



What Would The Season Be Without...

A Wee Bit O' Seasonal Fluff

By Kelly Blake

Christmas never seems to fill the air when the cool ocean breeze flutters the fronds of the palm trees. They make a noise more akin to thin sticks dropping upon one another than the sound of a crackling fire in the hearth. And the blinking lights one often sees wrapped around the girth of the trees is a far cry from the multicolored lights and depictions of mangers that litter the lawns further north.

But I was more than content to sit upon the white sea wall and let the breeze gently shuffle my thinning gray hair. Though the temperature was in the low seventies, I clutched the lapels of my white cardigan firmly and ignored the coolness of the concrete on my bottom. The years of living in 'paradise' thinned my blood and even this mild weather would send a chill through my body.

I was passed the age of caring whether indeed I did passed as a woman and I simply appeared to be somebody's grandmother out for the evening air. It is as if age makes our fondest dreams come true with a wry sense of humor. Of course there are some perks. 'Sensible shoes' were now suddenly...sensible.

Although I was now alone, I had lived my life as I had wanted...no...as I had needed. I had to leave home at such a young age. My family simply didn't understand. My father was enraged the first time he caught me dressing. He yelled and swore quite foully between the swinging of his belt and the back of his large hand.

My poor dear mother had little in the say. She knew I was...different. Exactly how different I was, neither of us realized at the time. But she acted as if nothing was amiss. She'd carefully place the odd piece of girl's clothing I had neglected to put in my hiding spot in the closet out of view, but where I would find it. And if I would leave a cosmetic stained tissue on the floor of my bathroom, she would simply flush it down the toilet.

My older brother went ballistic when he found out. He called me all the derogatory names he could think of. I even think he invented a few new ones of his own. It's not like I hadn't heard them before. But coming from his mouth, those words cut the deepest.

Everyone in school thought I was gay...although they often used other more colorful epithets. And, in truth, I thought I might have been. Although I adored girls, it was not in the manner that most boys adore girls. I admired their colorful and stylish clothes. I loved the way they could decorate their faces with dabs of color here and there and suddenly be transformed into ravishing beauties trailing boys behind them as a comet does with its tail of dust.

But it was the boys that really got me...excited. I couldn't even be near certain boys because there was something about them that simply made me melt. I so very much wanted to touch them; to feel their chests and arms and their hard flat stomachs. I hated physical education because I would have to endure them when they were changing clothes or taking showers. The desire to achieve some form of intimacy...any form of intimacy...was overwhelming.

I wanted to be asked out on a date. I so wanted to be the one asked to a dance or a movie. I played the scenario out in my mind a thousand times. I would close my eyes at night as I laid in bed and dreamt of the dress I'd wear. I could envision how I would make up my face to entice some boy into kissing me. I even thought of what jewelry I'd love to wear.

It wasn't until I ran away from home that I began to really discover who I was. My life became hard...very hard. My money went quickly and I had to resort to less savory means to simply eat. The very thought of 'entertaining' some random stranger for a few dollars still causes me to shudder on the very rare occasions I remember those times. I remember being oh so hungry and tired and worn that I even thought of ending my life.

But there was this drive within me that kept me going. I found another young lad such as myself and we managed to find a place to wash ourselves spend the night. The cost was but a few dollars. The tenant of the apartment was a drug addict whose only interest was getting our money to feed his habit.

Whilst plying my new found trade of exchanging 'favors' for a bit of money, I met a man who had empathy and compassion and took me in. He recognized the fact that I was profoundly more female than male and he procured hormones for me. I was tall and deathly thin with fair skin and soft features. It wasn't very hard for me to begin living with him as his 'girlfriend'.

I suppose the rest is my history. Once I began, I never stopped or looked back. There were different men and I acquired different things from them including an education. By the age of twenty five I was out on my own. I had moved to Fort Lauderdale with the last 'sugar daddy' in my life and I chose to remain in this tropical paradise.

I did eventually meet someone who could accept me as simply another human being looking to connect on something other than a physical basis. We had a good and happy life together until his death. I found myself alone once again after so many years of his wonderful companionship and love.

I had made several attempts over the years to connect with my family but to no avail. My father had died and my mother was in a nursing home suffering from depression. My brother wanted nothing to do with me. And, to be honest, I wouldn't recognize him today if I came face to face with him. After fifty years, even the faces of my parents have faded into blurred and fleeting memories.

And so as I sat and watched the various people walk past on the opposite side of the road, I smiled and thought of how fulfilling my life turned out to be. A tear or two came to my eyes as I watched them smile and laugh and fill the air with about as much of Christmas spirit as was possible in a tropical climate.

As I turned from the busy side of the road back to my own more subdued side, I noticed a child slowly walking my way. I immediately recognized the young girl as being a runaway. I knew the look from my own past. She looked unwashed and her clothes were dirty. Her hands were in her pockets and she stared at the ground as she shuffled along the sidewalk, her small back pack dangling from her shoulder by a single strap.

As she neared, rather than avert my eyes from her or simply up and leaving, I clutched my bag a wee bit tighter and gazed directly at her. I smiled. Her eyes rolled up long enough to see my smile and she rightfully acknowledged my invitation by coming directly up to me.

“Can you spare a dollar?” The poor thing was near tears.

“Are you hungry?”

That was a completely ridiculous question that needed to be asked anyway. She nodded her head. Her shoulders were hunched and her face was drawn and quite pale in spite of the fine weather we'd been having.

“Well...” I smiled as maternally as I could. “Suppose we go across the street and we could dine together. Would that be acceptable?”

Once again she nodded as her tears did finally flow. I got up and reached into my shoulder bag for some tissues which I promptly handed her. She wiped her tears away and blew her nose.

“What is your name dear?”

She was silent for a long moment and then gazed up at me.

“Emily...” She squeaked.

“Well Emily...” I didn’t believe that was her name for a minute. I wouldn’t have given my proper name either if I was in her happenstance. “My name is Lilly...like the flower.”

She smiled. That was a start.

“So...Emily... Shall we dine?” I chuckled and she nodded.

I turned and walked toward the curb. Emily was just slightly behind me. I think had I made a sudden move, she would have fleetly disappeared into the darkness of the beach. Once traffic passed I crossed over and she followed.

Most of the stores were already closed for the evening and the restaurants and bars were getting ready to follow suit. But I did spot one place that appeared to still have a few patrons eating so I walked toward it. After inspecting the menu and seeing it was quite varied and told of many tasty delights, I turned toward my new dinner partner and smiled.

“Have a look and see if there’s anything you find to your taste.”

Emily moved to my right and quickly eyed the menu. I could swear I saw her actually drool as she slowly read each line.

“Can I have anything I want?” Emily’s eyes never left the menu.

“My dear child... You can have everything you want if that’s what you desire.” I couldn’t help but chuckle.

Emily grinned at me and nodded her approval. I went and opened the door and she followed. We were given a table by the window so we could gaze out into the street. The waiter came over and we immediately ordered. Emily asked for the conch chowder and a cheeseburger with fries. I ordered several appetizers and a white wine. I really wasn’t hungry but I thought Emily might want a bit more than she was actually ordering.

“So Emily... You’re not with your family tonight?”

She was staring out the window and smiling until I asked that question. Emily glanced down at her hands. I noticed that she bit her nails and her cuticles. The poor child was a mess.

“You’re not with yours.” Emily retorted with some anger.

“That’s true.” I chuckled. “My...husband passed away this year and though I was invited to our daughter’s house for dinner, but...I simply didn’t have the...spirit.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. It must be...difficult.”

“I have other family but we haven’t spoken in...far too many years.”

Emily gazed up at me. I smiled gently.

“We had a difference of opinion?” I offered.

“So what happened?”

“I ran away from home when I was about your age.”

I smiled at Emily but studied her reaction very closely. She nodded and glanced down at her half eaten burger.

“Is that what you’ve done Emily?”

She didn’t say anything but she did nod her head. Emily suddenly glanced up at me.

“You won’t tell?” Her voice was edged with panic. “I can’t go back there!” Emily’s tears began to well up.

“No sweet heart... I won’t tell. You’ve been living on the streets for some time?”

“Yeah...” Emily nodded her head.

“Well we certainly can’t have you sleeping out on Christmas Eve. Would you like to come to my home? I have an extra room and you can wash and get a good night’s sleep. We can even wash your clothes if you’d like.”

Emily eyed me warily to say the least. And I understood that look completely. I knew what lurked out there and too often it wasn’t pretty. Memories came flooding back of what I had to do to survive. I needed to dab at a still forming tear.

“It’s within walking distance and if you don’t feel...safe...you can leave. I won’t stop you.”

I simply wanted to make her feel...good with this? I could tell Emily was thinking about what I’d said. She slowly gazed up at me and nodded.

“Yeah... That would be nice.”

I could hear the weariness in her voice. I wasn’t quite sure of what I was doing or where this was going. I only knew that this child would not spend tonight huddled behind some bushes or on a piece of cardboard beneath some overpass.

“So... Emily...” I smiled as innocuously as I could. “Are you from around here?”

Her accent gave her away as being a Southie. She only shook her head as another piece of what must have seemed a feast disappeared from the burger. I smiled as I felt the satisfaction of her stomach being filled and remembered that feeling from my own past.

“What made you think of this town?” I knew the answer. It was the same one I gave so very long ago.

“I saw this thing on spring break? And it showed Fort Lauderdale. It looked warm and sort of comfortable?”

“Well...” I decided to push just a wee bit. “It must be warmer than Boston.”

Emily gazed up at me for a moment, her actions frozen and her mouth agape.

“You see sweet heart... I grew up in the projects.” I chuckled.

Emily stared at me for the longest moment. I think she was trying to figure out what I was about. She carefully wiped her mouth with the napkin without breaking eye contact.

“You don’t sound like a Southie.” She watched me intently.

“Well...” I chuckled. “When I left, I left everything behind me including the accent. I wanted nothing more to do with Boston...or the memories.”

Emily nodded and gazed down at her French fried potatoes. She seemed to carefully choose one that was a wee bit overdone and, after applying a liberal coating of ketchup, bit into it making a crunching sound. She wiped her finger tips with the napkin again.

“How’d you get by?”

I loved the ‘oh so innocent’ look on her face and I hated the world that brought her to this point in her very young life. I sighed and smiled sadly at her.

“You know... Men...”

She nodded sadly and stared down at her half eaten meal.

“But they’re not all bad and they all don’t want to...” I had to pause and sip my wine. These weren’t pleasant memories. “...to use you.”

“But you seem to be...okay?”

“I got very lucky. I met someone who...who could accept who I was with no questions.”

Emily leaned her head against her palm as she rested her elbow upon the table top. She had this dreamy look in her eyes.

“What happened? Why aren’t you with him?”

“He passed away last year.”

I gazed down at my hands as a rush of warm and wonderful memories flowed rapidly through my mind. I even smiled.

“I’m sorry.”

“You needed be sweet heart. I had a wonderful life with him and he gave me the children I could never have otherwise.”

Emily sipped her soda and reached for a piece of the fried calamari which seemed to be a prerequisite on everyone’s menu.

“Why couldn’t you have children? Didn’t you want any?”

However was I to answer that?

“I simply couldn’t. It was physically impossible.”

“That’s too bad. I guess you like kids.” Her gaze was unflinching.

“Yes... Very much... But I was able to help him raise his and they called me ‘mom’.” I smiled simply thinking back upon those days.

“I wish I could have kids.”

Emily’s voice was barely audible. And the sadness that dripped off her words struck me very deeply. I couldn’t imagine why she would ever say anything like that at such a young age.

“Perhaps you will. Perhaps you will meet your special somebody and you’ll have a family of your own.”

“Yeah...” She sounded so cynical. “A girl came always dream...right?”

“Dreams are what life is made of. That’s what keeps us going...am I right?” I smiled warmly at her.

“Yeah... I guess...” She sounded far from being convinced.

“Anyway...” I wanted to change the subject to something a little less...introspective? “I have this wonderful Christmas tree that I haven’t finished decorating. Would you like to help me do that?”

Emily’s eyes lit up and a grin came to her face.

“Yeah... That would really be nice. I love hanging stuff on the tree.”

“Well...” I grinned and feeling a bit self-satisfied. “We have plenty of time before midnight so take your time. Whatever you don’t finish we can bring along with us.”

Emily didn't take too much longer. She just managed to finish her burger and a few more fries. I had the waiter wrap up the appetizers and I asked for the bill. I glanced at Emily and I could see that she was fidgeting. I also knew that feeling.

"I need to use the rest room. Would you like to come along?"

She looked up at me with her big amazing doe eyes.

"Ummm... Sure... I guess..."

Emily turned and unzipped the top of her pack. She pulled out a small cross body bag and placed the strap over her head. We got up and as we walked toward the rear of the restaurant, I placed my hand lightly upon her shoulder. The poor thing was quivering like a leaf of grass in the wind.

I opened the door to the rest room and entered. There was nobody else inside. Emily stood at the threshold quite tentatively and cast her gaze around the small room. Only after doing so did she enter. She went to the first opened stall, closed the door and did her business. I washed my hands and gazed at my reflection in the mirror as I waited for Emily.

She didn't take very long and upon exiting the stall, Emily went to the basin and immediately began to wash her hands. Then she splashed water on her face and soaped up her hands again.

"You know dear..." I knew exactly what was happening. "You can take a bath or a shower when we get to my home." I spoke and smiled gently.

"Oh... Yeah..." I handed her some paper toweling. "I forgot." She stared at me with her big sad eyes. "It was too cold this morning to shower."

"You use the beach showers?"

"Yeah... I have a bathing suit on underneath my clothes."

Emily opened her purse and took out a tube of lipstick. She opened it and began to apply it to her lips. I could see that there wasn't much left. I could also see her chewed finger nails and cuticles. I wasn't surprised. She had such lush eye lashes. I was envious of that as I watched her rub her lips together and smile at reflection.

"A color with a bit more blue might be more suiting." I smiled as she gazed at me questioningly. "You have such fair skin, beautiful but pale, and something like a berry color might be more suiting. Let's go." I smiled and went to the door. "I have unused cosmetics and I'm sure we can find you a few colors."

Emily smiled and I smiled with her. I paid the bill and gathered our things. As we walked out of the restaurant and began our short journey down the street, I could only smile and remember

myself at the same age. I remembered playing with my sister's makeup just to see how I would look as a girl. I remember the few times she even helped me with the colors and she combed out my long scruffy hair.

But she has long since passed through this life all too quickly. I could show this young one a thing or two and at least provide some rest and shelter. Not that I even thought of letting her out into the streets again without something...some plan.

Somewhere along the way Emily grasped my hand in hers. Her gaze down at the ground, smiled coyly, and glanced at me out of the corner of her eye. I didn't know whether she was simply seeking the comfort of another human being or if she was playing me. I knew how quickly one learned such things on the streets. But I smiled back at her and gave her warm hand a little squeeze.

We arrived at my building and I let us in with my key. The bright and cheery lobby allowed me to get a good look at my new guest. Emily was gorgeous. Her skin was so very fair as was her long blond hair. But her most striking feature was her blue-green eyes. They were the color of the ocean where the sandy bottom meets the first growth of sea grass.

She was slightly taller than me and thin as a reed. Emily's hands, her bitten finger nails baring the remains of pink nail polish, were long and slender like a pianist's might be. One look at her attire, her worn slightly oversized jacket, very worn jeans, and dirty white tennis shoes indicated that everything about her needed a good and thorough scrubbing.

"God... This place is amazing." Emily's eyes lit up as we walked to the elevator.

"Well..." I smiled and chuckled. "I only recently moved in here. I sold the house after my husband passed away. I simply didn't need the room. Plus which..." We stopped at the elevator and I pushed the button. "I was getting lost in it."

"Wow... It sounds like it was big."

"No sweet heart... I was getting lost in all the memories."

We rode the elevator in silence. Emily still held onto my hand. And, to be honest, her warmth felt good. We soon arrived to my floor and we walked down toward the far end of the hallway. My keys still in my hand, I unlocked the door and led Emily in.

"Wow... This place is amazing."

She quickly let go my hand, dropped her back pack, and went right to the big glass windows that held the view of the ocean. It was quite dark but one could see the palms and beach lit up by the street lights along the walkway. I smiled as I picked it up and placed it upon the hall table along with my bag and my keys.

“Can I go outside?”

Emily’s face was pressed up against the glass and her hands spread trying to blot out the light from my lamps. Her voice was so full of innocent joy and wonder. How could I even think of refusing her? As she slid the glass door open and stepped out onto the balcony, I dropped my sweater on a chair and brought the remains of our meal into the kitchen.

The guest bath came next. I brought a large bath towel in from my linen closet and, after setting it down on the counter top, I made sure all the proper accoutrements were already in the shower stall. Although I haven’t had any guests as of yet, I liked to be prepared. The liquid soap, shampoo and conditioner were on the shelf along with a wash cloth that hung from the bar beneath.

When I walked back into the living room, Emily had come back in and was looking around. She stopped by the server and began to look at the photographs I had arranged atop the piece. She glanced up at the Christmas tree standing innocuously in the corner and then at me.

“There’s nothing on it.” Her wide eyed look belied her time on the streets.

“Well...” I chuckled. “I was hoping to have help decorating it.”

“Yeah...” Her grin was nearly ear to ear. “That’d be great!”

I loved her excitement. But I wanted her to clean up first so I could wash her things.

“But first to the shower for you young lady...” I had trouble affecting my authoritative voice.

“Ohhh...!” Emily pouted as she gazed at the large box that contained all the decorations.

“You’ll feel so much better and we can comb out your hair so use the conditioner.”

I don’t know why I told her to use that. I did want to see what her long hair looked like with just a wee bit of styling. I suppose it was the mother in me. I so missed that part of my life. I truly loved raising children.

“Do you need anything from you pack?”

“Oh... Yeah...”

Emily went to her pack and unzipped the top. She began to remove somewhat folded clothing. I took each piece from her. She finally found her little bag of personal items and I showed her where the bathroom was.

Once I heard the water begin to run, I brought her clothes into the utility room and began a wash. Then I went to get her pack to move in into the guest bedroom. It was still opened and I couldn’t

resist peeking inside. I saw a pocket knife, a douche syringe with tip, and several packages of birth control pills. I even found some condoms at the very bottom when I shuffled the bag.

Everything in the bag made perfect sense. If I could convince Emily to stay for a while, I would need to have my doctor do a complete physical just to make sure she hadn't contracted some sort of disease from working on the streets. I turned down the bedding and made the room ready for her. Now I only had to find Emily something suitable to wear. She was slightly taller than me but much slimmer. I had a pair of old cotton draw stringed pajamas that might be perfect.

As I retrieved them from my dresser, I thought of a lovely silk floral print robe she could wear. I removed that from my closet and walked to the bathroom door. I rapped twice softly and simply turned the door knob and walked in. Emily was in the midst of wrapping a towel around her hair but she was otherwise naked. I saw her small budding boobs but then I saw something that nearly made me faint. Emily had a very small, but indisputable penis.

I quickly placed the clothing down and shut the door before either of us could vocally respond. The poor dear looked startled and horrified; her eyes wide and mouth agape. I leaned back against the door to take several deep breathes and gather my wits. I never expected that the child I found was in transition. Who would have thought?

Suddenly everything in her pack made even more sense. She was taking birth control pills to get her hormones and used the syringe for...well...for work? Now for sure there was no way I ever would let this child back out on the streets to fend for herself. What I could do is give her the opportunity I never had. I could help her through her changes, and challenges, with completely unconditional love.

No child should be without that type of love and caring and I didn't want her to go through what I went through. I hated having to sell my body to simply get by and I was going to see that Emily never had to do that again. I quickly went into my bedroom and to my vanity. I opened up the bottom draw and sifted through some very old photographs until I found the one I needed.

I slowly walked back to the bathroom door and knocked softly.

"Please... I'm sorry. Just let me get dressed and I'll leave." I could hear Emily softly crying.

"If that's what you want to do...I won't stop you. But I want you to look at this picture first."

I bent down and slid it under the door. There was a very long eighth month pregnant silence as I waited for Emily's response. I heard her lean up against the door.

"Who is this?" She softly asked between snuffles.

"That was me at about your age."

I anticipated the silence again. I knew exactly what she was thinking. I heard her move and the door knob slowly turned. Emily cracked the door a mere few inches. She gazed at me through her reddened eyes and then back down at the picture.

“This is a boy.” She said softly.

“No sweet heart...” I smiled warmly. “That’s a girl who looks exactly like a boy. The girl is inside and the boy is covering her.”

Emily continued to stare at the picture as she tugged the lapels of the robe together with her other hand. She leaned against the wall and opened the door half way.

“I should have told you.” She didn’t take her eyes off the picture.

“Why...? Do you think that would have mattered?” I reached out and gently stroked her cheek.

“It does to a lot of people.”

“Well... You can see that it doesn’t matter to me.” I chuckled. “Now why don’t you come out and we’ll dry your hair.”

Emily gazed up at me and I could see the tears form again. She suddenly reached out and hugged me.

“Thank you...”

I could barely hear her voice. I hugged her to me and felt her head rest upon my shoulder.

“Come sweet heart... Let’s do your hair and then we can get to the tree.”

I took Emily by her hand and led her into my bedroom. We went into my bathroom which was appointed more to my tastes than the guest room.

“God... This is gorgeous.” Emily was so excited. She immediately went to the free standing bath. “This has the jets in it?”

“Yes...” I chuckled. “When one gets older, the streams of warm water work wonders on one’s old bones.”

I sat her on the stool in front of the mirrored cabinets and retrieved both my hair dryer and my curling iron. Taking off the towel I could see she had perfectly straight hair and I wanted to see what we could do about making some waves. Her hair color was an amazing strawberry blond and as I dried it after putting some liquid conditioner in it I could see wonderful possibilities.

Once it was dried, I began to use the curler on it, making large waves as I went along. Emily's face lit up with delight as large curls began to form and frame her face. And the more I worked, the bigger her smile became.

"Oh my God...! I look..."

"You look amazing." I chuckled. "I wish I looked like you when I was your age. You're so very lucky."

"But you look so pretty." She quickly turned to gaze at me.

"Yes... Well... It took the miracles of modern cosmetic surgery to fix what nature had done. But you seemed to have beaten that. How long have you been taking your pills?"

Emily's expression suddenly changed and she gazed down at her hands.

"Look at me dear." I gently placed my index finger beneath her chin and lifted it up.

"I guess for two years... Maybe more..."

"Where did you get them?"

I could feel her tense up.

"Don't worry sweet heart. I'm not going to tell anyone. Anyway...'Ladies Lounge rules' apply here."

"Ladies Lounge rules...?" She gazed at my reflection questioningly.

"Yes... What's said between women in the rest room, or bath room, remains there." I giggled.

"Ohhh..." Emily giggled. "I think that's a good rule."

Once I'd finished, Emily began to get up as she checked her new style out in the mirror.

"Oh no you don't...!" I admonished Emily with a smile and a snicker as I gently pushed her back down onto the seat. "Now for the fun part... Let's see what colors would look good on you."

I bent down and opened up a cabinet door. In it were all the various 'gift free with' kits I had accumulated over time. I picked up several compacts that held eye shadows as well as mascara and an eye liner. I opened them up to display an assortment of various shades.

"You have such fair skin and your hair is such an amazing color. I think we should try earth colors. They work especially well in the evening. The darker colors add...mystery." I smiled.

"And they make you appear so very sophisticated."

I began to work on her eyes with cotton swabs, brushes and sponges. Since all the items were never used I had no problem simply letting her have them when we were finished. I worked slowly and deliberately until I had her eyes shaded the way I thought they should be. Amazingly, Emily seemed to know which way to turn and where to look. This wasn't the first time someone had done her makeup.

I found a shade of lipstick that nearly matched her hair color and, after carefully outlining her lips, I filled them in with the color using a brush. I massaged her lips and then applied a second coating. I finished her off with a blush shade that matched the lipstick. I turned her seat around to face the mirror.



“Oh my God...!” Emily’s hands flew to her face but stopped short of touching what I’d only just completed. “Is that really me?” She turned with a very shocked expression on her face. “I can’t believe it!”

“Now don’t you cry and ruin your eyes.” I said with a giggle. “You are a beautiful young woman and you can’t be mistaken for anything else.” I placed my hands upon her shoulders. “If you would like, we can take you to my salon and have my stylist trim your hair. Perhaps even add a wee bit of auburn to the color. You’d look spectacular.”

“You really think so?” Emily gazed at my reflection in the mirror.

“Oh absolutely...” I had to laugh. I thought she looked gorgeous; a natural beauty. “Come on sweet heart... Let’s go do the tree.”

We got up and went back into the living room. I could already tell that Emily felt differently about herself. Her manner of walking and of holding her body changed dramatically from when I first saw her. But then again, a little styling and some cosmetics are enough to make any of us feel better about ourselves; CIS or otherwise.

We both knelt down around the box and I opened the top up. There were dozens of decorations we’d collected over the years as well as those that were handed down to my husband. And as I carefully opened each box, I told what little story of each ornament that I could remember or knew.

“You must have loved him very much.” Emily spoke as she inspected a glass ornament before hanging it on the tree.

“Yes... I did.”

“What was his name?” She bent down for some tinsel.

“John... His name was John Grady. But everyone called him Jack.”

“Yeah...” Emily giggled. “That happens a lot in Boston.”

“Well... It happens down here as well. He was...amazing.”

“You told him about...you know?” She stared intently at me.

“Well yes... I had to.” I smiled remembering that day. “I’d already had my surgery but I felt it was only fair. He already had two children but the way he spoke about kids...” I felt my tears welling up. “I had to let him know that I certainly couldn’t have any. It was tough for me.”

“Well... What did he say? I mean...how did he take it?”

I got up and went to grab a tissue.

“I didn’t mean to upset you or anything.”

“No...” I sat back down wiping my nose. “You didn’t. These are good memories.”

“So...?” Emily was rocking back and forth on her knees with excitement.

“Well... He said it simply didn’t matter. He said he loved me and that was more than enough for him.”

“Wow...” Emily sat back on her heels. “That’s amazing. It’s like... Why doesn’t that ever happen in real life? I mean...in my life...”

“You simply haven’t met the right one. You’re so young anyway. You’ll have more time than you can imagine and there are so many different people out there to meet.”

“Yeah...” Emily held a crystal star up to the light. “This one is beautiful.” She sighed.

“Listen sweet heart... We need to get a program started for you.”

“Huh...?” Emily sudden stopped in mid action of hanging up the star.

“Well... If you’d like to stay, I’d like to help you. And we need to start with you getting a medical check-up. We can use my doctor. She’s very committed to our community.”

“Ohhh... Okay... I guess.” Emily took the next ornament I handed her.

“It will mean a real hormone prescription and not those pills you’ve been taking. You’ll develop quicker and a lot more safely under a doctor’s care.”

“Yeah... But all that costs money and I can’t do that...take your money. It doesn’t seem right.”

“Now don’t you worry about that!” I scolded her. “I would rather have you take my money than you getting it the way you are now. Anyway, dear Jack left me quite well off so you don’t even think about it.”

“But...”

“There are no ‘buts’. And while we’re at it, once the stores reopen we can buy you some new things to wear. Your clothes are about worn out anyway.”

Emily’s eyes were as wide as saucers with a smile to match. Whilst I got up to put her now clean things in the dryer, she came with me to watch and help.

“Where did you get these clothes from?”

“They were a few of my sister’s old things. Nobody could bear to toss them when she died.”

The sadness of her words hung heavily.

“She was the one who taught you about cosmetics?”

“Yeah... And a few other things...” Emily gazed at me with tears forming in her eyes.

“One minute sweet heart...” I quickly went and fetched another tissue. “Let me show you how to deal with tears and not ruin your makeup.” I smiled gently as I dabbed at the corner of her eyes.

“There...” I handed her the tissue.

We finished putting her wash in the dryer and went back to our task at hand.

“So I guess you left home after that.”

“Yeah... You know...”

Emily didn’t need to finish the sentence and I wasn’t going to ask for anything she didn’t feel up to offering.

“Yeah...” I said sadly. “I guess it’s kind of why I had to leave. Actually...” I chuckled. “They had more than enough of me I imagine. I was asked to leave if you want to really know.”

“Really...?” Emily giggled as her sniffing ceased.

We went on to speak about a lot of different things in our lives. I was amazed that in spite of our age difference, things hadn't change all that much. The tolerance still wasn't there and the hatred and the name calling and the seer brutality that surrounds us all the time stayed the same.

I had lived a very privileged and sheltered life once I married Jack. Questions of my gender simply never came up. And, over the years, Fort Lauderdale had become...civilized? Gay and lesbian people were everywhere and they owned shops and homes and even elected city council members. Plus always living on the east side of town presented itself with a certain kind of gentrified life style.

Only Emily's appearance into my life brought the realities and the harshness of the world into view. I was determined more than before to see that this child enjoyed whatever remained of her childhood. And that she enjoy it being the gender she was really born; that of a girl. I was determined that she would not have to deal with what I had to and with what some many others still have to deal with in their lives.

As we finished up hanging all the ornaments and, with the assistance of a chair, placing the final star atop the tree, we both stood back as the lights blinked and the various hangings offered their cheery reflections and sounds and sparkles.

I placed my hands upon Emily's shoulders as we watched. I had only one more very important question to ask her.

"Emily... Do you have proof of your age?"

I could feel her tense up.

"Yeah..." She said as she gazed down at the floor.

"Well... You are sixteen I hope?"

"Is that important?"

"Well yes dear... It makes everything we want to do that much easier."

"The only thing is that the name Emily isn't on my ID."

"Well what name is sweet heart?" I gently turned her to face me.

"Ennis..."

A tear began to form again. I dabbed at it before it could fall.

"Isn't that...?" I never had a chance to finish.

“It’s a girl’s name. I was named before they knew my...sex...before I was born. And they just kept it cause they didn’t know.”

“Well... Names can be changed. But for now that’ll have to do. Do you like the name Emily?”

“Yeah...” She smiled coyly.

“Then Emily it is and damn the rest of the world.” I laughed. “Tonight is the one night when anything is possible and all our thoughts should be on hope and the dreams and possibilities for our future.”

Emily gazed at me and smiled. I placed my arm around her and hugged her to my side. Her face was aglow and she seemed to almost emit inner light that comes with feeling happy and secure in the moment. I walked her over to the love seat by the windows so that she could see the tree as well as the sight of the beach.

I thought, considering the time of year, that perhaps a wee bit of something like a port would be nice. I went to my breakfront, retrieved two small wine glasses, and poured a bit of port into each; a bit more into mine than hers. I went, handed Emily a glass, and took the seat next to her.

“Mmmm... This is really good.” Emily’s face was alit with wonder. “What is this?”

“Oh... Just some old wine... It’s called port.” I laughed. “I sometimes have a glass at night. It helps me sleep.”

“Well... I think it tastes wonderful.” Emily laughed.

We sat and sipped and spoke of many things; things of the past and things of the future. I felt very at ease with Emily. I felt as though I wasn’t simply speaking with a somewhat adrift sixteen year old girl. I was speaking with an old friend I hadn’t seen in way too many years. I felt as though I was speaking with my younger self and it was very...salutary...and comforting?

I especially enjoyed reliving my first meeting Jack and how touch and go things were at first...as with many young relationships. But I also spoke of my own insecurities at that time in my life. I knew these were the same ones Emily would encounter as she went through her life.

We spoke long enough to have another wee bit of the port. I haven’t felt that...that young at heart in too many years. We both had our feet curled up beneath us as we sat facing one another, wine glass in hand. It seemed like no time had passed when my grandfather clock struck midnight. I gazed at Emily as a mother would to her child and Emily smiled that innocent smile reserved for a loving mother.

“You know...” Emily said to me with her glass barely touching her lips. “You will be blessed for what you do to help me.”

Tears came to my eyes.

“I already am.” I replied as a tear flowed down my cheek and passed my smile.

Soon I could barely keep my eyes open. It was past my bedtime and the wine was having its desired effect. I took Emily by her hand and led her into my bathroom. Taking a cotton pad, I showed her how to remove her makeup and then how to apply cream to her face and hands. I showed Emily to her bedroom and tucked her in for the evening with a kiss to her forehead.

I then retired to my bedroom, undressed, and went through my nightly routine. I wanted to preserve whatever remained of my beauty for it fades altogether. After I had done my business for the evening, I donned a comfortable flannel gown and, after tucking myself in for the evening, I turned off my night light. It wasn't more than a few minutes when I heard a light rapping on my partially closed door.

“Come in Emily.”

I smiled and thought ‘who else could it be’. I reached over and turned on the night light. It almost felt normal to have another soul in my home. I'd missed that close and intimate feeling of someone sharing my living space and my life with me. And a child would do just fine.

“I'm sorry.” She said as she slowly and tentatively entered. “I hope you don't mind but...” She came to the edge of my bed and sat down at the foot. “I often slept with my sister for company. I have a hard time sleeping alone. I'm sorry.”

Emily gazed down at her fingers which she held in a prayer like grasp. How could I possibly refuse? I pulled back the bedding and patted the bed with a smile. I didn't need to utter a single word. Emily, her smile as big as I'd seen it, literally hopped onto the spot I patted and stretched out. She pulled the blanket back up and snuggled in. Then Emily sidled up to me on her side and placed her arm around me. I encompassed her with my arm. I felt the wetness of her tears as they soaked through my gown.

“Thank you...” She whispered. “You will be blessed for this.”

I hugged her with my arm, turned out the light, and smiled. I was asleep in to time at all. All I can remember was that her body's warmth penetrated my entire being. And then I fell into the deepest sleep I ever had.

When morning came I opened my eyes to find Emily no longer in bed with me. The warmth and the feeling of her touch still lingered heavily. As I sat up in bed I hoped...no...I prayed she had simply gotten up before me and was gazing out at the ocean.

I hopped out of bed with energy I hadn't felt in too many years. I donned my robe and quickly went out and down the hall into my living room. But there was no sign of Emily at all. I felt like my heart burst from the thought that she'd left.

I raced back to the guest bedroom to find her pack still here I'd placed it last evening. Now I felt panic. Where could she have gone? I went to the utility room and opened the dryer. Her old clothing was still in place. She certainly couldn't have gotten far in pajamas and a robe.

I quickly went back to the terrace window and as I reached for the sliding door handle, I saw Emily's ghostly reflection in the glass! I quickly backed away and clutched my robe tightly. I felt my heart begin to palpitate and I thought I was having a heart attack. I collapsed into a cross legged position on the carpet.

I tried to slow my breathing and I even laid back to try and calm myself. There had to be an explanation for where she was and why I saw what I saw. I gazed all about and around me. Everything seemed to be as it should. I glanced back at the Christmas tree. It was still lit and everything as we had left it the prior night.

I finally, and very slowly, sat up. As soon as I felt my feet beneath me I got up off the floor. Still shaken but with my wits returned I slowly started back to my bedroom. I was heartbroken for I felt my guest, for whatever reason, had left my home. I took some comfort in having fed her well and I had hopefully given her a peaceful night of sleep.

I walked slowly to my bathroom. My head hung down in sadness over the loss of my Emily. Yes, I'd even begun to think of her as mine. I turned on the water at my basin and waited for it to warm. I bent over and splashed my cupped handful of water over my face hoping that it would bring some sort of resolution to this horrid situation.

When I gazed up and into the mirror over my basin, I screamed! Facing me in the mirror was Emily with the exact same horrified expression on her face. My hands flew up to my face, as did Emily's. I touched my forehead and she imaged the same movement. I blinked one eye and then the other and the image of Emily did the same.

I quickly gazed at my hands. Gone were the wrinkles and the wear and tear that occurs with use over the years. My nails were down to the quick and in need of care. I quickly opened and shed my robe on the floor. I very tentatively lifted my gown to reveal what I had gotten rid of so many years before; my dick! I raised my gown even higher and saw Emily's budding breasts. I completely shed the gown and turned around, watching my body very closely. It was indeed Emily's.

As I stared at the reflection in the mirror, two thoughts occurred to me. Firstly, I had to start all over. And, secondly, I can start all over. I was in the body of a sixteen year old girl in the midst of transition and the more that thought became real to me, the more I cherished that notion.

But there would be problems. How could a sixty seven year old woman suddenly turn up as a sixteen year old girl? I hurriedly rushed to my bag and retrieved my wallet. I opened it up and a learners permit for driving stared me in the face. My name, my maiden name appeared on it as

well as the proper birth year for a sixteen year old. I looked further and saw that all my credit cards and my bank cards were in my maiden name. I cast my gaze up toward the heavens and said ‘thank you’ countless times. I was literally starting over with more than enough to fall comfortably into a new life!

A miracle had occurred and my mind raced. What to do first? For some reason the first thought that occurred to me was getting my hair done. Although long hair was a thought, I didn’t relish the amount of time I would need to tend to it. And I had to do something with my hands. My nails were a disgrace. I would need to get silk wraps until they grew in.

My wardrobe would need changing. I could now wear all the things that I envied the young girls their shapes for. Time... I had a lot of time. But I knew how quickly time flew and I wasn’t going to waste another minute of it. I had a life to live...again.

As soon as I tried on my bra and panty, I realized that I was, temporarily, stuck with Emily’s wardrobe, limited as it was. I would need to buy an entirely new one when the stores opened tomorrow. I dialed up my salon, the one I used at the mall, and left a message for the earliest appointment. Of course it was for my...niece and, being one of their best customers, I tip too generously, I knew the date was set.

Epilogue...

My stylist was saddened to hear about my ‘aunt’ becoming disabled. She even went as far as offering to come and do her hair at home. But I assured her that I would be taking all of her appointments and, after giving my usual gratuity in cash as usual, she was most pleased. So was my manicurist as she diligently worked on my finger nails.

The sales woman at Neiman Marcus was shocked that a sixteen year old not only had her own store credit card, but that there seemed to be no limit. And, after purchasing an entirely new wardrobe, she assured me there would be no problem getting it delivered the following day. I did take two cute outfits with me.

Having never been fitted for a training bra, and now having the need for one if for no other reason than to fill out my new outfits, I stopped into the lingerie shop. I had no idea that those things seemed to be made of cardboard and I found them to be completely undoable. I wound up with a bra called ‘Barely There’. Fashion cups would make up the difference if it was truly needed.

Then I was off to Sephora. I now had a different much paler complexion and I needed some idea of what might look good. The stylist there was more than happy to assist me. She loved my pale blue-green eyes. They seemed to be almost teal in the light of day. And with my newly almost copper colored hair, she brought out a plethora of amazing colors.

The young lady...listen to me talk...she's probably what...twenty? Anyway, she worked on me quite diligently as well. She took her time and used any number of brushes and sponges to achieve a truly startling look. It was very sophisticated and yet still youthful. Of course I bought everything including some earth colors I knew I already had.



As I walked out of the store with my packages, I suddenly felt a bit exhausted. I had expended so much physical and mental energy on all these new things to begin my new life that I lost track of the time. I had been in the mall nearly five hours. I wouldn't have lasted two hours as my 'old' self.

As I sat and rested, I watched the people passing by and many of them, especially the guys, looked at me and smiled. I cast my gaze downward and coyly smiled to myself. This was going to be...fun? I was now in this incredible gift left to me by a truly unknown guest and everything in life seemed new and refreshing.

I also made a promise to myself. I would seek out runaways and find them a safe refuge. I'd been living in another world and had forgotten where I came from in a very big way. There would be time for that once I settled into being the 'new' me.

And, in the midst of enjoying being me, my phone sounded. I couldn't imagine who might be calling me other than maybe the kids. The kids...! How was I going to explain all of this to them? I fished my phone out of my shoulder bag and saw a phone number I didn't recognize. The phone stopped sounding and I stared at it. Suddenly the same number appeared when the phone went off again. What else could I do?

"Hello...?"

"Hi..."

It was a guy's voice. He sounded older than a teenager but still young.

"Listen..." He continued. "I'm really sorry about the other night."

Other night...? What other night?

“It’s just that... Well... You hit me with a lot and I just didn’t know how to take it...you know?”

“Uhhh...”

“Don’t say anything please. Just listen and if you want, you will never hear from me again.”

I didn’t recall hearing from him before.

“I want us to maybe see each other again. I acted like an asshole and it’s not who I am. I never met anyone like you before. You seemed to really have everything together and I know I’m older...maybe too old for you...but I’d like to try again. I felt something I never felt before and I want to see if it was real...you know?”

Then there was silence. I had no idea who I was speaking with and I hated to burst his bubble because he seemed to be a nice honest individual.

“Who is this?” I really needed to know.

“Ummm... It’s Jack...?”

I dropped the phone. I thought I was going to die right there on the spot. I could hear him on the other end asking if I was still there. I picked up the phone again.

“Jack...?” I said. I burst into tears. “Oh my God... Jack...”

Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah