of course, Mike declined, if he would allow her to do so he would have to admit she was capable of doing something, anything, by herself; and that was most unlikely to occur. However, there may have been another reason for his decline. Kit; Christopher their oldest son, was headed straight toward them. His cheery disposition would always be a light in her heart. His arms contained the bulk his fathers were lacking to muscle the wooden crate to the car's trunk nearly two blocks away. His sandy colored hair and deep dark brown eyes, in addition to his nearly six foot height, had more than a few girls throwing themselves at him. The large BYU parka loosely draped across his shoulders spoke of his slight rebellion toward his Father's opinion, but that was more credit, than the other three children offered when they happened upon them at the taco stand, awaiting the arrival of their ordered sodas.

Jason her youngest, saw them first and quickly grabbed his coat from the bench next to him. It was too late though, Dad had already seen the only thing being warmed by the coats were the booth. While he proceeded to lecture them on the stack of Dr. Bills sitting on his desk. She

pulled the hidden bill from her pocket nonchalantly and bought three additional large Coke's, for them to drink on the way to the car.

The haunting picture that kept filling her mind was tantalizingly familiar, yet just beyond recognition. Abstract faces, clothing of an era gone by, a brilliantly lit home larger than any she had ever known. It built a kaleidoscope of pieces, nicely framed with the outline of the china's woven blue ribbons and gold edging.

Taking a soda from her hand, Mike asked staring into her absent face. "Ok, what is it this time?"

Shaking off the clouded air about her head, she gave him a look of bewilderment. "What?"

"I know that look - You're worried about something. I'm not mad about the elbowing."

"No" she corrected his misconception "I - I'm worried they might be broken." There was no way she was going to mention the flash and picture. He'd never understood before, she couldn't see how he would this time. Especially since she— herself didn't understand where it had come from. Beth; her sister, always called it a gift, but this was different from anything she had ever experienced before. Sure, she could tell when something wasn't exactly right, but never before had she ever actually witnessed something. It was not as if she had asked for the gift ... nor had she ever sought to use it but it was a part of her. A part she couldn't deny, and when it warned her of danger she had learned to listen and gave thanks to God for it. But what was there to fear from a big house, brightly lit and open, with fiddle music and laughter flooding out?

Looking over his shoulder to catch a fading glimpse of Kit, weaving his way through the crowd, Mike offered, "I'm sure they'll be fine. Kit's pretty careful about your things." Then turning to look back at her, he added, "Now tell me why you felt you had to do that."

She had just raised the large straw to her lips, so instead of swallowing right away she simply raised her narrow eyebrows and shrugged her petite shoulders. Maybe if she played dumb, she thought, he would drop the subject.

"None of this bull shit Em! Tell me what's going on here."

Swallowing hard, she uttered just above a breath. "You don't want to know."

Quickly pulling the cup from his mouth, he exclaimed, "Shit Em, will you just say it."

"I can't explain it." She fought for an explanation but it was like grasping at air. The kids had trailed off after Kit, so at least she was not afraid of them over hearing one of her strange stories, as he referred to them. "When I touched that plate, it felt like I was hit by lightning." She had decided the truth would be the less bothersome. She so wanted him to listen but figured he would just shrug it off, the way he did all of her emotional based stories.

"Lightning Hah?" he questioned looking up at the beautiful blue sky.

"I said it felt like lightening!" She exclaimed, storming off toward the car. *Why do I try? . . . He never listens anyway.* The large soda splashed onto the arm of her coat, then dripped to the ground. *And why in the hell, am I wearing this stupid thing. It must be 60 degrees out here . . . I must look like a fool.* She continued cursing herself under her breath, as she marched off.

"Wait!" Mike called after her, but she wasn't about to let him get his digs in again. Instead, she quickened her pace wishing to put more space between them.

"Emma, Wait!" He called from her heels. A minute later, she felt his nimble fingers slide beneath her moist underarm, yanking her to a stop. The coke splashed so violently in her hand, she had trouble holding on to it, and again it covered her sleeve.

"You have to learn to control these things." He demanded, breathing heavily through his clinched white teeth.

Control it hell! He can't even control his reaction to it. How am I supposed to control the real thing? "How?" She shouted into his face "Just how do I do that?"

Jerking her arm free, again she turned and started off, leaving him to contemplate the question. She'd never asked for the gift, so just how did he expect her to shut it off. Turning to look back at him, she shouted. "It's not like I got a damn switch, you know."

Silently he stood there looking longingly at her. "I don't know, but you can't let these things run your life."

"I don't!" She shouted back, even though he was no longer demanding. He looked like a child afraid to move. The pained expression on his face led her to believe that somehow she had opened an old wound. The moment he realized, she could see it. He shifted his feet and walked around her, looking only at the ground. Not another word was spoken by either, until they were home.

She would have been pleased to slide the old crate into the bottom of the closet. Satisfied with the knowledge that she had found a plate that matched her Grandmother's set, had it not been for his open dare.

Beth and Rob: her sister and brother-in-law, were busy packing groceries in the front door, as Kit retrieves the wooden crate from the trunk.

"Whatcha got there?" Beth called, coming out the front door for another armload.

"Dishes." Emma explained as they passed on the walk.

"Yeah, if we're to believe her." Mike spoke up and Emma shrunk in her shoes, hoping he would not tell the story in front of the kids. "They'll match her old set of dishes."

Forcing a sigh of relief through her whistle shaped lips that he hadn't mentioned the lightening, she had continued into the house and down the back steps to Beth's apartment. Stopping at the bottom, she called a hardy hello, to whom ever was left behind. Rob, responded with a husky. "Come in."

Once they made eye contact, she explained she needed to look through the closet holding her storage, and then proceeded to unpack the crowded space. After removing, an old box of clothing and having Mike's discarded bowling ball nearly crush her toes. She collected the tattered cardboard box from beneath everything else, and paraded back up the steps, where she placed it next to the wooden crate on the kitchen table.

"So what's in it?" Shelly asked, reaching for the wooden box.

"Shelly" Mike shouted from the doorway, "Don't." Immediately she jerked her hand back to her side, with a shocked expression sweeping rapidly across her face.

Emma wondered if he actually believed her story. His frantic tone left something to be desired. Shelly had obviously heard it too. Stepping back from the table, she demanded, "So what's so important about those dishes?"

She may have carried Emma's coloration and structure, but she certainly had Mike's temperament.

"Your Mother would have us believe, they'll match her old set that I guess, belong to her Grandmother once."

"They will match!" Emma exclaimed flared by his tone of disbelief, before Shelly could force a sound through her round shaped lips, forming the word "So?"

Carefully she un-wrapped a dish from her Grandmother's set and placed it on the table. Then cautiously, fearful of receiving another shock, Emma chose what appeared to be a cup from the new set. Holding onto the newspaper more than anything else, she un-wrapped it too.

"IT MATCHES!" Jason exclaimed with an air of self-accomplishment.

"It seems to." Mike still didn't sound so sure. So setting the cup - still holding the newspaper - on the table, she reached for another item, a plate this time. Again holding firmly to the paper, she un-wrapped it as well. As soon as the delicate blue ribbon and gold edge appeared, Mike exclaimed, "Well, I'll be."

Emma could only smile. The two plates matched so perfectly, it sent a chill up her back. Turning each over carefully she examined their creator's initials imprinted on the back. They matched, as did the little fire pot marks just below them. Musing how this could be possible, she stared down at the two plates, and started to recite the story her Grandmother told of the dishes. "Grandma Lizzy, my Father's Mother. Used to tell me the story of these dishes, when I was

younger than you." She paused and looked up to insure the children were still there. "You see they were given to her by her Grandma Emme."

"Is that where you got your name?" Crystal interrupted.

"Yeah, you might say so." She said shaking her head, unconsciously in agreement. Crystal smiled with contentment and took a seat at the far end of the table. The other's soon followed, except Mike who was busy at the sink drawing water for coffee. "And her Grandmother had received them as a wedding gift, from her Grandma Emma."

"Wait a Minute, Em" Mike interrupted, joining them at the table with his empty coffee cup. "Let me get this straight. Your Grandmother Lizzy, got them from her Grandmother Emme. Who got them as a wedding gift from her Grandmother Emma?"

"Yeah" She responded, hoping he wasn't going to stop her from telling the story, or at least the portion of it she had long ago determined to be the shred of truth, buried beneath her Grandmother's spun tales. "Now remember, Grandma's given name was Emma too. She just always went by Lizzy. You know its short for Elizabeth; Her middle name."

"Wow!" Shelly, blurted out, "Four generations named Emma. Why didn't you name one of us Emma?"

"It's more generations than that remember I said Grandma every time the dishes changed hands."

"I get it." Crystal spoke up. "One of us would have to name our daughter Emma, right?"

Mike's face filled with shock and something else, something that moved like a shadow across his strong face, but she did not recognize the emotion. On the other hand Kit looked like she was forcing him to listen against his will and Jason sat motionless.

Realizing his mother was looking at him, Jason leaned forward placing his elbow on the table and said. "That makes those dishes nearly 200 years old."

"Shit Em, why didn't you tell me how old those dishes were?" Mike said jumping to his feet.

"I'd never thought about it." She tried to explain, watching the shadow grow darker inside of him. "To me they were just a piece of Grandma. Besides, the set is not complete. I only have a few of the pieces."

"Like what?" He demanded sternly and her stomach churned with regret for not just putting the dishes in the closet, but flustered as she was, she managed to recite off the pieces of her Grandmother's set, forgetting only the round bellied tea pot.

"Still" Mike spoke up "It's nearly 200 years old. You have to take that in to consideration."

She was sure she could see dollar signs twinkling in his eyes but she really didn't care. He had just given her permission to finish the tale of their journey. "To say the least, some of it was probably lost when the ship that brought my Great Great Grandparents to the U.S., ran into trouble off the east coast, with a Man of War from France."

"What kind of man of War?" Jason ears suddenly perked up.

"It's a name for an old ship, Jason." His father answered, in an impatient tone, from behind her.

"Or when the steam boat, they took up the Mississippi river, blew up." She forged on, fearful he was going to change his mind and shut her up at any minute.

"Blew up?" Crystal exclaimed, her shimmering blue eyes the size of half dollars.

"Damn Em, What a story." Mike again put his two sense in, but allowed her to continue.

"Did that really happen?" Jason questioned.

"Of course it did, or Mom wouldn't have said so." Kit's judgmental tone struck blood, her blood. More than once her older brother's had spoken to her with that tone, even recently they had condemned her for not owning the home that now housed her extended family.

"Kit, that's no way to talk to your brother." Her voice was stern. She would not allow Kit to dominate Jason the way her brothers had her, but she knew better than to dwell on the subject for more than a passing moment either. Addressing Jason she continued the story "It was a steam boat, Jason. Sometimes they would build up to much pressure or at least this one did and then blew up. I'm sure it doesn't happen often. Anyway, Grandma said that's what happened to my Great Great Grandparents boat. Of course, it didn't sink or the dishes would have been lost. Anyway, if all that wasn't enough" she plowed on, casting a glance at Mike's stunned expression.

"They ended up having to push a hand cart across the plains, to join Brigham Young here in the Valley of the mountains." At last taking a deep breath she was done, and Mike still had not replied negatively. She was sure the minute she added the prophet's name he would have something to say, but uncharacteristically he had not even opened his mouth.

Shelly was the first to speak. "Can you imagine? Believing in something so much, as to endure all that and not be turned back?"

Emma thought her heart was going to explode with pride. Shelly had got it. She really understands, Emma thought, it's more than the age of the dishes. It's the journey and the people that brought them.

Suddenly Emma was drawn back to the present by Mr. Mason's hearty laugh behind her, after Crystal had asked about growing cows.

"We raise cattle; child but we do grow corn as well." His voice was soft and accepting of the child's innocent comment. And he continued to grin at Emma as he looked down upon her face, signally to Emma the girls were safe in his presence, so again she gazed out upon the immense landscaping laying beyond her and was dragged back to the conversation that had taken place around the table that day.

Shelly's comment had left everyone as speechless as she was, undoubtedly touching Mike's heart as well. The dollar signs she thought she had seen in his eyes were gone, replaced with a soft glow and perhaps even a slight dampness. "She's right." He finally spoke, noticing Emma watching him. "Those dishes have been to hell and back. Don't mix them up." He instructed, "After all you know the history of your set. Guess, I need to get you that china hutch I've been promising." He added as he headed for the counter top.

Emma shifted her attention back to the two sets sitting before her, but his reactions were so out of character that she could not shake the questions from her mind. Why had he not stopped her from telling the story? He hated her stories of her family. She knew his childhood had not been the joy she was raised in, and she avoided the subject whenever possible, but he generally stopped her from finishing the stories anyway. He had not even objected when she mentioned the prophet, which was truly crossing his invisible lines, but it was his last suggestion that had thrown her off balance. The thought of him offering to buy her a hutch to put silly sentimental items in, was not at all like him.

She continued anyway to open and examine every piece of the new set, as she thought about his bewildering reactions. Before she knew it, she had a well-dressed table of fine china. Shelly's calming voice calling out the name of every piece as she un-wrapped it, had disturbed her thoughts little. Carefully peeling the crisp paper from the last piece, she was drawn back into the circle.

"It's a salt shaker." Shelly concluded, suggesting a spot for it in the relish dish, but it did not fit.

"Great, now we have Two incomplete sets." Mike proclaimed playing with the coffee maker, his cup still empty. Emma wasn't really listening though— she had noticed a large Manila envelope at the bottom of the box quite some time ago. At first she thought it was there for support but realizing the wooden crate needed little support, so she finally picked it up. The flap was stuck down and the clasp folded flat. Turning it over she discovered, **RETURN TO MR. BECKSTED AT 555-8726 FOR A REWARD** printed in bold lettering.

"Em!" It was Mike's trumpeting voice that caught her attention this time. "Look at this!"

"What?" She asked since all she could see was a small paper laying on the table in front of Jason.

"Jason's figured it out." Shelly proclaimed, sounding as excited as her father does.

"But we helped him remember all the pieces." Crystal interjected.

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