

Aces, Charles

by David Carner

AU Professional Poker Player Jenny Burton find herself in a cash game with technology whiz Charles Bartowski. She reads people, and he uses math to make decisions. He's a nerd, she's a former con artist. There's no way they could be attracted to each other...right?

Rated: T · Genre: Humor, Romance · Chapters: 12

Chapter 1: Ch 1, Know When to Fold Em

A/N: This will be different. Really different, but if it goes awhile, I'm sure it will get fluffy because we all know I can't help myself. I'm setting it up as a one-shot, if there's interest I'll do more. Apparently the fanfiction website is having an issue getting out alerts about stories right now. If you are interested, I am posting all of my work on my tumblr, davidcarner.tumblr.com You're welcome to follow if it helps. Welcome to Aces, Charles.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, Bobby's Room, Stu Unger, Scotty Nguyen, but I do own a copy of Supersystem.

Las Vegas, Fall 2003

Chris frickin' Moneymaker. Jenny sighed. You would have thought poker didn't exist before he came along. Now some amateur had finally won the World Series of Poker Main Event, people were everywhere. Most would think that would make her life easier, but the thing about amateurs you never really knew what they were going to do, and some of them needed to be a hero to beat the pro, and that's what she was now, a pro.

She huffed to herself. A pro, when she came to Vegas at seventeen after her father was arrested, she was afraid she'd have to be another type of pro. Luckily she managed to finagle her way to become a dealer. She ran a few cons on the side, but she began to

watch the game as she dealt, and she learned, just like her father taught her. She began to try low buy-in cash games and found herself making money. It didn't take long until she made a name for herself in Vegas, and she was known as one of the best cash game players around, with a standing invite to Bobby's Room, THE ultimate cash game in Vegas.

Making that WSOP Main Event final table was a blessing, and a curse. Now everyone wanted to play her, but the big fish, they were a little wearier. It was one thing to use a false Texas accent (her dad was so wrong when he told her that would never work) and bat her eyes in shock as she kept winning hand after hand, it was another to be famous. No, coming in third at that final table had changed her life.

She looked down at her cards again and the board. She didn't like what she saw. She was sitting on pocket aces, hearts and spades, and thought she would slow-play her opponent. The flop had been horrendous. Seven, eight of diamonds, and the three of spades. If her opponent had the nine, six of diamonds, she knew she was a slight dog in the hand. He had bet, and she raised. He had studied her a long time, but she was quite sure it wasn't her he was studying, he was doing math in his head.

Jenny hated these players. Math could win you money and even tournaments, but long term, you just couldn't WIN. Not the big haul, not the big game on a consistent basis. She looked up at him, and he had a grin on his face that she couldn't quite figure out. She looked at the thing he fiddled with. She knew she shouldn't give away information, but she wanted to seem relaxed, and keep this hand going, so she did something she never did, she talked during a hand.

"Is that an iPod?" she asked. He looked at her, shocked.

"Yeah," he answered.

"Is it worth the money?" she asked. He gave her a smile, scrunching his nose.

"Oh, for your job, I think it would be a great investment," he said. "Want to listen to it?" She thought for a second, and shrugged. He took the ear bud out of his ear and handed to her, but paused. "I cleaned my ears," he said, sincerely. A laugh bubbled up inside of

her. She took it and fiddled with it a second and music began to play. "I call," he said. Jenny sat there, and listened to Nina Simone's Feeling Good.

The King of Spades hit on the turn, and Sarah wanted to sigh. No straight or flushes had connected, but there were two flush draws out there. If her opponent had an Ace, King, or King Queen, he had hit his top pair, and was a serious dog in the hand. She studied how much was in front of him. It was a cash game and he could buy back in. She could move it all in and find herself up over \$250,000.00 for the night. Of course if he called and she lost, she would be done for the night. She'd even have to drop down in the cash games and play the lower games to build back her bankroll. It was something she had to before and she was sure she'd have to do again, but right now she was sure she was winning. He flashed that smile at her again, and the thoughts of moving all in, vanished. She didn't want to run him off. What was she thinking, this was \$250,000.00. She knew what it was, the money, the game, all of it, she could do it all on autopilot. She could lose everything here tonight, and within two weeks of grinding have her bankroll exactly where it needed to be to play in this high stakes game.

She was having fun, and she hadn't know when she had enjoyed herself more.

"You make those, Charles, Baby?" Scotty Nguyen asked, pointing toward the iPod. Scotty called everyone baby.

"No, and it's Chuck," he answered.

"Chuck?" Jenny asked, unable to help herself.

"My parents were sadists," Chuck replied, making the whole table laugh. Sarah moved half of her remaining chips and cash in, and Chuck blinked a few times and concentrated. "Call," he said. Sarah internally berated herself. He was supposed to move all-in. He looked down at his cards and looked at her, seemingly upset. Jenny couldn't figure out what was going on. The deuce of diamonds hit, and Chuck looked visibly upset. Jenny had been ready to check, thinking she was beat with the flush, and she would fold to any bet, but that look...he didn't like what he saw. He didn't like it at all, and Sarah knew she had won. She moved all-in, and the look on Chuck's face told her, that moved killed him.

“Call,” he said softly, and turned his cards over. Sarah stared down at what the two cards she originally thought he had, the nine, six of diamonds. He had the flush. She had misread him. She looked back up at him. “Sorry,” he said, and then it hit her, he meant it. He didn’t want her to lose the money, what was wrong with him? Then it dawned on her. He had fallen for her. He was one of those. Love was for suckers, and he had fallen for her...and she could take advantage of that....why didn’t she like that idea?

“Nicely played,” she said, her facial expressions revealing nothing. Chuck nodded, and stood.

“I hate to be that guy,” Chuck began.

“Nah, Baby, you won, you have to stay awhile,” Scotty said.

“I told you that was my last hand,” Chuck said. “I have to get back, any of you guys coming up to the Bike next month?” The Bicycle Hotel was one of the spots Chuck frequented in Los Angeles.

“If I am, I’ll call you, Baby,” Scotty said. Chuck turned to Jenny.

“You just want me to call you,” Jenny said. Chuck’s ears turned red, but he didn’t deny it. She watched him go. She would call him, to get her money back, and figure out, how she had misread him. That’s all it was, she had read the right emotion, and she just applied it wrong. She had already figured it out, so why was she nervous? Jenny Burton didn’t get nervous. She’d rebuild her bankroll, take a trip to LA, and gut a whale. That thought used to make her excited, but today, today she was scared. She got up, left Bobby’s Room, and headed outside. She looked at the night sky, and sighed.

“It really is beautiful out here at night,” she heard a voice beside her say. Jenny turned and looked at him. “I get it, you’re pissed at me for taking your money.” She grinned and shook her head.

“I was planning on taking yours so what’s the big deal?” she asked. “If you’re worried about money, you shouldn’t be in the game. Here’s your iPod.”

“Keep it,” Chuck said, grinning. “I can afford another.” She couldn’t help herself, and gave him a punch in the arm. He gave her a look.

"Thanks," she said, and put the iPod in her pocket.

"Some say you're the best at reading people since Stu," Chuck said. Jenny gave him a look.

"Many people can read like Stu, the question is, do you have the stones to make the move?" Jenny asked.

"I guess we'll find out if you come to LA," Chuck said, and walked over to the car that pulled up. She watched Charles Bartowski, owner of Orion Industries, and multimillion dollar bachelor, open the door. He turned to her. "See you soon, Jenny Burton," and with that, he got in the car and rode away. She just watched him go, wondering exactly what he meant about that last comment, and wondering what she wanted it to mean.

A/N: There you go, an earworm that wouldn't go away. If there's interest, I'll keep going, if not, I got it out of my system. Take Care

DC

Chapter 2: Ch 2, Know When to Walk Away

A/N: (Me before Ch 1 to a couple of friends) No, I shouldn't do this, no one will like it. (3 hours later) You were right, I was wrong...So we're here, for the second chapter. Two things, there will be some angst, in fact this chapter ends with some angst, but IT'S ME. No third party, no stupid love triangle, just life stuff getting in the way. Give it a bit to breathe, I know exactly how it ends, we'll just all enjoy the time together. (There will probably be all sorts of fluff by the end) Second, my brain thinks, Chuck and Sarah, but in this fic, she is Jenny Burton. So if you see Sarah, send me a PM, tweet, tumblr, something, because I messed up, and those who look it over did too.

Also, if you're not familiar with poker, the names I use are actual poker players, and their histories are arcuate as far as I can corroborate. It's time for Aces, Charles Ch 2, Know When to Walk Away.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, or poker, but I do prefer Razz when I play...

Chuck sat in the car and watched as the Las Vegas strip went by. He could have taken a plane back, but he liked to ride in the car, it let him think, let his mind wander, that's where some of his best game ideas came from. He thought back to his childhood, to his mom and dad. He thought about the day his sister got that fateful call about their parents who died serving their country. He thought about how members of the government had stepped in and kept Ellie and himself from ending up in a foster home. He thought about how the man currently driving, John Casey, agreed to be the foster parent to the two Bartowski children, and somehow, the man who preferred to communicate through grunting had become a father figure to him, and to Ellie.

He thought about Stanford and the time he had there. He thought briefly about Bryce and Jill. He hoped they were happy, and then a moment later he hoped they had some type of venereal disease. He left Stanford with his degree, and he and his little bearded friend had come up with a couple of video game ideas, the biggest one called The Intersect. It was an RPG, featuring a nerd who had a computer program upload into his

head, but you could only access information as you leveled up. It's sequel, The Intersect 2.0, included physical combat skills. He and Morgan had made a killing off of the idea.

With money flowing in hand over fist, and Chuck now overseeing many employees, he was becoming quite famous. Fame had it's advantages and disadvantages...Chuck now had many women who wanted to date him, that was an advantage, Chuck now had many women who wanted to date him, that was a disadvantage. He had no idea who was out for his money, and who wasn't. Casey had taken over his social life because of this, and Chuck was positive this was some sort of punishment for crimes he had committed in a previous life.

Casey vetted everyone Chuck wanted to date. He had to believe that government agents weren't vetted this much. Chuck tried to talk to Ellie about it, but she was siding with Casey on this one. Casey wasn't completely overboard...yeah he was. It was Casey, and one thing about John Casey, whatever he did, he was going to do it well. Chuck thought it was going to take presidential approval and an act of congress for him to play in the high stakes game in Bobby's room. He didn't know how many phone calls were made as soon as he stepped foot in the door, but he hadn't been expecting one of the players to show up...Jenny Burton.

Chuck loved poker, it was math, luck, and adrenaline. He didn't like to be scared for his life, but Chuck did enjoy excitement, the uncertainty, and even the small sense of adventure. The math, just made his inner nerd squee with joy, and the luck...it just spiked the adrenaline. To make all the right plays and still get drawn out on...it was so awful when you were the one getting drawn out on, but it was like mana from heaven when you drew out on someone else. As much as Chuck loved poker, he really started to enjoy it more when Jenny Burton, "The Ice Queen," was seen on ESPN all last summer at the World Series of Poker Main Event. Her ability to read people and make moves was eliciting the name Stu Unger, the man many considered to be the greatest No Limit Hold 'em poker player of all time. It wasn't that Chuck didn't think she was attractive, no the woman was beautiful, but she had an ability that he just respected. The story of a former card dealer that had worked her game slowly over the years, grinding to become one of the best in the world, it was awe inspiring. He had admiration and respect for her

that words couldn't convey.

When Chuck entered Bobby's Room, he had expected some of the names, Phil Ivey, Doyle Brunson, Scotty Nguyen, Johnny Chan, Billy Baxter, and many others, but when Jenny Burton walked through the door and sat down beside him...Chuck didn't know what to do. The first few hands, he folded, just to see how she would play. She made money over the first several hands, without ever showing her cards, and when she did, she had the goods. Chuck knew better. He knew she was appearing tight early. He studied every move she made, because the only way to get better is to study, especially when the master was teaching a class right beside him.

There were always rumors about Jenny. She had a problem at blackjack, or roulette, at least that was the rumor. She was frequently seen in the low money games grinding, building her bankroll, and no one knew why, because they rarely saw her lose, and when they did it was never in consecutive sessions. Why couldn't she hang on to her bankroll, no one knew? Drugs were another belief, but as Chuck watched her, she abstained from alcohol at the table, and always did her best to stay away from the cigarette smoke. After a few minutes, he couldn't believe the cocaine rumors, so where did her money go, because she was a machine. She went head to head with some of the best NLH players in the world, and won.

As the night went on, Chuck found himself winning, and winning big. He was the big winner, and the second biggest was Jenny. She seemed almost personally affronted by it as well; he was sure it was because he was an amateur. She wasn't mean to him, or showed him any disrespect, but every time she looked at his stack, she would shake her head.

"My eyes are up here," Chuck said once to her when they were both out of a hand. Jenny was caught off guard, and nearly choked on her water she was drinking. "I see you admiring my stack."

"It is a very nice stack," she said, laughing.

"You gonna take it to dinner first?" he said. "I'm sorry, I've never played this many straight hours, and I'm making terrible, inappropriate jokes." She studied him a moment

and then leaned in.

“Tip from a pro, never tell someone that,” she said. “Don’t give anyone that edge.” She leaned back. Chuck nodded.

“Thank you,” he said.

“When I win it later, I’ll treat it right,” she said, winking at him. She waited until he was taking a drink before saying it, making Chuck nearly choke on his water. They shared a smile, and then the cards came out, and it was back to business.

“Will you shut up back there!” Casey yelled, pulling Chuck out of his thoughts.

“What are you talking about, Casey?” he asked. “I haven’t said a word.”

“Your lady feelings are about to smother me,” Casey said. “What happened a pretty girl tell you you’re good at poker?”

“Nope, played right beside Jenny Burton all night, and busted her,” Chuck said.

“You’re happy you busted a lady?” Casey asked. Chuck opened his mouth to speak and then shut it, knowing there was nothing he could say to this one. “Moron.” Casey didn’t say anything for a few miles and Chuck started to go back to his thoughts when Casey started back up. “You mean Jenny Burton, WSOP Main Event Final Table, Jenny Burton, you busted her at a cash game?”

“Yes,” Chuck said.

“Bartowski, she’s a poker player, she was probably smiling at you to get you to make some bigger bets so you could buy her groceries for the next few years,” Casey said. Chuck stayed quiet. “Fine, I’ll vette her.”

“Casey, do you have to vette every woman I see? You do know that the majority of them don’t want me for my money.”

“Chuck,” Casey began, and he knew this was serious, because he rarely called him Chuck. “Even if it was only one in a hundred that wanted you for your money I’d do it, to protect you.”

"Thank you, Casey," Chuck began.

"But, it's probably only one in a hundred that don't want you for your money," Casey continued.

"And, there it is," Chuck said. "A perfectly heartfelt moment...Caseyfried."

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Chuck sat in a meeting listening. He usually came in dressed in what many would call business casual. It was a video game company in LA, some employees came in wearing shorts, a tank top, and flip flops, and he didn't care. All he cared about was what they could produce, and what they produced was hit after video game hit. Today, Chuck didn't care. He hadn't shaved in days, he was wearing an Atari tee shirt, jeans, and his Chucks. It had been almost two months since the night at Bobby's Room. He kept thinking Jenny would come after him to win her money back, but she hadn't called. He had heard she was following the World Poker Tour, not to play in tournaments, but to hit some of the cash games. How much of a bankroll did she need to challenge him?

"What do you think, Chuck?" Morgan asked.

"I think Intersect 3.0 won't happen unless we can think of a better plot than the nerd is turned into a Bond like character. Having to play the games at the casinos, seduction, but not over the top, just enough to tranq or get info, but we can't have sex in the games. The other two weren't mature and this can't be either. Also you'd need to include a skill set for driving; cars, boats, airplanes, and of course, a jet pack," Chuck said, staring out the window the whole time. The room was silent and Chuck turned back to see everyone scribbling furiously.

"YOU ARE A GENIUS!" Morgan yelled. Chuck sat there, confused.

"Uh, licensing?" Chuck said.

"I'll run it by our lawyers, but I don't think it will be a problem, especially since we're using our own character, very special agent Charles Carmichael," Morgan said. "Okay, folks, you know what to do." With that, everyone filed out, and Chuck went to looking back out the window.

"I know that look," a voice said from the door. Chuck looked over and smiled. There stood a lanky, taller, richer, retired nerd. "I had the same look on my face just before I called it and cashed in."

"There's no excitement," Chuck said. "However, I am not rolling in money like you are Phil." Phil Gordon had joined Netsys Technologies as their first employee, and had made a bundle when it was acquired by Cisco Systems in 1996. In 1997, he retired to travel and play poker. To say Chuck was a little jealous was an understatement.

"If you're standing still, you're moving backwards," Phil said. Chuck grinned at him. "Let's go to the Bike, I want to talk with you."

"We can talk here," Chuck said, grinning.

"Yeah, but I can make some more money there," he said.

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"You seriously should enter some of the limit tournaments," Phil said later. "I mean you are a genius at Razz." Chuck shrugged. The two had played for hours, with no actual talk between them. They were up several thousand dollars, and Chuck wondered what it would be like just doing this every day. It was a fun distraction, but he was still missing something.

"So Vegas has been talking about you," Phil said. Chuck gave him a look. "People are losing money hand over fist with prop bets about when you're coming back."

"So you're here to win a prop bet?" Chuck asked, grinning, and raking in another pot.

"Nope, I've already lost," Phil said. "Chuck, talk to me, I get both of these worlds. I know how lonely things can be, and I've heard what happened in Bobby's Room. You melted the Ice Queen, and everyone is in shock."

"I don't know what you mean." Chuck said, shrugging.

"Don't quit your day job for poker," Phil said, laughing. "You are terrible at lying." Chuck couldn't help but laugh. "You got to her, and no one...Chuck, NO ONE, has been able to get to her. You said more to her in five minutes than anyone has in five years."

Chuck looked at him. Phil grinned. "Some of us got a copy of the surveillance video after you left, and you can hear what you two said." Phil started putting his chips in a carrier to go cash out. "Do you have the stones to make the move? You've won at everything else, you're looking for your greatest challenge?"

"Phil, I'm not after some fling," Chuck said.

"Do you think I'd be here if you were?" Phil asked, humor in his eyes. "Chuck, you're one of the best guys I know. That lady, has been through something, but she opened up to you. Make the move. Go all-in. I'll see you. I need to get back to Vegas, the WPT starts tomorrow and I need to see about winning a tournament."

"Good luck, Phil," Chuck said. Phil stood, paused, and laid a hand on Chuck's shoulder.

"She's reloaded her bank roll," he said, and left. Chuck sat there, until the dealer asked him what he wanted to do. He folded, cashed out, and went home.

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Chuck walked in the door to his townhouse.

"Where the hell have you been!?" Casey yelled.

"Good to see you to, Honey," Chuck said. Casey was watching a war documentary. "I got us a couple of steaks," he said, showing him the bag. "And, baked potatoes." Casey grunted and followed him to the kitchen.

"Chuck, how am I supposed to protect you if you don't tell me where you go?" Casey growled. Chuck turned to him.

"Phil Gordon and I went to the Bike to play cards and talk," he said. Casey rolled his eyes.

"Did you get your lady feelings sorted out, or are you gonna mope more?" Casey asked. Chuck was shocked. "You do remember my job."

"Casey, what you are doing is so outside your job description," Chuck began.

"Then fire me," Casey snapped. Chuck gave him a look of "are you serious?"

“Casey, even if I fired you, you’d do it all anyway and help yourself to my beer, hotpockets, and TV whenever you want,” Chuck said. Casey looked a tiny bit ashamed...or maybe it was gas.

“Yeah, I would,” Casey said. “You’ve been hurt enough, kid. I know, I know, I go too far, but kid, if you get your heart broke again...I’m afraid you wouldn’t make it.”

“Casey, that may be the sweetest thing-” Chuck began.

“And then this plush gig would be over,” Casey finished, taking a swig of beer giving Chuck a look.

“And, there it is,” Chuck said, taking his own swig of beer but knowing what Casey actually meant. “Another moment Caseyfied.” The two stood silently for a moment, a comfortable silence. How one emotionally stunted man had been so changed by the two Bartowskis, he would never know. Ellie and Chuck were Casey’s kids, and he was going to protect them from all the heartache he could. However, if he kept this up, Chuck would resent him. Casey sighed.

“I find nothing terrible on her,” Casey said. Chuck started to ask who, but Casey just gave him the, “I’m not an idiot look.” “She’s a poker player, and I think she hasn’t called because she wants a whale, on her turf. Yeah you stay in a luxury hotel room, but it’s not home for you , and it gives her the slightest edge and that’s what makes the great ones. Call her, because if you don’t I’m not going to be able to take dealing with you over Christmas. It’s bad enough I got to watch those stupid Twilight Zone marathons anyway,” Casey complained, wandering off.

“I love you too, Casey,” Chuck said, smiling at the other man walking off. He grunted, and kept going. Chuck pulled out his phone and made the call.

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Jenny looked down at her phone, and saw who it was. Part of her was excited; this might fix all her problems, another part of her....it wasn’t excited at all, in fact, this is exactly why she hadn’t called him.

“Hello,” Jenny said.

"Jenny, Chuck Bartowski," he said.

"Who?" she asked, grinning.

"You know, Chuck Bartowski, the guy you gave way too much money to for his iPod," Chuck said, hoping to make her laugh. He sat there wondering if he said too much. A soft laugh came over the phone.

"I don't know if you're aware of this Chuck, but I have this thing called caller ID, and it tells me who is calling," she said, grinning.

"So you were messing with me," he said.

"Yep, if you're not in my phone, I don't answer," she said.

"Glad I'm in there," he said, and clanged his head against the wall immediately. He shouldn't have said that. He knew better.

"Don't do anything stupid, and you'll stay in there," she answered. She closed her eyes. What was she thinking, was that flirting!? She needed to change the subject quickly. "So did you call me to gloat about scamming me for this iPod?"

"The reason I'm calling is there's a cash game gonna start in a few days at the Bike, and I wanted to see if you wanted a chance to win some of your money back."

"LA?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"There's some games going on here starting tomorrow," she offered.

"Oh," Chuck said, thinking back to what Casey said. "I can't really get down there right now." Chuck lied, he knew he could get down there, but she said she'd come see him, was Casey right?

"Sorry, Chuck, still haven't built back my bankroll enough to feel comfortable coming up there with it," she said. "You know how it goes, ebbs and flows, right now is an ebb." Chuck was silent a second. Why would Phil lie to him? Answer, he didn't. Casey was right. She was only after him because he was a whale and she thought he was easy

pickings on her turf. This was about a poker game, and nothing more.

“Okay, well, good luck, if you ever manage to build it back up, let me know,” he said, a bit coolly. Jenny heard it in his voice, he knew he didn’t trust her. Chuck Bartowski shouldn’t trust her, hell, no one should trust her. No one should trust any Burton, ever. Or, maybe she was wrong. Maybe he had gotten through but didn’t deserve to. The one guy that made her way through her defenses, she was sure was the right guy, and now, she was wrong. That never happened. She had to end this, for both of their sakes.

“Good-bye, Chuck,” she said.

“Bye,” he said and hung up. She started messing with her phone.

“What are you doing?” the guy with her asked. She reached into her pocket, pulled out a roll of bills and handed it to him.

“This make us even?” she asked. He started counting and she kept messing with her phone until she was satisfied. He looked up and nodded. “I deleted that guy’s contact, that way I won’t know his number if he calls back and won’t answer. I’ll listen to his message, but I’ll probably just delete it. I was wrong about him, it doesn’t happen often, but I was wrong about him.”

“I’d say you are wrong about people more than that,” the guy said, looking at the roll of money she just handed him. Jenny shook her head.

“No, I’m not wrong about him,” she said, head nodding toward the money. “I know exactly what he is, I just can’t get away from his problem.” The guy raised his eyebrows as if to say, “what can you do.” She shrugged, and he got up and left. Jenny sat there for a minute.

“Back to grinding,” she thought. She would go hit the \$1/\$2 NL tables, again. She hated having to restart her bankroll, but what else could she do. “Damn him,” she thought. The problem was, she wasn’t sure which him she meant.

A/N: If every one of you wants to start a review with, “I’m not happy with you right now,” I understand. (IT'S ME, it will be okay) I’m going to go hide now...Take Care, till next time.

DC

Chapter 3: Ch 3, Know When to Hold Em

A/N: Hi, the fanfic website is having a bit of an issue with me, or just in general, so make sure you've read Chapter 2. Go ahead...I'll wait...(Checks watch) Oh good you're back. Glad to have you. So I was concerned some of you would be worried and I basically got an eye-roll from everyone. I can keep them apart...yeah, no I can't. Also I wasn't trying to be so cryptic at the end of the last chapter, and after rereading it for the fifth time, it wasn't the best. I knew what I meant, but it's my job to make sure you do, so if it sounded disconnected or disjointed, that's entirely on me. ...It's time for Aces, Charles

Ch 3, Know When to Hold Em.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, nor can I count cards, but *Breaking Vegas* is a heck of a book...

Christmas 2003

The tree was decorated, there was food everywhere, Bartowskis, both naturally born, and adopted in, were in their PJs...including one John Casey. Casey didn't even bother on Christmas day to try and be himself...Ellie just wasn't hearing it. John had done a lot of things in his life, but nothing, absolutely nothing, scared him like Ellie Bartowski.

"John, what's wrong with him?" Ellie asked. Chuck wasn't even watching The Twilight Zone marathon going on, and he had been distracted all day.

"Ellie, I don't want to have this conversation," John said. "You're going to yell."

"Why would you think that?" she asked. Casey just looked at her. He looked over at Chuck, and then glanced at his watch. What he was about to do was mean, but what the hell, it was his Christmas present to himself.

"If you think he's that bad, stop the marathon and flip it over to ESPN," Casey said. Ellie gave him a look. "It's the WSOP Main Event from this summer, I promise it will answer a lot of your questions. Just watch him." Ellie stopped the marathon. Chuck didn't even notice, and she flipped it over to ESPN. The name Jenny Burton was mentioned, and

Chuck's head raised up. She was in a hand with Sammy Farha. This wasn't the final table, but the final 27 players. Chuck watched Jenny, how she had one leg drawn up under her, her elbow resting on the table, her chin on the heel of her hand. Ellie looked at Chuck, then looked at the screen, and then over to Casey. Casey tilted his head as if to say, "see." Chuck watched her as she coolly analyzed everything, and seemed to pick up on something from Sammy. She picked up four chips and dropped them into her hand, over and over as she studied the board and then Sammy.

"That's her, 'I-think-you're-lying-but-my-cards-aren't-good-enough-to-beat-you tell,'" Chuck said softly. "I should have told her about that," he said, and then sighed. He watched the screen. "I always wondered what would have happened if she pushed all-in here? The math was right. If he folded she would have won a big pot and really hurt Sammy. If he called, her odds were pretty good." Chuck shook his head. "It's her only flaw I've ever seen on what they've showed on TV." Ellie looked over at Casey, who shrugged. She grabbed Casey's arm and drug him into the kitchen. Before she could say a word, Casey's hands were up in a defensive posture.

"Jenny Burton, professional poker player, father is a con man that stays in trouble. Best I can tell she spend the majority of her money getting him out of a jam. I thought she was playing Chuck for a big payday, but turns out, she won't talk to him. Apparently the kid said something stupid last time they talked and she's cut him out," Casey said, terror on his face, as he watched the look on Ellie's face.

"So, she's not after Chuck for his money?" Ellie asked. Casey was quiet for a second.

"I don't think so, Ellie," Casey said. "I mean it's possible she's hooking him in for a long con, but if she's picked up half of what her father knew, according to my contacts, then she's got him right now and doesn't need to play it. The other thing is, I haven't told the kid any of this." Ellie gave him a look and he held his hands up again, knowing if Hurricane Ellie struck, this motion would be useless. "I told the kid she was a card player and probably only wanted him for his money. I may have said enough that he messed some things up when he talked to her."

"You tapped his phone again," Ellie said, not asked. John looked away, the tiniest bit ashamed...but not really.

"Ellie, you know what he'll do if we have another Jill situation," Casey said. Ellie put her face in her hands. "Exactly." She raised up to look at him.

"Well, he's not exactly the bubbly Chuck we know, is he?" she asked. "I'll take care of it." John gave her a look. "Just go ahead and get ready, because he needs to at least try, for his sake." John didn't look happy. "I know, I know. You don't want him hurt, I won't tell him you care, and we'll pick up the pieces if it goes wrong, but, John. He has to live his life." Casey grunted, and watched her walk off.

"Chuck me," he grumbled.

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Ellie sat down on the couch beside Chuck and watched him. He seemed the happiest she had seen him in weeks. He was watching intently every time Jenny did anything, and then when the action wasn't on her, he seemed to be off in another world. His sister laid a hand on his arm and he turned to look at her.

"Tell me about her," she said. Chuck smiled.

"She's worked her way up from a card dealer, teaching herself. She's so smart, but she plays by feel, she has instincts that rival anyone in the game. And funny, Ellie, she is so funny, but she's reserved, like something happened a long time ago, and she's not letting anyone in, although I could be projecting," he said shrugging.

"So you know her?" Ellie asked. Chuck nodded. "Talk to her."

"I kinda screwed up with somethings I said, and how I said it, and she's not taking my phone calls anymore," Chuck said. "She reads people, Ellie, she's a poker player and she can pick up on things, and my voice...I didn't trust her, and it hurt her. I also made a snide remark to let her know I knew some things...I messed up. Plus, Casey says she's only after me for my money."

“Chuck, if she was after you for money, don’t you think she would have called by now?” Ellie asked. Chuck nodded. “Okay, how about this. Tell me, tomorrow if you came in and found out through some paperwork error you had lost everything, would you be concerned?”

“I mean, yeah, there are people’s jobs that I am responsible for,” Chuck said. Ellie shook her head.

“I mean could you put in the work, and get it all back?” she asked.

“I mean we’d have to get lucky and make a hit game again, but yeah, we could make that money back,” Chuck said.

“So what do you care?” Ellie asked. “You are miserable. You have feelings for her, and you deserve to give yourself a chance. Do you think she’s after you just for your money?” Chuck shook his head no. “How much of your money would you give to see Mom and Dad again?”

“All of it, plus I’d go find more,” Chuck said. “I’d give everything I could.”

“Then why aren’t you?” Ellie asked, patted him on the shoulder and walked out, leaving Chuck to watch Jenny on TV.

February 21st, 2004

Chuck was ready to pound his head into the desk. He had shut down the company from Christmas through New Years to make sure people spent time with their family. They were on pace to make their deadline for Intersect 3.0, but over Christmas, rumors about the game made their way online, and now Sony and Microsoft were at Chuck’s door, wanting the game before the insane demand waivered. He and his employees had worked nonstop to get the game ready and now it was in certification. What little sleep he had, he dreamed about Jenny. He had called her several times. She never answered, and he never left a voicemail. He didn’t know what the right thing to do was, but he was pretty sure he knew what to do.

“Morgan,” Chuck yelled, knowing his buddy was lying on the couch in his office. “You’re in charge, I’m going to Vegas for a few days.”

“Chuck I think that’s a bad idea,” Morgan said, coming into his office with someone else. Chuck turned and saw Andy Bloch. Andy held electrical engineering degrees from MIT and a JD from Harvard. He was famous for being involved in a black jack scam, but more importantly, he was a nerd, and a friend to Chuck and Morgan.

“Andy,” Chuck said, shaking his hand, “What are you doing here?”

“Came to see you two,” Andy said. “There’s a WPT tournament going on down at the Commerce Casino. Thought maybe you’d like to go, plus she’s there,” he said, showing Chuck a picture. “Phil says it’s time to go all-in.” Chuck looked at him, and nodded.

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Jenny sat in her chair, leg folded under her like normal, elbow on the rail, hand on her chin. They were waiting on a player from a breaking table to come over. She knew the player was going to be seated by her since it was the only open chair at the table. By the odds, it would be a guy, and he would be hitting on her, because that’s what they did. Well, one never did, but apparently that was part of his game, it was a long game, that she didn’t give him a chance to play...or was it. She sighed, thinking about him and looked down at her iPod. It was hers now, no matter what anyone said. She kept telling herself she’d get rid of it, but she hadn’t yet. It had been nearly five months since he gave it to her, and she seemed to hold tighter to it every day. She felt the man next to her sit, and her body froze. She wasn’t sure what was going on, who would make her react that way, but Nina Simone’s Feeling Good was starting, and she wasn’t about to interrupt it.

“You know I’m thinking my phone’s broken because I never received a call telling me you were here. Nice iPod,” the voice came beside her. Holy shit! She knew that voice, that smell, that feeling her body got when he was nearby, and she had missed it. How was that possible, he had only been close to her once, but it was enough. “How’s the battery life on it?”

“It’s okay,” she said, not looking at him. “I overpaid for it.”

"You ever find yourself in a situation where your brain runs so far out in front of your mouth, it takes days to catch up?" he asked. She turned and looked at him. She stared at him, thanking God her glasses were on, and her cap pulled down. Those chocolate eyes that could see into her soul, that curly hair that really didn't belong on a multimillionaire, but she was so glad he hadn't cut it. He looked very nervous, she glanced down and saw him wipe his sweaty palms on his jeans. She allowed him to see the small smile. She wanted him to know she was enjoying this. "You know what, screw that, I was an ass, and you deserve better than that. I am sorry. I had no right to say what I said, in the tone I did. You have every right to live your life however you want, and you didn't ask for my opinion on things, and I got my feelings hurt. I deserved to be removed from your phone. I am sorry." Jenny stared at him. She was dumbfounded. She could let him off the hook, but she had hurt for months, and doubted herself, and she needed to know was her read wrong? Had she misread him, or was she right, and that moment was something else. She had to find out, and she was going to convince herself those reasons were why she was doing this.

"Screw what?" she asked. Chuck looked confused. He was expecting many things, but not that question. "Screw what? You were going to say something before, but you stopped."

"It was an excuse," Chuck said.

"But, an excuse is full of truth and I want to know why you treated me the way you did," she said. Chuck nodded.

"I'm a nerd. I guess you figured that out. I am also very wealthy, and women, who previously had no interest in me, suddenly seem to have a lot more interest in me," Chuck looked down, licked his lips, looked back up, and continued. "I admire the way you play, I admire your story, how you came from nothing. And then, I got to sit by you, and watch, and I realized something, you're brilliant, you have a sense of humor that is so funny, but I bet many never see it, because I bet many never get close enough to you. When you said you wanted me to come down to Vegas instead of go to LA, I thought all you were after was my money, to get me on your home turf, get an edge, and to just take

my money. I was wrong, I'm sorry, and I would do anything if you would forgive me." She nodded, and snuck a glance at the clock. They had a few more minutes while the tables were being adjusted. She decided to go for broke.

"You'd do anything?" she asked. He nodded. "Okay, then you need to lose all your chips to me that you can." Chuck sat there shocked. "What's wrong? Maybe you were right about what you thought about me on the phone. Make it up to me, lose your chips to me, this way I have a better shot of winning the tournament." The look on her face told her it was a no go, but she had one more card to play that she had to know. Don't worry Chuck, tonight, I'll make it up to you. I promise I'll make it worth the money." Chuck's face fell, and Jenny did an internal victory dance. She wasn't wrong. He was a good guy. He wasn't trying to play her.

"I didn't think I'd have to put those kind of parameters on anything," Chuck said, as he looked up at her. It was then he noticed the wicked grin on her face. "Damn," he said softly. She took off her glasses and he could see her eyes. They were a stormy blue, and he thought he could get lost in there forever. "I deserved that." He had a soft smile on his face, and she returned it.

"Thank you, Chuck," she said. She saw the question on his face so she continued. "Thank you for proving to me that I was right when I first met you. Thank you for making me stop doubting myself."

"You?" Chuck said, shocked. "You doubted yourself, your Jenny freakin' Burton!"

"Yeah, and Jenny Burton doubts herself all the time when the TV lights aren't on, so thank you, but you still owe me," she said, smirking. "Let's be clear about one thing, Chuck Bartowski, I am after your money. I am a poker player, and I want to win it, not because I'm specifically targeting you, but if you are going to put up money at my table, then you have to pay the toll." Chuck smiled at her, and she returned it. "And, don't think that I forgot that you busted me, so there's that, plus interest. I'd be after your money if you had five thousand dollars, or five million, because that's how I earn my living. But, I like you, Chuck. You are a good guy, and frankly I like being around you, so if you cannot do anything stupid, maybe we can agree on some things."

"Like what?" Chuck asked.

"If you put your money down, I'm going to try to win it," Jenny said.

"The same with me," Chuck replied.

"During a hand I'm not going to have a big conversation with you, because that reveals too much, after, we'll see," she said.

"So I get to you, and I can read you," Chuck said. Jenny gave him a look.

"I'm not saying all that, I'm just saying I'm not going to give you a chance," Jenny replied. "Final thing, I would like you if you had five million dollars, five hundred thousand dollars, or five cents."

"Got it," he said. "Now, how about we make another deal?" Jenny nodded. "How about we both talk to each other about what the actual problem is and not what we think the problem is. No secrets, no lies."

"I have a lot of secrets, Chuck" Jenny said honestly.

"I'm not asking for you to tell me things from your past, and I understand if you don't want to, or can't tell me something, but things about us, let's tell each other the truth." She nodded, smiled, and glanced at the timer, knowing it was close to running out.

"You're buying me dinner during break." The timer stopped and it was back to poker. They played a few hands, a player busted, and the table the two of them were at, broke.

"You do know that there is a free buffet for the players?" Chuck asked. Jenny gave him a look. "Right, dinner it is." Jenny picked up her phone, typed in a few things and showed it to him.

"I got back in your phone," he said, grinning.

"Don't screw it up," she said as she turned to head to her new table.

"Don't you screw it up," he said, causing her to laugh. He thought for a second. "Wait, how did you get my number?"

"I never forgot it, Chuck," she said, as Chuck watched her walk to the other side of the room. Jenny freakin' Burton had his number in her phone. Win or lose, this was a good day.

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Chuck made his way to the steakhouse the two were supposed to have dinner at, but as he arrived he noticed Jenny in a heated conversation. He tried to not be close enough to listen, but she saw him and motioned him over.

"Listen, I got you into this tournament. I flipped my 40 bucks for a 10k buy-in. You're the one making me play this, you could have cashed that out for 9k," Jenny said.

"And I told you, you owe more than that," she glared at him. "Fine the account owes more than that, you need to make it to the money."

"Where, what makes us even, because I'm telling you I'm not winning this thing and you suddenly tell me I owe 1.2 mil," Jenny said. Chuck stood there quietly.

"Eighth," he said finally. "You get eight and pay me 75k and we're even."

"Are you gonna quit buying up his tabs?" she asked. The man smiled evilly, and walked off. Jenny rubbed her left arm with her right hand.

"Are you okay?" Chuck asked. She shook her head no.

"Let's go eat at the buffet," she said. "I'm not that hungry right now." Chuck followed her, not saying anything. He thought and he thought. He knew what Casey would say, he knew what Ellie would say, the question was what should he do? They sat, and Jenny didn't say a word.

"I don't know what's going on, and I'm not asking, but if you need 75k I can give it to you," Chuck said. Jenny's eyes shot up at him. "No favors, no agendas, just a friend helping out a friend."

"Are we that close of friends, Chuck?" she asked. Chuck shrugged.

"I think so, but I've got money to burn so it's no big deal to me." She sat and studied him for a minute. "Did I screw up?" he asked. She smiled and shook her head.

"I don't want your money, and I'll explain why, but I need a favor, and given the joke I made earlier, it's gonna sound...." Jenny trailed off.

"You want to stay at my place tonight to get away from Creepy McCreeperson?" Chuck asked. Jenny couldn't help but laugh.

"If it's not too much trouble," she said.

"I'll have to move the frogs I'm training for a chorus line out of the spare bedroom, but yeah, I think we can figure something out," he said.

"Top hats and canes, or I'll be disappointed, Mr. Bartowski," she said, grinning.

"Please, I've got the full tux for them," he said. She laughed and studied him.

"Thank you, Chuck," she said simply.

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"You sure this is a good idea?" she asked, as he walked up to his front door to unlock it.

"You staying with me, you checking out of the hotel, or you seeing my frog chorus line?" Chuck asked.

"The first two, I'm not missing the chorus line for anything," she replied, trying to smile.

"Jenny, you are safe," Chuck said, gently placing his hands on her shoulders. "I'm not going to do anything." She grinned at him.

"Oh, that wasn't what I was worried about," she replied. "If you tried anything I'd just kick your ass." Chuck smiled at her. "No, I'm talking about getting you involved."

"So I can loan you the money, or just give it to you?" Chuck asked.

"No, Chuck, and you need to quit offering to give money to people you barely know," Jenny said, starting inside. He reached out and gently held her wrist. She turned back to him. He reached around and turned on the light.

"I didn't want you to trip and hurt yourself," he explained. She gave him a tight smile. "And, I know you Jenny, I may not have known you long, but I know you." He closed the door behind her as she shook her head in wonder. She walked over, sat in the middle of

the couch, and patted the seat beside her. He walked over, and sat down, right beside her. She took a deep breath.

“My father is a con artist,” she said. “He was caught by the police when I was seventeen. That’s when I moved to Vegas.” A tear made its way down her face, Chuck just watched her. “He got out a few years back, and started conning again. As I became a better player and was just starting to get my life on track, a man approached me. He had a picture of my mother, and he told me he had paid off those my father had conned. I owed him money, plus the interest, or vig, as he called it. After I paid it, I thought it was over, but then he approached me again.” Chuck shut his eyes.

“He’s extorting you,” Chuck said softly, opening his eyes to look at her. There was pain in them, for her. Jenny gave him a smile as another tear fell down her face.

“The night you called, I had just reloaded my bankroll for a second time, I was on my way to call you, and he showed up again,” Jenny said, sighing in frustration, looking up at the ceiling. The tears fell freely now. “I can’t get away or they’ll hurt mom.” She looked at him. “What am I supposed to do.” Chuck didn’t hesitate, he pulled her into him. She held on for dear life, and the tears of frustration fell. They stayed that way a very long time, until they both fell asleep on the couch, holding each other, exhausted, but for the moment, at peace.

A/N: Hello my baby, hello my honey, hello my rag-time gaaaalllll...Oh, you’re still here...well...that’s embarrassing...Take Care, till next time.

DC

Chapter 4: Ch 4, Never Count Your Money

A/N: I say this every fic at some point, so, I am shocked at the how many of you are enjoying this fic. I am also shocked at how many of you agree on one thing, unleash the Casey. You might want to find something to hold on to, because Casey, well....he's going to have a feeling...One...but a feeling...Ch 4, Never Count Your Money

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, but I am a bit of an organized crime history nerd...and if anyone asks, we all agree the Mafia doesn't really exist, it's a bad stereotype propagated by TV (whew, don't need to lose a kneecap over a fanfic...)

Casey sat in the car, parked in the driveway, fuming. This was his fault. Even since Christmas he had Bartowski running ragged. Casey had known that after Chuck and Ellie's talk Chuck was going to do the one thing Chuck did best, worry, plan, and eventually do something stupid. So Casey did what he did best, keep Chuck from doing something stupid. Casey made some phone calls over the Christmas break and sure enough, rumors of Intersect 3.0 took hold of the internet, and the video game powers that be, begged Chuck's company for the game ASAP. Chuck went into hyperdrive...was that a thing? Christ, the nerd was rubbing off on him.

Casey knew he could pull back security and take a mini break. He had some of his friends watching Chuck; it wasn't hard, Chuck hardly left the offices, sleeping there many nights. Casey decided to see his best girl, Kathleen. It had been awhile, and Casey was enjoying the two of them, just being together when he got the call. Chuck had taken off for a tournament at the Commerce and somehow his guys had lost him. The one thing they did know was Jenny Burton was spotted with him several times yesterday.

Casey knew he was only a foster parent, but he also knew if he'd let him, the moron would call him Dad. What the nerd didn't know is he thought of him as a son. Chuck had it all, but it wasn't enough, and if Casey was honest, deep, deep down, past the happy center, where the angry center ruled, Casey grudgingly respected that. The kid deserved all the happiness, but Jenny Burton? She was trouble, Casey knew it. He had to

go in there and end this, for everyone's sake. Ellie was going to yell, but it was her lady feelings talking and not the analytical doctor.

He got out of the car, nearly slamming the door, but realized, in time, that the Crown Vic didn't deserve that treatment. He walked up to the door and let himself inside Chuck's house.

"Bartowski, we've got to talk," he said, coming into the living room and seeing Jenny and Chuck huddled on the couch. "Christ," he muttered. He sat down in the chair as the two roused by his entrance. As Jenny's eyes saw him, he caught something he didn't expect to see. To the casual observer, Jenny seemed to melt more into Chuck's side, looking like a scared young lady who didn't know who the big man was that had just burst in. However, to the trained observer that saw her eyes, Casey caught it. The look she didn't even know she was giving. Casey knew that look. There were few he had that look for but Bartowski was one of them. She would protect him. "Hmph," he grunted with a slight smile on his face. The two locked eyes.

He slightly raised his eyebrows and cocked his head as if to say to her, "You'd protect him?" He caught her barely noticeable head nod that said, "Yes." Casey took a deep breath, and realized he was too late. If she was that invested...

"Aw, hell," he muttered. "Pancakes, Bartowski?" he asked, heading to the kitchen.

"Uh, sure, Casey," Chuck said. "Good morning, come in, make yourself at home."

"Who is he?" Jenny asked.

"Well, he's Casey," Chuck said. "Kinda my foster parent, kinda my self-appointed body guard, kinda my OVERPROTECTIVE MOTHER each time I try to date." Jenny stifled a laugh at the last part. Casey was going to make a crack about the lack of dating and when he did it was to thieves, but....he couldn't. He already knew how Chuck felt, and now after seeing Jenny.

"You want pancakes, Burton?" Casey asked. Jenny gave Chuck a look. Chuck shrugged.

"He won't poison them, and they're pretty good," Chuck admitted.

"I can even do chocolate chips," Casey said. Chuck's eyes about popped out of his head as he slowly turned toward Casey. Casey was looking directly at Chuck. Chuck gave the slightest of head nods that Casey returned.

"I wouldn't mind chocolate chip," Jenny said, not sure what was going on. She looked at her watch. "We have a tournament we have to get to soon."

"I'll drive you," Casey said. "You need a good breakfast if you're going to do well." Chuck looked at Casey like he had grown two heads. "Bartowski...shut up." Chuck turned back around and looked at Jenny, grinning.

"I'm not saying you need one, but I do have this amazing shower if you feel you need one," Chuck said grinning.

"I do, and so do you," she said returning the grin. His ears went red and she realized what she might have implied.

"Good thing I've got two showers in two separate rooms," he squeaked out. Casey shut his eyes in the kitchen. What fresh hell was he exposing himself to being around these two numbnuts?

"I'll just go get my stuff, shower, and get changed," Jenny said, basically fleeing the room.

"This is my fault," Casey muttered. "I've kept you on such a leash you act like a complete moron around women."

"Casey, we can talk about the lack of my love life later, I need your help," Chuck said, coming over to him. "Casey, she's being extorted." Casey turned around slowly to look at him. "Her father..."

"He's a con man," Casey said. Chuck nodded. Casey thought for a second and let out a low growl. "Someone is paying off those who are conned and making her pay it back, plus the vig?" Chuck nodded. "Gotta admit, it's good, but where's the pressure coming to make her pay. Tell me she isn't sappy enough to be worried about her old man."

“They have pictures of her mother doing everyday routines,” Chuck replied. Casey was holding a wooden spoon from mixing the batter. The spoon part flew past Chuck’s face, while the handle remained in Casey’s hand. That was the only noticeable change in Casey, but Chuck knew what had just happened. He had unleashed the Casey.

“She’s got nothing to do with any of this,” Casey said. Chuck nodded. “Those...” he couldn’t finish the sentence. “That’s why her bankroll keeps dropping.” Chuck gave him a look. “Of course, I’ve vetted her, Moron. You moon over her like a love sick calf. Do you think I’m stupid?” Chuck didn’t answer, because he was pretty sure no matter what he said it was going to be wrong. Casey thought for a second. “I may have been wrong about her,” he said quietly. Chuck schooled his features because that was as close as Casey was ever going to come to admitting he made a mistake and apologized. “You offered to pay it, didn’t you?”

“Casey,” Chuck began. Casey waved his hand.

“Kid, you wouldn’t be you if you didn’t,” Casey replied. “How much?”

“She wouldn’t take it,” Chuck said. Casey looked at him, stunned. “She wants to help her mom, but she won’t take my money.” Casey turned around, found a new spatula, and chocolate chips, both white and regular. “Which one does she want?” Chuck stared at him. “Go ask her, Moron.” Chuck headed down the hall to the guest bedroom. He heard movement inside.

“Hey,” Chuck said from the hallway.

“Come on in,” she said. She was dressed, and towel drying her hair.

“I have a blow dryer if you need it,” he said. She grinned. “This,” he said pointing to his head. “Needs a little help.”

“So you want it to look like that?” she asked raising an eyebrow, and grinning at him. Chuck looked affronted.

“Casey asked me if you wanted regular or white chocolate chips, but now, I’m not going to tell him,” he said, with an airs about him.

“WHITE CHOCOLATE!” she yelled. Chuck winced. “Is everything okay?” Chuck smiled and nodded.

“Better than I hoped for,” he said. “I’m going to go take a shower, think you’ll be okay with sir Grunts-a-lot?” Jenny smiled and gently thwacked his shoulder.

“Go, I’ve been dealing with people for a long time,” she said. Chuck nodded and started to leave.

“Jenny, you don’t have to alone anymore,” he said. She smiled and nodded. Chuck left. She took a deep breath and headed to the kitchen. Casey saw her, and went back to the pancakes. He put some on the plate and handed them to her. She took a bite and nearly moaned. Casey, his back to her, working on more pancakes, grinned where she couldn’t see.

“I can take care of him for you,” Casey said.

“No you can’t.”

“All you have to do is give me a name and it’s done.”

“Fine, Jimmy ‘The Shark’ Sykes,” she said. Casey froze and turned, seeing her eyes.

“Christ,” he muttered. “The mob is buying up his markers?” Jenny nodded. Casey sighed.

“Okay, I go get your mom, and bring her back here, and then we have a sitdown,” Casey said.

“With who?”

“Gino Toletti,” Casey answered. The color drained out of Jenny’s face. “Good,” he said pointing at her. “You have enough sense to be scared. If Gino says it’s over, it’s over. It would probably help if we could find your old man and get him to quit conning people. Do you think if he knew your mother was in danger because of it he would quit?” Jenny nodded.

“I don’t know what he would do, but he’d quit,” she replied.

"Hell, Burton, you supporting him would run you less ragged," Casey said.

"Don't I know it," she said, taking another bite of the pancakes and trying not to moan.

"Thank you."

"It's just pancakes," he said. She looked him in the eye, and he shrugged. "Don't hurt him."

"Who, Chuck?" she asked. "We're just friends." Casey gave her a look.

"Burton, I may not have them, but I know lady feelings when I see lady feelings." Jenny smirked and leaned in.

"Casey, we both know you have lady feeling," she said. John grunted and turned back to the pancakes.

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Jenny looked at the clock. They were supposed to stop in thirty minutes, but everyone knew they were going until the next person busted. There were currently two tables of nine players and one of ten. She glanced over to the table beside her. Chuck leaned back, and smiled at her, and she returned it. He was at the table of ten. The next person that bust made zero dollars this tournament, and everyone else made at least \$22,690...well, that was the payout. That still wasn't enough to pay off Jimmy.

After Chuck came out of the shower, there had been discussions that Jenny just didn't like, but she had to admit, it was the best play. She was going to stay with Chuck until this thing was over. It made Casey's job easier in case someone decided to do something to her. She had protested saying that she couldn't put Chuck in jeporday and she was returning to Vegas when the tournament was over. Casey muttered great, Chuck shrugged and headed to his bedroom. Jenny had followed to find him packing a bag.

"You aren't my protector!" she yelled.

"No, but I am your friend, and you need one right now, and I'm going with you," he said.

"You have a job, you just can't leave!" she countered.

"I don't give a damn about that company, especially if something happens to you," he replied calmly. Jenny was stunned. She fled the bedroom and nearly crashed into John.

"You're wasting your time arguing, this is what he does for those he cares for," Casey said, gently. "He's decided you are someone worth caring for, so you can fight it, or just let him have it. It's easier to just let him have this."

"What does he want from me?" Jenny asked. Casey chuckled.

"Burton, he just wants to help you, that's it," Casey replied. "I'm not saying he doesn't have other feelings for you, but what he wants is for you to be happy and safe. That's the Bartowski way, and once they decide your one of them, you have no choice but to become Bartoskified." Jenny laughed at that.

She had told him she'd stay, but Chuck insisted on keeping the bag pack, just in case she changed her mind at the last second. They had a plan, Jenny didn't think it was a great plan, but it was the best they could do on short notice. Jenny and Chuck would go to the Bay 101 Casino in San Jose the next week to play on the next WPT stop. Casey had friends there that would guard them. They tried to book a room with two beds, but there were none available. Chuck then said, two rooms, but Casey vetoed that saying he didn't have enough people to guard two. They finally got a room with one bed, and Chuck insisting he take the floor. She'd fight that fight later.

While in San Jose, Casey would go to San Diego and get Jenny's mom, Emma. Bringing her to Chuck's and her being guarded made life easier for Casey. After that it was time to see if they could hunt down Jack and set up a face to face with Gino Toletti. Chuck had told her he would gladly pay off whatever was owed and she could pay him back, whenever or not at all. Jenny relented to the point of agreeing to if she had no other option, but she was going to do everything in her power to make sure she could pay him back.

She looked down at pocket Aces and she wasn't sure what to do. She had been folding everything, trying to make sure she made the money, but now she knew she had to come in eight to get out of the current nightmare. She looked around, mostly at pros. She was here to win, and you didn't win folding pocket Aces preflop. She raised the pot, and was

called by Steve Zolotow. Jenny's heart sank. Steve was one of the best no one knew about. He was famous for his play at the Mayfair Club in New York. The flop came out 2 of spades 5 of diamonds and the 7 of hearts. Unless Steve had a pocket pair of one of those three cards on the flop, Jenny knew she was in the lead. She checked giving Steve the rope to hang himself with. Steve wasn't short stacked, but he didn't have a lot of chips. A bet would take about half his stack. He deliberated for a moment and then pushed all-in. Jenny was getting amazing odds, and knew even if she busted she'd still have about $\frac{3}{4}$ of her stack, which would put her in great shape. She shoved all in. Steve flipped over pocket Kings, Jenny flipped over pocket Aces and Steve nodded. Someone said they had folded a King, which if correct gave Steve a five percent chance of catching the remaining King. A three of clubs came on the turn, leaving him with a two percent chance. A Queen dropped, making everyone gasp at seeing a face card, but then there were cheers. Everyone was ready to go home, and Jenny found herself as one of the chip leaders.

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"I can't sleep on the couch again, Chuck," Jenny said to him grinning as she came in.

"Probably best, since Casey will sleep there," Chuck replied.

"I thought he had his own room here," she said. Chuck laughed.

"It's too far into the house according to him. He wants to be near that door, just in case."

"Chuck," Jenny said, taking a deep breath. "Tomorrow, you need to play to beat me. Do you understand?"

"No, Jenny, I don't," he replied. "Explain it to me."

"Look, I had a con man father, he took every advantage legal and illegal that existed. I look for the edge, but not an illegal one. There are plenty of ways for me to win, but taking chips off you just because you want to give them to me, that's not acceptable. This is non-negotiable, Bartowski," she said.

“Okay,” Chuck said nodding. She nodded and turned to head toward her bedroom. “One condition.” She stopped and turned around.

“Whatever money I make the rest of the way goes toward paying off the debt.” Jenny looked like she wanted to say no.

“Minus the entry fee,” she said. “Non-negotiable.” Chuck stepped toward her and stopped with just inches separating them.

“A lot of things in your life seem to be non-negotiable Burton,” he said softly.

“Some of them only seem to be, but they actually are negotiable,” she replied. Chuck swallowed thickly. “Careful, Bartowski, I will call any bluff.”

“I am well aware, Burton,” he said. She smirked, raised an eyebrow, turned, and headed to her room.

“I owe you, Chuck, and I don’t know if I can ever pay you back,” she said, looking back at him.

“That’s called friendship,” Chuck said. Jenny nodded.

“Don’t screw it up.”

“I won’t, I don’t want to lose you again,” he said. Jenny just stared at him, nodded, and walked back to her bedroom.

“Damn, Bartowski,” Casey said, scaring the life out of him. “You’re actually a little smooth.”

“Thanks, Casey,” Chuck began.

“I mean a 5 year old has better game than you, but not terrible.”

“And there it is, Caseified.”

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It had been a long day, and Chuck was exhausted. They had made it to the final table, but play would continue until they made the TV table, or the final six. Those six would duke it out tomorrow for a first prize of nearly 1.4 million dollars. However Chuck and

Jenny found themselves in the final nine. Chuck had no hand, but a ton of draws, and knowing he was feeling the exhaustion of playing tournament poker for three straight days, he moved all-in. The odds made him a 55-45 dog, but he was thrilled to get his money in there. If he won, he would be in the chip lead, if he lost, he was out, but at least he could then relax. What had him confused was the death-glare. After he moved all-in, he smiled over at Jenny and was stunned at the look she gave him.

He busted out, and shook everyone's hand. The table took a break, and a hand on his elbow marched him away as he got his payout slip.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" she asked.

"Moving all-in," Chuck replied, really confused.

"Don't give me that crap, Bartowski," she said, madder than a baptized cat. Chuck stopped walking, made her ever madder, which he didn't know was possible.

"Why don't you tell me exactly what you think I did that has you so mad."

"Don't play games with me, damn it! You promised," she said, glowering.

"What did I do?"

"You lost on purpose so I'd make eight place to pay off Jimmy," she said.

"No I didn't," Chuck replied. Jenny started to retort, and he held up his hand. "Jenny, I'm a cash game player. Three days of tournament grinding, I was nearly done. I had the math to make the move I did."

"You keep talking about math, I know math," Jenny said, irritated.

"No, you know some math, basic poker math, but there is more to it," Chuck said.

"It's overrated."

"You've never beat me," he said, and she wanted to be mad, she did, but he was smirking and she found herself wanting to knock it off his face. It was the how that was bothering her. She took a deep breath.

"And the fact if you went out had nothing to do with it?" Jenny said, her anger subsiding.

“One hundred percent honesty, yeah it factored in a little, but Jenny, we already had the money,” Chuck said. Jenny looked confused. “Between you and me, if we both busted back to back, we had the money.” Jenny thought and realized he was right.

“I’m...I’m sorry, Chuck,” she began. Chuck put a hand on her shoulder and she looked at him. “Jenny, I get it, this is new, and you have to be careful, but in the future if you see something squirrely about me, talk to me, but give me the benefit of the doubt until you do, please?” She nodded. “Now, go, I’ll cash out and you go win 1.4 mil.” Chuck went to the window to cash out, and the tournament started back up. He was taking his time getting back when he heard a commotion. He got back and saw Jenny had gotten all-in with pocket Kings. With the blinds moving up, her opponent with pocket sevens had reraised her and she had move all-in. Chuck watched as her opponent missed on the turn. Jenny was about to double up and be the chip leader, eight handed, and then...the third seven, or a set, hit on the river. She took it well, and she collected her things. She met Chuck, who were both shaking their head, and he gave her a hug telling her she had played it perfectly. She backed away, with his arm around her, put her hand on his chest, and took a deep breath. The important part was they had the money to pay off Jimmy. As they were walking away together, Chuck’s arm still around her, they didn’t notice the pictures being taken of them for the WPT.

A/N: You do realize that we are four chapters in and our heroes haven’t even kissed yet...the fluff police will be after me soon...Don’t worry...There will be Chenny...(It seriously took me a few minutes to figure out what that was those of you who said it in the reviews)...Take Care, till next time.

DC

Chapter 5: Ch 5, Luck be a Lady

A/N: I was worried with the background of this story being poker, many of you wouldn't get parts of the story. But, as Steampunk . Chuckster reminded me, put Chuck and Sarah...uh, Jenny, in a story people will flock to it. (Read Thin Ice, she is killing it with that one) BTW, I would like to think wilf21 for a name that will pop up in this story. I just couldn't pass it up when it was said. Welcome to Ch 5, Luck be a Lady

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, or Card Player magazine, but I did have a subscription long ago (you all do know what a magazine subscription is, right?)

March 2, 2004

Chuck followed Jenny into the Bay 101 Casino. She had an invite as a bounty and was part of the Bay 101 Shooting Stars. It was an interesting concept. Bounties were placed on "shooting stars" and each player that knocked out a "shooting star" received \$5,000 (the buy-in for the tournament. Since she had gained notoriety at the WSOP final table, placing a bounty on her was just common sense according to the marketing department. She could play poker, was extremely attractive, and had an intriguing story. Chuck felt a hand on his shoulder as he turned around and saw one of the few people in poker he, literally, looked up to. Phil Gordon was grinning at him.

"I see you went all in," he said. Chuck returned the grin.

"Not exactly," Chuck admitted. "Things got a little...strange. Phil gave him a look.

"Barry Shulman wants to talk to you two," Phil said, grinning. Chuck looked confused.

"For Card Player magazine."

"Why us?" Chuck asked.

"You really don't know?" Phil replied. "Are you two really not together?" Chuck's eyes about bulged out of his eye sockets.

"Hey, Bartowski, you gonna register?" Jenny asked, walking up to him. "How's it going, Phil?"

“Good, Jenny,” Phil replied. “You know Moneymaker is here, right?” Jenny gave him a look and Phil just laughed. “Good to see you, Chuck, seriously you two need to see Barry.”

“What was that about?” Jenny asked. “I’m not sure, but I don’t think we’re going to like it, and I really don’t think Casey is going to like it,” Chuck replied.

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Chuck should have been a fortune teller. After he registered and they made their way to their hotel room, Chuck noticed a lot of nods, and thumbs up he was getting from a lot of the players. Chuck was sick inside. Jenny was living with him and not in Las Vegas currently. They were sharing a hotel room. They had become rather...touchy over the past few weeks, hugs, holding hands, snuggling while watching TV, that sort of thing. They had never kissed, but Chuck was beginning to think it wasn’t just him who was wondering if there was more to them than just friends. In her current situation Chuck didn’t want to make things worse by trying to push a relationship. He sighed as he sat on their bed. That was the other problem, there was only one bed in the room. He was going to be very uncomfortable on the floor.

“You okay, Bartowski?” Jenny asked. She had started calling him that after being around Casey, and he found he liked it when she did...but not so much when Casey did.

“Jenny, I’m afraid I’ve caused us a problem,” Chuck said. Jenny sat down next to him.

“Chuck, it can’t be as bad as anything my dad did,” she said.

“I think all the guys think we’re together,” Chuck said. Jenny nodded and was silent.

“Well, that would explain the lack of flirting from other players lately,” Jenny said. Chuck looked at her. “I mean, it makes some sense, I live with you, we are sharing a room.”

“Yeah, but not like that, and I don’t want them thinking that you...” he trailed off. Jenny smiled at him.

"I don't need you to protect my honor," Jenny said grinning. Chuck started to respond, but she lightly placed a finger on his lips. "I don't care what they think we're doing in here, and frankly what we do in here is our business. Now I am worried about two things." She had Chuck's attention. "I'm afraid how this is going to affect the extortion, specifically will they try to extort you, and your social life." Chuck burst out laughing. He fell onto the bed, tears rolled out of his eyes, and Jenny just stared at him, amused. "What's so funny?"

"My social life!" Chuck managed to get out. He lay on the bed, one hand propping up his head. Jenny did the same thing, mirroring him where they were looking at each other. "Jenny, I'm a nerd, one with money, so most women are after one thing, my money. Casey wants to vet everyone so I'm just to the point of why bother with a social life. As for the extortion and me, Casey and I have already prepared for that. Actually Casey has, when I asked what we were going to do, he just grunted and smiled." Jenny chuckled.

"Chuck, you are an amazing, sweet, adorable," Jenny began.

"Those adjectives are really why I have no social life," he said. She reached over, smiling a closed, tight smile, and pushed him. He fell onto his back. She closed the space between them, and leaned over him. Chuck gulped.

"Smart, funny, and very attractive guy who anyone would be lucky to have," she said softly. Chuck swallowed. "Now, since everyone assumes we already are, you're going to sleep with me tonight." Chuck's eyes about bugged out of his head. Jenny laughed, knowing she had gotten him.

"You know, that really wasn't nice," he said.

"You're wrong, Bartowski, it was hilarious," she said. "Seriously, sleep in the bed tonight, we both have a tournament to play."

"Yeah, but you have one to win," Chuck countered.

"Chuck, I'm getting my mom to safety, I've already won, and it's all because of you," she said. He looked into her eyes. Damn it, each time he told himself there was nothing

between them, each time he almost believed it, that look was there. She leaned down, inches between them, and softly, but quickly, kissed his lips. "Thank you, Chuck."

"My pleasure," he squeaked.

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Two days later, Jenny looked around, and realized she had forgotten to get a bottle of water as she got herself situated at the table. She saw a bottle appear over her left shoulder and a hand squeezed her right. She knew instantly who it was. She took her left hand, placed it on the hand on her shoulder and squeezed it in appreciation. She looked up at him. He winked, gave her shoulder one more squeeze (what she wouldn't give for him to do that to her tonight for a long, long time), and he returned to his table. They were down to 18, and had to play down to the six person TV table. They were all in the money, and if they both busted out now, they were up almost \$3,000 each. Jenny didn't care about the money, right now her mom was safe at Chuck's house, there had been no contact from the extortionist, and Jenny thought maybe her life was about to change. Casey told her she'd have to stay with him for a while, maybe months. She was worried about Chuck's reaction, but he told her it was fine.

She really shouldn't have been surprised, the past two mornings had found them together. The first morning, she found her back against his chest, his arm over her protectively and his hand on top of hers. She awoke and found herself with conflicting emotions. One part of her was telling her to get out of bed quickly and get to the showers...the colder the better. The other...the other wanted her to turn over and attack him. That's when the third part of her started speaking, the one that said a rich, good guy like Chuck Bartowski would never have anything to do with a con-artist's daughter.

She was still contemplating when she thought the heat from her hand was going to burn her up. Chuck's thumb was slowly tracing his way along her thumb and hand. Jenny felt her throat going dry. She felt the heat spreading everywhere and when she looked over her shoulder, those brown eyes that saw her almost melted her. He fumbled with his words, telling her he was sorry about how they woke up, and she surprised herself by answering, it's completely comfortable on my side. She mentally faceplanted herself on

that one. She had managed to get to that cold shower seconds later before things got too embarrassing, but this morning....that was another story all together.

This morning she wasn't facing away from him, nope. That she could have dealt with. How, Jenny Burton had gone from someone who never shared a bed with anyone, to becoming a snuggling fanatic was beyond understanding. This morning she awoke, to find she had moved all the way across the bed to Chuck. How she had managed to drape herself over him, arm across his body, head on his chest, leg over his, and slept the best night's sleep of her life, she had no idea. She woke up, found herself that way, and instead of moving away, snuggled closer and went back to sleep. Jenny had never let her guard down that much in her life. When she woke the second time and looked up at Chuck, he had the silliest grin she had ever seen, but it had warmed every inch of her heart. She then did something she had never done before. She took her hand, and booped his nose. She was a grown woman and she was acting like some giggling love struck teenager. Jenny Burton didn't do that. It was getting bad, but what was worse was the smile that broke out on Chuck's face. She was in trouble....no she was past trouble, because of that stupid interview they agreed they needed to do to try to get control of the situation.

The night before Barry had found them and showed them the picture he was going to put in the magazine and asked if they wanted to comment or even give an interview. The picture was from the last tournament where they had walked out, Chuck's arm around her. Jenny had to admit it didn't look like two friends, it did look like something they'd do, and were totally comfortable with. Chuck asked if they could talk to their people. Barry told them that was fine but he needed something as soon as possible. They called Casey and told him what was going on. The word moron was used many times. His advice, give Barry the truth, but spin it just enough to give them something they could use. Jenny agreed to let Chuck lead the interview, especially since he had more practice with the media.

Card Player: So, Jenny, Chuck, it's always nice to see those outside the poker world join us, what brought you into the game?

CB: Well, Barry, I've always loved the game, but during the WSOP last year, I started watching the main event and became...enamored with a certain poker player.

CP: Well, Chris Moneymaker did become an icon. (They all laugh)

CB: I'll admit he had the world's attention, but watching Jenny, hearing her story, I was just as impressed as I could be with her, and then, a few months later, I met her at a cash game, and I got to watch her in person, up close, and I truly know what they meant by learning from the master.

CP: I'm guessing you took it easy on each other. (Chuck and Jenny laugh)

JB: Nope, he busted me!

CP: What? Chuck, don't you know that's not the way to a lady's heart.

JB: He was after my stack.

CB: Actually you were after my stack, remember? (Jenny laughs) Jenny and I became friends off the table. On the table, we're just two poker players trying to take each other's money.

CP: So you're close? (Chuck and Jenny share a look)

JB: He's the best friend I have.

CP: Friend? (Show's them the picture)

JB: We were consoling each other after a loss, it had been three hard days and we busted out back to back.

CP: What about you Chuck. I know you play, but you do know how some feel about poker players, is that what's holding you two back?

CB: I don't really know what you mean by holding us back. There is no one I care for more than Jenny. I don't care if she's a poker player or not, I don't care what she's been through in life, and she's been through some things. In fact, I think I might just care for her more because of it. She is my friend, and I will do anything for her...short of losing on purpose. That thing doesn't fly between us.

CP: So those calling you Chenny? (Chenny, they say together, Barry nods.)

JB: Well, if that's what they want to do, let them do it. Just like if he busts out, I'm going to console him, and if I bust out, he'll console me. We are close, but we're private. (Chuck nods)

CP: Thank you for joining us you two, and best of luck in the Shooting Stars tournament, last question Jenny, how many wild calls have there been trying to bust you? (Jenny laughs)

JB: I think only one, but you could see the wheel turning on some of them.

CP: Chuck, you've already busted two stars.

CB: Yep, but there's one more I want to get before the tournament's over. (Winks at Jenny)

JB: Good luck, you're gonna need it.

The interview had gone as well as they could hope...well, it went better than Jenny could ever have hoped for. If she wasn't a poker player and used to hiding her emotions...she had no idea what she would do. When Chuck told Barry that he didn't care what she had done and he cared for her...she nearly squealed. Jenny Burton didn't squeal. She noticed everyone getting up. It was dinner break and she had managed to navigate through all the players and be one of the twelve remaining. She felt him beside her before she saw him.

"I think we need to call Casey," Chuck said, softly. She turned, stretching, noticing him fighting to keep his eyes on her face. He was such a good guy. She really should admit to herself she sometimes did these things just to watch his expressions.

"Oh, the twelve voicemails that said, 'Call me, Moron,'" he did in his best Casey voice. Jenny burst out laughing at that one. They found a relatively quiet spot where they could call him.

"How'd it go?" Casey asked, answering the phone.

"Good to hear from you too, Casey," Chuck said.

"Burton, did the moron do anything stupid?"

"No, John, although we have a couple nickname now, Chenny," Jenny said.

"What the hell is a Chenny?" Casey said. "It either sounds like a country music singer or something you need to get an antibiotic for."

"Do you have a better idea?" Chuck asked.

"Why not Juck?" Casey asked. "It puts the better of the two first and it's what I think when I see you two together."

"Casey, are you saying you approve of me," Jenny said, grinning. Casey hung up.

"He really likes you," Chuck said grinning.

"I can tell," she said, returning the grin.

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"You okay?" she asked.

"I'm good," he said. Jenny grinned at him.

"Chuck, I know you're, 'I'm goods', and that is not one of them." He looked at her.

"I just really wanted to be at that final table with you," Chuck said. Jenny smiled at him.

"And you're pissed Phil Gordon busted you," she said. Chuck fell on the bed face first.

"Yes," Chuck mumbled into the bed. Jenny climb on the back of him and started massaging his shoulders. "What are you doing?"

"Massaging you," she said.

"I'm aware of that, but you're the one in the tournament, not me, you need the massage," he said. A second later he felt her land beside him. He looked at her, and saw the smirk on her face. "Walked right into that one, didn't I?"

"Yep," she said, popping the "p". Chuck took his place and started rubbing her shoulders, and after a minute or so, she started to...be verbal. Chuck was glad she couldn't see his face because he was sure his face was getting red. "That's it, right

there,” she said. His eyebrows raised. “That’s it, Chuck.” He quickly launched himself off of her and onto the ground. He had no more than started to open his mouth when her laughter filled the room. “Are you done?”

“What are you talking about?” he asked. She rolled over and looked at him.

“This whole tournament, you have walked on eggshells around me, for one reason, you are worried about everyone else. You are worried what they are going to say about me, and what they are going to think, we’ll what are they going to think about you?”

“Who cares!” he said, confused. Jenny nodded.

“Who cares,” she said softly. “If they think we’re in here doing whatever, which way, how many times, who cares.” She stood up and walked towards him. She stopped, inches from him, and looked him right in the eye. “There’s something, here.” She took a deep breath. “You and I get to figure it out, not them, and I know with everything, it makes things complicated, but the last thing you and I need to do is quit being us around each other, and that’s what’s happening, not just you, me too. I don’t know what’s happening. I know I’m staying with you...for how long,” she shrugged. “So if you rub my shoulders, and I moan inappropriately, and someone hears it, and they need to high five you, I don’t care. Do you understand?”

“But I care what they think about you,” Chuck said. Jenny smiled at him.

“I know, Chuck, I know,” she said as she pulled him into a hug. “I’m going to bed, I have a big day tomorrow.” She let him go, and headed to the bathroom to change. She stopped at the doorframe and winked at him. “And someone just worked all the tension out of me earlier, so I’m exhausted.”

“You are evil,” he said, grinning.

“Yep,” she said, popping the “p” and heading into the bathroom.

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There were three of them left. Her, Moneymaker, and Phil. She looked over in the crowd and there was her...Chuck...yeah, that’s what he was, her Chuck. If she hadn’t been at

the table, she would have smiled. She woke up this morning like yesterday morning, but when she scooted closer into him, she found her lips so close to his jaw. She looked at his stubble, and fought herself from tracing her finger over his jaw line. She fought herself from kissing his jaw, and that's when she noticed his breathing. He wasn't asleep. His head slowly turned to her, their eyes locked, and she knew exactly what she wanted. She knew exactly what she was going to do about it, and that when the alarm went off. With amazing dexterity, Chuck reached behind him, and shut it off, never taking his eyes off of hers.

"It's time to go win your tournament," he said. She nodded slightly.

"I'm winning my prize," she said. He nodded, wondering what prize she was referring to, hoping it wasn't the money.

"I hope you win," he said. The grin she gave him made him think it wasn't the money.

She was short stacked, and knew she was in trouble. She had played her best but the cards just hadn't fallen the way she hoped. She saw him looking at her, and she gave him a wink. He grinned at her, and thought about this morning. He didn't know what was going on about them, but if they wanted to call the two of them Chenny, then deep down, he didn't hate. That was when he caught the WPT cameras on him. Chuck didn't blame them, love stories brought in TV viewers, and it didn't necessarily have to be an actual love story, but the promise of one would do much the same. Chuck heard Jenny say all in, and he rose up with all the crowd to get a look. She was called, and it was Phil. They flipped over the cards and she had pocket nines to his Ace King. She got up from her chair and walked over to where he stood. She grinned at him, wrapped her arms around him and pressed her face into him, so she didn't have to look.

"I don't feel good about this," she mumbled.

"That's not good," Chuck said. He wanted to assure her, but he'd been in this spot too many times himself, and he knew people should trust their instincts in these situations. The flop came a seven, a deuce and a Jack, all of them different suits. There were no flush possibilities, no straight possibilities, he relaxed, and Jenny did the same. "He's only got six out." She looked up at him.

“It only takes one,” she said. He grinned at her. If she busted, she was looking at over \$103,000. The turn came a blank and she was starting to feel good. “Less than 15%.” Chuck nodded at her. The next card flipped over, and she felt it in his body and heard it with the crowd. She reached up, and gave him a peck on the lips, to the audience’s delight, walked over, shook Phil’s hand, Chris Moneymaker’s hand, and headed out to cash out. She knew she should stay around for the end given they’d want her on TV and she would get some money for that.

“You played it right,” she heard him say behind her. She turned around and hugged him, feeling herself sink into him.

“Sometimes playing it right doesn’t guarantee you win,” she replied.

“That’s poker,” he said. “Sorry you lost your prize.” She looked up at him.

“I haven’t lost it yet,” she said. “In fact, I think my odds are pretty good.” Chuck smiled, took her hand, and they returned to the studio to watch the end of the show and be part of the award presentation at the end. As Mike Sexton said, “May all your cards be live and all your pots be monsters,” Jenny looked at Chuck, and he looked at her. They were definitely playing for a monster pot.

A/N: Wonder how long until they’re, “All-in” HAHAHAH...hahah...ha....Is this thing on? Take Care, till next time.

DC

Chapter 6: Ch 6, Queen of Hearts

A/N: So you want Chenny do you....sigh...oh, alright....I don't know who established in fanfiction that Sarah/Jenny has a problem with mojitos, but that person deserves a lifetime achievement award. Ch 6, Queen of Hearts

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, I don't own any Juice Newton recordings, but my parents listened to a LOT of country back then, so I know all the words to this song.

March 12, 2004

As she raked another pot, the internal war kept going on inside of her, should she stay here in California with Chuck, or hop on the WPT cruise ship that was going to head out to the Sea of Cortez (the Gulf of California) to get away from him for a few days. She didn't know how she wanted to be right beside someone and as far away as possible all at the same time.

Jenny was currently playing at a low limit cash game at The Commerce. She was currently doing something she swore she would never do, playing while drunk. She didn't know who made the mojitos here at The Commerce, but they deserved a medal, a star, a street named after them, or something like that. Who was she kidding, she was breaking two rules, she was falling...she was having some serious feelings...she took a self-check and decided that phrase would work, for that stupid curly haired nerd.

He had helped her, her mother, and what did he want for it...NOTHING. He didn't expect any kind of repayment. She finished her drink, signaled for another, raised on the turn, driving her opponent out of the pot, and raked in more money. She cursed herself, she had won that pot off of the math that idiot had taught her. Other guys, if they had done what Chuck had done, she knew what they would want...not that they deserved it, but she knew. What scared her even more than all of that, the nut wanted a relationship. She sighed, moved all-in, got called, showed her cards with the goods, and raked in a huge pot.

There were a lot of upsides to having a relationship with the adorable chocolate-eyed nerd. She could move out of that room down the hall, the one she was going to stay in until he ran her out of his house or he invited her to his room, not that he needed to know that, and not that she would ever admit out loud. She could wake up with him each morning and run her fingers through that curly mess that made those animal shapes. She could.....she needed another drink! She slammed that one down and signaled for another.

So if she loved all these ideas, why was she here, two sheets to the wind, playing low-level poker, using the math he had taught her, and KILLING IT, she might add. Because of the sweet, sexy, idiot she was having a lot of feelings for that went far beyond just liking someone. Damn, Casey was right. Even when she was quiet she was screaming out her lady feelings. She tossed back another shot and folded, knowing the math wasn't right, the player had the cards, and she was in no shape to even attempt to move him off of his hand. Hand...that thing he did with his thumb in San Jose. Now she had the song, *Do you know the way to San Jose*, in her head. She hated that nerd. Hated she hadn't drug him into her room, or his room, or the living room....this was getting out of control.

She put her head in her hands, and wanted to just scream away the frustration, but the employees and patrons wouldn't appreciate that here. It all started when they returned from the Shooting Star 101. Jenny had thought about her play in the tournament, and she wondered if she could have done anything differently. She asked Chuck, and he had that look on his face again that he was thinking of the best way to tell her. She grabbed his shirt, pulled him near, smirked, and reminded them of their no secrets, no lies pact. He nodded and told her he would have played a couple of hands differently because of the math.

They began to work during the evenings on how to approach things in poker using math, and she began to see that, oh, how she loathe to admit this, he was right. Instead of getting mad, she listened, learned, and applied what she learned to her game.

While that was great, life took a turn she never expected by getting to know her mother better at Chuck's house. After she explained everything to her mom, Emma went over to

Chuck and hugged him so hard Jenny thought his ribs would pop. Jenny swore she even saw Casey smile...just for a second...it could have been gas... The two began to bond, and that's when the questions began, what was going on between her and Chuck. Jenny did something she had never done, she admitted to another woman how she felt about someone. Since she was seventeen she had been on her own, and now here was her mother, someone she had always been comfortable around, but had been driven apart by their father; Emma had known how Jack really was, and Jenny was a child taken in by the romanticism of the open road.

Jenny admitted she had more feelings for Chuck then she knew what to do with, but she had never been involved in an actual relationship before. There had been a few guys, here and there, but for the most part, it hadn't been worth the trouble, especially when she was used to staying up all hours of the night some days for a big score. Emma smiled and told her, just go with it. What did that mean? Just go with it? It couldn't be that simple....could it?

During the day Chuck had stayed around the house, or took Jenny, or Jenny and Emma, and drove them around. In the evening, Chuck and Jenny would work on poker. The next morning, Chuck always looked very tired for someone who had claimed to go straight to bed. This morning, Chuck told them he needed to go into the office, which was no surprise, he had a business to run. She had sat in the house for a while before Casey yelled at her to shut up. When she gave him a confused look he told her that she was screaming about her lady feelings whether she realized it or not. He offered to take her to Chuck's company and she quickly agreed.

When she got there, Casey took off, thinking today was a day for himself. She asked to see Chuck, told the receptionist who she was, and a minute later was lead to an office where she was surprised to see a short, bearded man. He was studying her, not in a checking her out kind of way, but in a what's the big deal, kind of way. He told her that Chuck was asleep, he wouldn't wake him because he had been working every night from home or by coming into the office. Jenny maintained her composure but on the inside she was freaking out, why had he done that?

Morgan explained to her that Chuck didn't want to leave her alone, and that Chuck was leaving the company. He would own it, do a little work, here or there, but 95% of the company was to be run by Morgan. He said that while he was ready for the job, and happy to do it, without his Han it just felt empty, and she better be the Princess Leia he deserved. She wasn't totally sure what he meant by all of that, but she understood that Chuck was leaving his company because of her, and that wasn't okay. That wasn't right. What did he expect from her? He said they were going to take it slow! They had barely had any physical contact since the Bay 101. Sure they had snuggled while watching movies, she sat in his lap often, and she would find her hand in his all the time, but that was nothing compared to those magical mornings they had woken up together.

He couldn't rush her like that. There were so many other things they could do, but he was giving up things for her...he didn't know her...okay, he did, she had told him pretty much everything about her past, and when she had cried, he had just held her tight. She should have kissed him then, but she didn't, and she wasn't even sure if he'd let her, probably saying something about taking advantage of her. He was lucky he wasn't here right now, because she'd take advantage of him...even thought she was the drunk one....she knew what she meant.

She folded her cards and she felt her body react. Damn it, it wasn't fair, he shouldn't be able to just come near her and she react like that. She didn't even turn toward him, she just finished her drink, figuring he'd cut her off...from the alcohol...they hadn't done anything else to be cut off from...she really wish he'd go away so she could think straight...not that she was thinking straight before he showed up.

"Trying out the math while drinking, that's an interesting way to test something," he said.

"Maybe, I just want to play drunk poker," she retorted. She turned to look at him. Damn him. His eyes showed exactly how tired he was. She knew he was scouring the internet with his employees looking for any sign of her dad, now she knew he was staying up all night doing work at his company, all so he could spend his free time with her. Damn him for begin so considerate, and how dare he be all adorable, the sleepy look, the brown

animal shapes, and those eyes that were trying to look like he was laughing, but deep down he was concerned...about her...damn him and his consideration. She bet when he got excited they had another look in them...damn him and his sexy eyes.

"You are wasted," he said. She turned toward him, nodded, and belched.

"Maybe I just like Mo, ji, toes," she said. Chuck just looked at her.

"I've never seen you drunk in the middle of the day, hell, I've never seen you drunk," Chuck said. He was looking at her with concern in his eyes. He should have concern in his eyes, she was about to toss him on the table. How dare he look at her like that. She realized it was her turn in the conversation.

"Your point?" she asked.

"Well, in the time I've known you I've never seen you do this, so is this just because, or are you this upset?"

"What if I was upset?" Jenny asked.

"Well, I'm your friend and I'd hope you'd talk to me about it."

"What if youuuuuuuu are the reason I'm upset?" she asked, as sassily as she could manage. Chuck reached over, and gently moved a lock of her hair behind her ear that was dangling in front of her eye. Damn him and his good looks, and his gentle hands...and that thumb that made circles on her hand....

"Then I would really hope you'd talk to me," he said.

"Well of course you would, I'd hate for someone to think Chenny is having a rough patch!" she spat. Chuck slightly tilted his head and looked at her. She immediately regretted what she was saying. "You don't deserve that."

"Miss Burton, are you in?" the dealer asked.

"That's what I'm trying to figure out!" she yelled. "I mean he's frickin perfect, so why shouldn't I be in, but I've never had a relationship and I don't know how to do this, and I don't want to screw it up! He's leaving his job for me, HIS JOB! How do I deal with that? And he has hair makes the most adorable animal shapes, have you ever seen more

adorable hair?" she asked as she ran her hand through Chuck's hair while he sat there stunned. "I want to be in, I want him to be my Chuck, but I don't know how!" she said, nearly sobbing.

"I mean the hand, Miss Burton," the dealer said softly. Jenny looked up and saw all the faces at the table looking at her.

"I think she's out, in fact, she should probably take her chips and go, don't you think, Jenny?" Chuck asked, his hand on her arm. She turned, looked at him, and nodded, the words escaping her at the moment. They packed up her chips and walked over to the vault where he had her chips put into her box.

"We should get you home," Chuck said.

"So you're throwing me out for making a scene?" she asked. "I see, Bartowski. I should have known you were like all the rest." He just looked at her. It then dawned on her what she had said and she when she spoke, it was sheepish. "You meant your home, didn't you?" He nodded. She had to save this somehow. "I think I'll stay here tonight." Chuck shrugged and he took her over to the hotel part. Jenny started to ask for a room when one of the employees saw Chuck.

"Your regular, sir?" the hotel employee asked. Jenny turned to him, giving him a look.

"Yes," he said to the employee. He turned to her. "Casey doesn't bother me here, and no, I'm not planning on staying with you."

"Well, why not?" she asked. Chuck just looked at her. "You don't trust yourself around me?" Chuck took the key, and led her to the elevator. When they got to her floor, he opened the door and led her into a penthouse. She spun in shock looking around the room. "No, I really don't," Chuck said softly. She turned to look at him. "I'm sorry."

"THANK GOD!" Jenny said. Chuck looked up at her in shock. "I thought you didn't find me attractive, or didn't like me, or I don't know was a freakin' monk, but to know you're human, that helps." Chuck walked right up to her, and stopped.

"Oh, I am very human, Jenny," Chuck said softly. "I think you're one of the most amazing women I have ever met. I work a lot of nights because I know you're down the hall, and I

have trouble sleeping. I haven't slept right since San Jose. I am crazy about you, but wonder how someone as amazing as you, as someone who has single handedly kept the mob at bay, someone with the heart that you have...I wonder what in the world you could see in a nerd like me?"

"Chuck, why are you selling your company for me?" she asked softly.

"It's not just for you, I mean, yes, with you being here, it helped me decide it was time, but this is for me. I want to do more. I can do more. I'll still be a part, but not a large part. I have the money, why should I kill myself just to make more. This was coming long before I met you," Chuck said, taking her hand.

"Oh," she said.

"I know about Morgan, and I know how he made it sound, because he's upset I'm leaving, but he's wrong, I'm not leaving just because of you."

"But, I am a factor?" she asked. Chuck looked at her. "We said no secrets, no lies."

"Well, you realize now what that entails?" Chuck asked as she looked at him, confused.

"No secrets, no lies, means just that, and the person hearing those things has to accept them." Jenny nodded realizing what he meant. Not only did you have to be brave enough to share things, you had to be brave enough to hear the other's secrets.

"I should have talked to you directly instead of running," Jenny said. "In my defense, I didn't really run away, more of a slow jog."

"I'm halfway surprised you didn't jump on the WPT cruise," Chuck said, grinning. Jenny ran her hand through her hair, looking away. "Oh." She looked at him with a tight smile.

"No secrets no, no lies?" She nodded. "Okay, I'll be glad to be your Chuck," he said, nervously, she looked at him with huge eyes. "As for the question about the company, yes, you're a factor, I don't want you to move back to Las Vegas when this is over, I don't want you to ever leave my house, and yes, someday, I'd like you to change rooms." She stared at him. "But, I don't want to rush anything, especially in the shape you're in right now." She grinned.

"I would have won a bet with myself," she beamed. "Chuck, listen, I don't want to be alone, you're tired, I'm tired, and we both need some rest. Stay with me here tonight. I know it's only the afternoon, but I'm about out of it from the drinking and the emotional outbursts, and you look like you could fall asleep standing up. We need sleep, and you said you slept best with me."

"No funny business?" Chuck asked, grinning.

"I promise, no funny business from now, until we wake up," she said. Chuck nodded. Jenny crawled into bed, gave him a look and her pants came flying out. "I can't sleep with those on," she said. Chuck nodded. He took off his, and slid in. She rolled over to look at him, shrugged, and scooted across the bed. He gave her a look. "Like we're going to try to pretend we won't end up this way? Chuck smiled, and she snuggled into him. Two minutes later they were asleep. It was around three when she woke. She looked at him, but she knew something wasn't right. She studied him and felt his body shift.

"You okay?" he asked. She nodded and moved in to kiss him....that's when she realized what was wrong and she bolted from the bed. Chuck took a minute to process what was happening, and quickly followed. The noises she made were interesting.

"Don't!" she yelled, but she had business to take care of and as her stomach emptied its contents into the toilet, she felt him take her hair into a ponytail and hold it. She heard water running and a minute later a cool cloth was on her neck. "No one has ever treated me as well as you have."

"Jenny, all I'm doing is being a decent friend to you," Chuck replied. "Is that a pickle?" She laughed in spite of the awkwardness of the situation.

"I still appreciate it," she said, and leaned against him.

"You done?" he asked. She nodded. He stood, bent, scooped her up, and carried her back to bed. He dabbed her face, making sure she was clean, and then he reached over and picked up the phone. He made a call and a few minutes later there was a knock on the door. He came back a minute later. "I have a few toothbrushes and toothpaste," he

said.

“Seriously, that may be the greatest pickup line ever for someone in my condition,” she said. Chuck couldn’t help it and burst out laughing. They held each other, and fell back asleep.

A/N: I didn’t say it would be this chapter! Take care. See you soon.

DC

Chapter 7: Ch 7, All-In

A/N: I have all these stories and head cannons, and sometimes my thoughts don't make it to paper as wilf21's review made me realize. So please, if you have a question, please pm, review, whatever, and I'll try and show you where I talked about it, or in this case, it was in my head and I never really said why I was doing what I was doing. Oh, one other thing, remember this is 2004, no facebook, myspace, or twitter. It takes a minute for the public to find out about things. We still used magazines and newspapers back then...and flip phones...(there was a Sony Ericsson CAR-100 flip phone, I kid you not. Google 2004 a trip down mobile memory lane... I had the Motorola RAZR V3)

I was worried some of you might be a skoosh irritated with me the way that last chapter ended, but everyone seemed to like it. I had my reasons, but you can't go that far, and then pull back now can you? Hence the name of this chapter. Chenny fans you wanted it, you got. Ch 7, All-In

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, I don't own Chenny, but I'm really glad to get to write this chapter.

Jenny was looking in the mirror at the outfit she had on. She didn't know why she was so nervous, it was the four of them going out. Emma had suggested it, and Casey agreed which was curious in itself, but it was four people going out and having a good time. So why was it so important she get this just right? Oh, she knew why, she knew exactly why, her Chuck was why. She thought about this morning and all it had brought with it.

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That morning

She had woken up and wondered what had died in her mouth, that's when she remembered what had happened yesterday. Her head hurt and she stumbled to the bathroom for many reasons, but the main two, to find out where the ice pick had been placed in her head, and to brush her teeth, possibly multiple of times. After she had done all of her business, she left the bathroom and walked back to the bed, she sat on it,

and looked at him.

"I don't want to go to Las Vegas either, Chuck," she said softly. "I finally feel like I'm home."

"Then don't," came his sleepy reply. She jerked her head up, not realizing he was awake. He smacked his lips, and opened his eyes, and the thought of how adorable he was came rushing through her again. Her head was pounding, but seeing him look at her, was driving that pain away. How she wished she could tell him how special she felt when he looked at her like that. "I'm not going to ask you to leave, and just ignore Casey. He tries to throw me out of my own place once a week."

"It's not fair to you," she said.

"What's not fair?"

"You said you have trouble sleeping knowing I'm right down the hall," she replied.

"I would have even more trouble sleeping if you were a state away," he said, grinning at her. She shook her head. The phone rang, and Chuck reached over to answer it. "Hello. This is he. He left how many messages? How many people did he call moron? I see. Is he on the line? Yes, patch him through. Casey. Yes, I'm here, and she's here to. We just played poker late, that's all. I don't even know what that means, Casey, though it does sound delicious. Oh. OH. No, Casey, you did a fine job of explaining the bird and the bees to me when I was younger." He placed his hand over mouth piece and shook his head at Jenny. "No, he didn't," he mouthed. Jenny stifled a laugh. He took his hand off the mouthpiece. "Well, if you'd quit yammering like a gossip, we'd get ready and leave. Hello? Hello?" Chuck looked at the phone and hung up. "He hung up on me." "I can't imagine why," Jenny said, getting off the bed, and walking over to him. She kissed him lightly on the cheek. "You being so charming and all."

"There's medicine in that drawer for your headache," Chuck said. She opened the drawer, turned, and kissed his cheek again.

"I swear if you ever turned up your charm all the way, women would have no chance," she said. Chuck laughed.

"Yeah, right. Thanks for being nice," he said, beginning to get out of bed. He stopped as he felt a hand on his chest. He looked up seeing her eyes that were flashing blue.

"No. Chance," she said, and then she bent down and kissed him. Chuck had been hoping to kiss Jenny for a long time. He had ideas in his head of what it would be like. In his mind, there was a 16 bit computerized version of himself, or little Chuck. Little Chuck took those ideas, wadded them up and threw them away. This was an epic event! He swore he heard a choir singing, lights flashing, and people applauding. She pulled away, patted his chest and went back to the bathroom. She paused at the door and looked back. "No chance," she said softly. Chuck could only sit there and nod dumbly.

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They were headed toward Chuck's house after having checked out of the hotel. They had both been fairly quiet since the kiss. Chuck didn't want to talk too much due to Jenny's headache, and Jenny...well, she seemed to be deep in thought.

"What did Casey mean on the phone?" she asked. Chuck looked at her. "You know before you told me he didn't explain the birds and the bees very well." Chuck looked ahead, but his ears seemed to be getting red. "No lies, no secrets," she said. He turned to her, a grin on his face. "It can't be that bad."

"He asked me if I was mixing my chocolate with your peanut butter, or something like that," Chuck said. Jenny nodded.

"If he had waited twenty minutes to call the answer might have been different," she said softly. It took all of Chuck's concentration to keep the car on the road. "No secrets, no lies." Chuck's ears were fire engine red. "I know what our problem is."

"You do?" he squeaked.

"Yep," she said, popping the "p". "I mean besides neither of us really knowing how to do the relationship thing, you being adorably awkward, and me not knowing how to really verbalize things." Chuck sat there scared to say a word, fearing he would ruin the moment. "Our parents are in that house." Chuck laughed out loud.

“Okay, hold on, I mean calling Casey a parent is a bit bold,” Chuck began. Jenny looked at him with an arched eyebrow. “If he was your foster parent it would be one thing for me to be worried about him...Oh my God, you’re scared of Casey!”

“Not scared, but he can be...gruff,” Jenny said, looking away. “Besides, your terrified of my mom.”

“Wait a second, that’s not even a little fair,” he replied. “I don’t know her, and she and her daughter are living under my roof and I don’t want to give off the kind of vibes that might make it harder one day if I was her son-in-law, plus you two have just gotten-”

“WHOA! WHOA! WHOA! WHOA! WHOA! WHOA! WHOA! WHOA!” Jenny said. “Her WHAT?!?” Chuck looked at her, realizing he had let his mouth run on too long. He was going to try and walk it back.

“Who’s what?” he asked. Her eyes flashed, and not the way he liked.

“Bartowski, I swear to God if you don’t tell me what you said right this second-”

“IsaidIdidn’twanttoscrewthingsupifIwastobeherson-in-lawoneday,” he spit out as quickly as possible. Jenny looked at him, then turned and looked at the road, then back to him, then back to the road, and then back to him again.

“I see,” she said. She was quiet for a minute and then turned and looked forward to the road. “This whole no secrets, no lies thing is a bit more than I thought I was getting in to,” she said quietly.

“I’m sorry, Jenny,” Chuck said. “I won’t hold you to it.” Jenny turned to him with a smirk.

“Bartowski, I agreed, so I’m all-in, I’ve just got some interesting information that I need to process, that’s all.”

“You’re not pissed, or upset?” he asked, stunned.

“The greatest guy in the world wants my mom to be his mother-in-law, now all I have to do is find out if he thought I had any sisters...or brothers,” Jenny replied, grinning. Chuck laughed and laughed. He reached over and took her hand.

“I thought you were an only child.”

“Good answer, Bartowski. Good answer.”

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A few hours later found Chuck in his office working, and Jenny and her mom on the porch enjoying the day. Casey came outside and surveyed the scene. He grunted and shook his head.

“You look like hell, Burton,” Casey said.

“You are an absolute ray of sunshine, Casey,” Jenny said. Casey stared at her and grinned.

“Bartowski’s rubbing off on you, I see,” he said with a smirk. There was a double entendre there.

“Not yet,” she replied. Casey nearly choked on his coffee. Emma covered her mouth trying to hold in the laugh. He looked at Jenny, and nodded.

“Seems I was wrong about you,” Casey said. “I need to tell you about the Moron and his little friend. Maybe next time you won’t go on a bender if you know all the facts.” Emma looked at Jenny, grinning.

“I wasn’t....on a bender,” she said, knowing this fight was useless.

“Right,” Casey said, with a growing smirk. “Tell me something, Burton. Does Bartowski have as much money as a video game guy should?” Jenny knew exactly what he meant, she also knew by admitting what she knew that Casey would know she had checked Chuck out. She had, not for running a con, as she hoped Casey now knew, but because she was trying to find out about him, since he wouldn’t stay out of her mind those long months in Las Vegas when he wasn’t around.

“Too much,” she said, meeting his gaze. “Way too much.” Casey nodded.

“He feels stuck,” Casey said looking straight ahead, sipping coffee. “Before he went to Stanford, I would talk all about the NSA, and he used to laugh. He told me he could hack their systems in minutes. He kept on and on, and I finally decided to put him in his place. I called some people, told them about my...the kid’s boasts and was ready for

some laughs and us to set him up. What I got surprised me. I was told that he was probably right. Long story short, the Kid created their firewall, and is getting paid by the government, very well, I might add. He used that money to start his and Morgan's video game company, but his heart, it's not in it. The contract ends on his computer protections soon, and he wants to make it available to the public for next to nothing, or even free. He wants to do so many other things than be bogged down by a video game company. He enjoys it, he just wants challenges and to help people."

"He's a good guy, he learned from those that care about him," she said, looking Casey directly in the eye. She had caught his near slip. "I won't hurt him, Casey, I promise."

"You damn well better not," Casey said.

"If we get married, can I call you dad?" she asked. Casey growled, shook his head, and stormed off.

"Why must you upset him so?" Emma asked, laughing.

"Because he wants to act all gruff, and he loves Chuck so much it's not even funny," Jenny said. Emma patted her leg.

"I don't think he's the only one," she said, watching her daughter turn red. They talked for a while, and Jenny told her mom everything. She laughed about their realization of how awkward things were with their parents in the house. That's when Emma suggested they all go out to dinner together. Which led Jenny to her current predicament of what to wear. She went with a purple dress and nervously walked down the hall to the living room. They were taking her Porsche tonight, she need to drive and release the nervous energy. Chuck came out of his room buttoning the last of his dark blue shirt having never looked up.

"Jenny are you..." he trailed off, seeing her. She grinned, knowing from the look on his face he was gobsmacked. She put a mental checkmark down to wear this more often.

"Am I what, Chuck?" she asked.

"Are you for real," he mumbled out, and then shook his head seeing the confused look on his face. "I mean you are smart, so smart, like people don't get how smart you are,

and the personality you have, the wit, the jokes, oh man the jokes, the inner beauty you have, like trying to help your dad when he doesn't deserve it, and all the little things you do to take care of people, I mean that makes you one of the most beautiful, sexiest women in the world, but then...then, you are just so incredible...see, that smile, the one with your eyes, those eyes that look into someone's soul...I'm serious, are you for real or has my mind finally snapped and you are a figment of my imagination." Jenny crossed the space between them, grabbed his shirt with one hand, the back of his head with the other, and kissed him until they ran out of oxygen. When she pulled away she gave him a smirk.

"Any more questions?"

"Nope, I think my brain melted," he said. She patted him on the chest and smoothed his shirt.

"We should go," she said. "They said they'd meet us there." She took his hand and led him to her car.

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"Emma can't make it?" Chuck asked, grinning. Jenny was shaking her head with her own grin looking at her phone.

"Nope, I assume something's come up with Casey as well?" Jenny asked. Chuck nodded having snapped his phone shut. "So in the vein of no secrets, no lies, this was my mom's idea of letting us get to know the parents better."

"Then why bail?" Chuck said. "I mean they got us alone, I get it, but we've been alone before." Jenny studied him, and grinned. She took a drink of her water (there was no way she was drinking alcohol tonight, she couldn't take another headache, and she didn't want it to be an excuse...just in case).

"Maybe they're saying we have their permission," she said with a smirk. Chuck burst out laughing. "What?"

"We've entered the land of the absurd, that's what," Chuck said. "There's pictures out there of us as a couple, we've danced all around this," he said, motioning between us.

"And now our 'parents', are trying to set us up." Jenny grinned.

"You know, I've been thinking about us like that," Jenny began.

"Really?" Chuck asked. Jenny gave him a look, he held up his hands and look properly chastised.

"Someone did a real number on you, didn't they?" Chuck nodded. "Broke up with you, slept with someone?"

"Slept with my roommate at college," Chuck said, Jenny winced.

"That's low," she replied. "Tell me something, Chuck, is that why Morgan treated me the way he did?" He nodded. "Good." He looked at her, confused. "You need to have a friend that backs you no matter what."

"Well, that, and he thinks your Yoko Ono," Chuck said. Jenny laughed.

"I can handle it," Jenny said. Chuck looked at her, and she reached over and took his hand. "You've helped my family so much, you've helped me, and all you want is for me to be happy."

"Are you happy yet?" Chuck asked, grinning.

"Two things would make me happy," Jenny said.

"Well, tell me and I'll see what I can do," Chuck said.

"First, I need to find my father, and I know you're working on it, so that makes me very happy, and I have an idea, but it kind of ties into number two but I'm afraid you'll take it the wrong way," Jenny said.

"Okay, take a breath, that was close to a spiral, and that's kinda my thing," Chuck said.

"Oh," Jenny said. "Do I need to compensate you for it?" she asked, raising an eyebrow and grinning. Chuck gulped. "Do I need to apologize for using it?" Chuck shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"You know what, I think I'm going to have you added on to the paperwork to use it anytime you want."

“Chuck, you are so giving,” she said, seriously.

“That’s me, Chuck Bartowski, the guy who gives until it hurts.” Jenny nodded, taking his other hand.

“That’s the other thing I want Chuck,” she said. “I want to make you stop hurting. I want to make you happy. I don’t know terms and labels, but I want to be with you. I want a life with you, and I don’t care if you run a video game company or play on the poker tour or start a non-profit to help whoever, I just want to be a part of your world.”

“You are a part of my world,” Chuck said.

“Chuck, I’m greedy, I want to be your world,” Jenny said as honestly as she knew how. Chuck sat back, a little stunned. “I don’t know how to do the girlfriend thing, the spouse thing, because I never saw all of that, all I know is, when you’re not around I want you around. I want you around so much it hurts, and I get what I came from, but you say you don’t care, so I think it’s time you put up or shut up. What’s it gonna be, Bartowski, you got the guts to try this thing?”

“Did you just propose to me?” Chuck asked. Jenny burst out laughing. She wadded up a napkin and threw it at him.

“I spent hours talking myself into doing this, calm myself so I can get out the words, pour my heart out, and you’ve got jokes?” she asked, but the smile on her face told him she wasn’t mad.

“Jenny, that’s part of the package,” he said, his smile lighting up his whole face, including his eyes that were twinkling.

“Enough with the subtle hints, Buster, in or out?”

“All-in,” he said, squeezing her hand. Jenny nodded, a happy smirk on her face.

“About time,” she muttered.

“Aw, hell, Burton,” Chuck said, doing his best Casey impersonation. “You know that nerd was putty in your hands.” Jenny laughed so hard she thought they’d get thrown out of the restaurant. “Okay, now that we’ve taken care of that serious moment, what idea did

you have that might help us find Jack?"

"Welllll," she began. "I don't feel this way, I need to put this out there first," she said. Chuck nodded. "These pictures of us...he might see them, and check out who you are..." Chuck grinned.

"So you're saying, he thinks his daughter would only be with a guy like me, a millionaire, because she's conning him?" he said, his eyes far away, grinning, realizing the easiest way to find Jack was to just be themselves in public...that's why he missed it...the look.

"Charles Irving Bartowski," she practically growled. She swore an "epp" came from his direction but she could care less at that moment. "The reason I am with you, is because you are the kindest, most generous, loving, compassionate, amazing man I know, and if you don't stop down grading yourself, I'm going to have no problem kicking the guy I'm falling in love with ass." Chuck stared at her, a little frightened, but a slow smile growing on his face.

"What did you just say?" he asked. Jenny rewound the words in her head and she began to blush. Part of her wanted to run, but a part, the big part, was determined to sit right there and deal with this.

"I believe I said I'm going to have no problem kicking the guy I'm falling in love with ass."

"Well, that's problematic," he said. Her eyes narrowed, and she saw him fighting a grin.

"What is," she nearly growled again. The smile had overtaken his face.

"I'm pretty sure that sentence is grammatically incorrect." She reached over, took his napkin, wadded it up, and threw it right in his face. He never moved, and just kept smiling. "I believe it is more correct to say I have no problem kicking the ass of the guy I'm falling in love with."

"I hate you," she said, laughing.

"I hate you, too," he replied.

}o{

He had offered to take her dancing, but she said she really didn't want to be around a crowd of people, so he told her he had an idea. He drove her to the beach. She left her shoes in the car and they walked hand in hand until they found the perfect spot. He sat up a blanket and they sat on it, her in front of him, his arms wrapped around her. How long they stayed neither knew. Neither one had said a word since arriving, they just held each other, until finally Jenny broke the silence.

"Let's go home."

She drove them home, and they entered the house. It was silent, Chuck wasn't sure where Emma or Casey was and frankly he wasn't about to go look. In the middle of the living room she kissed him, smiled and headed down the bedroom hallway. He heard a door close softly, no idea what bedroom she went into. It didn't matter. He and Jenny they were together and that's all that mattered. The rest of it...they'd figure it out. He grinned, and started toward his room. He paused just in front of his door, and slowly opened it. He stood there a minute.

"You sure?" he asked.

"Shut up, come in, close the door, and kiss me," she said. He did.

A/N: (Sits back, cracks knuckles) I made it seven chapters. That's got to be some sort of record. Okay kids, crazy work this week, Grace with 9 million things to do, so I don't know when I'll get the next one out, and next week is just as bad. Plus I need to update Truffaut soon, or Grace will yell...a lot... Take care. See you soon.

DC

Chapter 8: Ch 8, The Joker

A/N: Apparently I have updated too much for fanfiction.net so you might want to go back and make sure you're caught up. Go on, I'll wait. (Checks watch) Hey, welcome back. So we have Chenny, to the delight of most of you, and now we are getting into the crux of our heroes problems...one Jack Burton. There is a little more language her than usual, no more than the chapter I warned you about in Truffaut, but more than I usually do, but when you get there, I think you'll see why. Sit back and enjoy Chapter 8, The Joker.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, and no one, I mean no one, has ever called me Maurice.

April 15, 2004

Emma and John sat at the bar watching Chuck and Jenny in the kitchen. They worked together, laughing, shoulder bumping each other, but they were a team. Casey rolled his eyes for at least the fourth time that day, and Emma grinned. Casey grunted, and shook his head. These two were going to be the death of him. What was supposed to be an easy job, had turned into something he really wasn't prepared for.

Chuck and Jenny making breakfast had become a tradition over the past few weeks. Since that night they spent together, they had become a couple in every sense of the word. Jenny had moved out of her room and now stayed with Chuck. Emma watched them and was happy for her daughter. It was obvious the two were crazy about each other.

"Today's going to be a big one," Casey said grinning. Emma gave him a look. "Moron made a reservation at the Bellagio for the tournament." Emma was still confused. "Your daughter has a house there." Emma's eyes got wide.

"We have to say something to them," Emma said. Casey shook his head.

"He's crap at communicating and needs to learn, Emma," Casey said. "He needs this, they need this. They'll get through it, they just need to learn to talk to each other."

"Do you two need some time?" Jenny asked. They looked back toward the kitchen and saw the younger couple was watching them, amused.

"Got your plans finalized?" Casey asked.

"Yeah, we're heading down tomorrow, and I've got the hotel room reserved," Chuck said, turning back to concentrate on the eggs, missing the look Jenny gave him, but he felt it. He turned to her, seeing the look on her face. "Did I do something wrong?" Jenny shook her head and walked out of the room. Chuck turned toward Casey. Emma backhanded him.

"Christ, Bartowski, go talk to her," Casey said. "Talk and listen," he growled. Chuck nodded and went off after her. "Guess I gotta make my own eggs," he grouched. Chuck walked down the hall and noticed her old bedroom door was shut. He knocked on it.

"I think I've done something," Chuck said through the door. "What that something is, I don't really know. But I'd really like to talk about it, and apologize, but I have to know what it is I did." The door opened and she was standing there, eyes red and tears streaked down her face, evidence of her crying. "What did I do?" he asked softly.

"Are you ashamed of me?" she asked. Chuck's heart nearly broke.

"NO! Why would you think that? I mean you can make your own hotel reservations if it's that important," Chuck said, taking her hands. Jenny stared at him.

"Why would I stay in a hotel room when I have a house?" The look on Chuck's face....he dropped her hands, closed his eyes, placed his hand covering his eyes in shame and banged his head against the doorframe. "Don't do that, you'll hurt yourself!" She put her hands on his shoulders, pushing him away from the door frame, looking him in his eyes. There was pain there, and tears were forming.

"I am the world's biggest idiot," he said. "I didn't even think about you having a place to stay there, or anything. I-" Jenny put her fingers on his lips.

"I assumed the worst," Jenny said softly. "I just assumed you didn't want to be seen with me, or stay with me." Chuck shook his head. She took her fingers off his lips and pulled him in. "I suck at this stuff."

“Obviously, I’m a master,” Chuck said. Jenny laughed into his chest where he was holding her. “I’ll cancel the hotel room, that is if you want me to...Let me start over, where would you like to stay, and can I stay with you?”

“I want to be where ever you are, so yes,” Jenny replied. “Staying at my place would be cost efficient, but it’s not on site. It’s not far away though.”

“Oh, for the love of all that is holy, cancel the damn room, Bartowski!” Casey yelled down the hall. Jenny grabbed Chuck’s hand and pulled him in her room.

“What are you doing?” Chuck asked.

“Upsetting Casey and making me happy,” she said grinning. Chuck just grinned as he shut the door behind him.

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April 21

Jenny was sitting at a cash game, mad. She had played the tournament perfect but lost on a draw out on the river. There was an old saying, “That’s poker,” but she wanted to beat someone. The thing she loved about the WPT championship was the 25k buy-in. Amateurs were rare with such a large buy-in, so it became more about skill than luck, but poker did have an element of luck, and today wasn’t her day. The good news was she had won back her buy-in at the cash game, and that’s when he cellphone buzzed. She picked it up, worried. She made a face as she read the text and her worries were confirmed. She cashed out, and went to find her boyfriend...boyfriend, God she loved that term...she was afraid that wasn’t all she loved about her situation, but she didn’t know how to deal with that right now. Some of the poker media saw her heading toward him, and she didn’t even care, she caught him in a hug, returning the one he gave her earlier when she busted out.

“Set over set,” he mumbled.

“Damn,” she replied. “Tournament poker, that’s how you want to go broke.” He nodded. “I’m winning this damn thing next year.”

"No, you're not," he replied. She pulled away and looked at him, confused. Chuck grinned. "I'm winning this tournament next year."

"No way, Bartowski."

"Yes way, Burton," Chuck replied, grinning. "I'll make you a bet." She grinned, interested in his terms. "The loser, which will be you." She snorted. "Has to make the other one happy for the rest of their life."

"I like chocolate chip pancakes for breakfast," she replied, grinning.

"Well, I'm going to have to get you a treadmill if you somehow win," he replied, with a smirk. She made a face like she was affronted and punched him in the arm.

"How do you do it?" she asked. "How do you keep knowing exactly what to say to make me feel so much better."

"Let's go home," Chuck said.

"Yeah, let's just get our stuff and get home," she replied. Chuck just looked at her. She grinned. "Yes, wherever you are is my home, and I don't think of Vegas as home anymore, are you happy?"

"Lady, I am freaking ecstatic!" They were both laughing when they left the casino.

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August 29th, 2004

Jenny was signing autographs before the second day of the tournament. The past few months had been amazing and flown by. Her and Chuck had spent most of May in Las Vegas playing in the World Series of Poker and all the cash games that accompanied it. She didn't cash in the Main Event this time, too many amateurs taking lucky shots and eventually getting her. The two of them made quite a bit of money between them. Chuck cashed in two limit WSOP events, and Jenny cashed in three different events, one limit, one no limit, and once in Omaha....Chuck was impressed with that one.

Things really picked up in June. The episodes of WPT aired that month on the multiple FOX Sports networks, and Chenny-mania went into overdrive with the new viewers. The

WSOP began to air on ESPN around the same time, and though they weren't in any of the events shown, the couple was showcased several times for a few minutes in each episode. Jenny couldn't blame the network, it was all about ratings, and the couple had proven to be a ratings draw.

Chuck had been working in all of his free time to try and find Jack. He used every trick he knew, but couldn't find anything, which didn't surprise Jenny. She knew he went old school which meant low-tech. Casey was having a little luck, but they all thought the best shot of finding him came from them being seen, either on TV, or any of the multiple magazine pictures. She signed one last autograph, and headed toward the tables, when a voice caught her by surprise.

"I always knew you'd be better than me, Darlin," the drawl came from beside her. She whipped around.

"Where have you been?" she asked, taking his arm and dragging him off to a private corner. "We have been looking everywhere for you."

"Hey, Angel, I'm fine, I didn't mean to worry you," he said, with a smirk. Jenny's face turned cold.

"Worry? You worry me? I don't think you understand, DAD," she said, stressing the dad. Jack realized something was off. "Because of your bullshit, Mom nearly got hurt. They have been extorting me, and using her as the leverage. They go in, pay off what you conned, and I have to pay it back, plus the vig, or Mom....well, I've paid it off." Jack looked shocked.

"Kid, who would do that?" Jack asked.

"Jimmy Sykes," she replied. Jack's mouth dropped.

"That's not possible," Jack muttered.

"Trust me, Dad, not only is it possible, it's been happening," she said, anger covering her face.

"I get it, you're mad because I've been messing with your money," he began.

“MY MONEY!?” she exploded. “Dad, it’s MOM! They threatened to hurt MOM!”

“Okay, I get it, I just can’t believe Jimmy would do me that way,” he said, shaking his head. Jenny gave him an inquisitive look. “See, when I need something for a con, or a getaway, or whatever, I’ve been using Jimmy.” Jenny threw her hands up in the air.

“Are you frickin kidding me!?” she said, trying not to scream. “You’ve been leading that lunatic to each of your cons? The guy is double dipping! How much was the last score?” she asked, realizing this one was going to be bad.

“One mil,” he said softly. Jenny was beside herself.

“You gotta pay it back,” she said. Jack looked away. “You’ve blown it, haven’t you, blackjack, the ponies, what is it this time?”

“Hey, I get it, I’m screwing up your good con you’ve got goi- hurk!” Jack lost the ability to speak because his daughter had grabbed his coat and threw him against the wall, holding him there.

“Chuck Bartowski is no con, you selfish son of a bitch!” she spat out. “I love that man, and he cares about me. He’s treated me the way a man should, something you could take lessons from.” She felt a hand on her arm, and she eased up, letting her father go.

“Actually he loves her, he just hasn’t found the right time to tell her,” Chuck said, having seen some of the conversation, but deciding to intervene before his girlfriend whipped her father’s ass in front of God and everybody. Jenny just stared at him. “I think you might want to get out of town, Jack. Out of the country even, because I don’t think anyone’s covering for you anymore.”

Jack sighed, and turned to his daughter.

“Come on, let’s get out of here,” he said. “We can go to Europe and make a ton.”

“Which part of I love him are you having trouble with?” she asked, her eyes blazing. Chuck was really worried she was going to deck him.

“Kid, we can’t fall in love,” Jack said, like it was the gospel.

"We aren't the same person," she said. She held her hand out. "Good-bye, Jack." The words she chose hit him like a ton of bricks. He took her hand.

"Angel," he began.

"Good-bye, Jack," she whispered. Jack shook her hand, nodded at Chuck, and left.

"Come on," she said, tears in her eyes. "We need to go play cards."

"I'm about out of chips, so I think I'll just let them blind me off," Chuck said. Jenny gave him a grateful smile. "Want to go home?"

"You really love me?" Jenny asked. Chuck tilted his head and smiled at her.

"You just threw your father out of your life, and your question to me is do I really love you?" Chuck asked. Jenny put her fists on her hips and looked him in the eye, not paying attention to the cameras starting to gather. "Jenny Burton, I love you so much I am scared. Scared of a life without you in it. Scared of not being enough for you. But mostly scared of screwing it up and pushing too hard." Jenny wrapped her arms around him.

"Chuck, I love you, and you know you are my home. You can't push too far," she replied.

"Well," he began. "I guess there's only one thing left to do," he said, but noticed a look of terror in her eyes.

"There is something you should know," she said. "I realized what my father said, and thought, and I'm wondering if others don't feel the same way. This is my mess, and I'm not dragging you into it, that's why you can ask, and push, but until I finish with all of this..." Chuck nodded. He didn't look happy, but nodded. "Do you understand why?"

"I understand that you think it's important, and that you want to fix it yourself, I don't agree, but I don't have to either, because it's what you want," Chuck replied.

"Chuck, you have to understand, every man in my life, except you has been trying to control me, but I want to control my life," she said. "I know what you're thinking, hell, I've been dreaming about it, but I can't let you do this until this mess is settled."

"Okay, then how about this, we try and fix it with Casey's help and contacts, and then I pay off whatever, and you just pay me back?" Chuck suggested. Jenny shook her head.

Chuck sighed. She took his hands.

"I love you, but I need to go into this right," she said. Chuck looked at her.

"You know I would do anything for family and I consider you family?"

"You know I protect my family, and I consider you family," she replied, grinning.

"Can I still give you any winnings?" he asked. She nodded. "Then, let's make a deal, we have until the end of this WPT season to get this done, if we don't let me pay it off, and we'll keep working together until we do." She looked at him. "Wouldn't that be enough time to prove to who ever you need to that this," he said pointing to the two of them. "That this is real." She grinned at him.

"What happens when we pay it off?" She asked. Chuck grinned.

"I finish that line of thinking I was having earlier," he replied smirking.

"Oh really," she asked, raising an eyebrow. "You don't mean right then, obviously."

"Why not?"

"You might have to do it in front of everyone," she replied. Chuck nodded.

"You're right," he said. He smile fell a little. "I hate it when people do those stunts and put public pressure on others." Jenny smirked.

"Chuck, if you asked me by myself, or in front of thousands, the answer would be the same, yes," she said. "IF it's not paid off by the end of the this WPT season, I'll let you pay it off."

"Gee, thanks," he said, smirking. She gave him a playful shove.

"So now what?" she asked.

"Well, I guess we need to get back and get with Casey to get the ball rolling," he said, scratching the back of his head. He blew out a sigh.

"Are we okay?" she asked, worried. Chuck grinned at her.

“Jenny, I’m not going anywhere,” Chuck said, gently kissing her, that’s when he noticed the cameras flashing. He pulled away. “Okay, I lied, we are getting out of here.” She laughed, put her hand on his chest and took a deep breath.

“Thank you, for being here for me through all of this,” she said.

“My pleasure, Jenny. My pleasure.”

A/N: I know it’s short, but I had to get to a certain place in this chapter, and now that I’m there, all I can do is add the next one, which could take days, or just stop here. I figure something is better than nothing. Hope you enjoyed it...take care...see you soon...til next time.

DC

Chapter 9: Ch 9, Diamond Eyes

A/N: NOT UPDATED IN 12 DAYS!? I am so sorry! I've gotten this question a lot. How does Casey know someone within an organization that doesn't exist known as the Mafia? You know how all of these chapters have a poker or card theme? This one stretched because it's the only song that could kinda meet both the poker motif and kinda speak to the chapter. Confused...not as much as me. You wanted the Casey unleashed...you got it. Chapter 9, Diamond Eyes.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, but if I was in a gun fight, I'd want John Casey to have my back.

August 30th, 2004

Casey just stood there. He had listened to Chuck's entire story about how Jenny's father had been a first class dumbass. His heart broke for the kid. He was so close to having it all, finally, and this worthless piece of trash didn't even believe his own daughter. Hell, even he believed Jenny loved the nerd and would never con him, but she didn't need to know that. Emma touched his shoulder pulling him out of his thoughts. That was another thing that was weird. He and Emma. Kathleen had decided what little they had wasn't enough and had moved on. John really couldn't blame her, he wasn't thrilled with what little they had either.

"You can't fix this," she said to him. Casey started to turn to her, and saw Bartowski's stupid smirk. The one that said, I know something you don't know. No, numbnuts, you don't. I know something you don't know, and I ain't telling you, because if I do, you'll tell Ellie, and I'll be deaf for the rest of my life. Casey growled at Chuck, which only made the fool grin bigger.

"No, but I know someone who can," he said to Emma.

"Casey, this is my and Jenny's problem," Chuck said.

"Actually it's my problem, but you had to go and say we're family, Mister Butt-in Buttski," Jenny said coming into the room. Emma gave her a look like she could cry and came to hug her. Jenny gave Chuck a look. "You told her everything, didn't you?" Chuck just grinned as he took a sip of his coffee. When Emma released her, she walked over, placed a kiss on Chuck's cheek, and slugged his arm.

"Ow!"

"You gossip more than anyone I know," Jenny said. Casey smiled at that. "Casey, leave it alone." He just stared at her, leaned against the counter with his elbows, his fingers intertwining each other, and grinned.

"Burton, there's something you've got to realize," Casey said. He turned to Chuck. "Not. A. Word." Chuck gulped, and nodded. Casey nodded and turned back to Jenny. "That idiot and his sister are my children, which makes you my daughter-in-law, and before you say you're not, we both know where this is heading, or already would be if you weren't so damn stubborn." Chuck wondered what alternate universe he was in. "That means, you're one of mine, and no one, and I mean no one, gets to do anything, to one of mine, other than me."

"Huh," Jenny said. "I figured you'd go with the step-father speech," she replied, grinning. Casey set his jaw and started to speak twice, but didn't. Jenny turned to Chuck. "He's trying to figure out a way of saying something about either way putting me over his knee and spanking me without it sounding dirty," Jenny said to Chuck. Chuck nearly spit his coffee out. She turned and looked Casey right in the eye. He grinned, and walked away. Emma watched him go, a bit uncomfortable. "Sorry, Mom."

"I just didn't realize...." She trailed off.

"Emma, even I know something's going on," Chuck said. Emma shrugged.

Casey had gone to his room, and just stood there, looking into the mirror. He took off his pants and looked at the scar on the outside of his left leg. He flexed it and thought back.

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Top secret location, lots of fighting mid 80s

"Casey, we've got to go!"

"The kid's in there, I'm going after him," Casey yelled to his CO (commanding officer).

"Casey, the chopper is 2 clicks out and we have thirty minutes to get there!"

"I'll be there!" Casey replied. The CO nodded as the rest of the team headed to the rendezvous point. Casey knew why they left the kid behind, he had disobeyed an order and gone into the building. His CO thought the kid was too much like his old man, a mobster in Vegas. Bobby had been anything but like his father, but the CO was old school. Casey also knew he had to get his men out of there, he understood, but he didn't respect his CO. Casey found the kid, and began to patch up his leg. "Hey, can you hear me?"

"I can, you should go," Bobby said.

"I don't leave men behind," Casey replied.

"I can't feel my legs," Bobby said tears in his eyes. Casey stopped and looked at him.

"Kid, we don't have a lot of good options," Casey said softly. "The only way I know to save your life is to pack you out of here, but that could make things worse."

"Leave me," Bobby said.

"Ain't happenin', Kid," Casey said. "Now, you're choice, I can make a stretcher, and drag you, but that gives up little chance of making the chopper."

"You're as stubborn as a mule, so pack me out of here," Bobby replied.

"That's the spirit, Kid," Casey said, hoisting him across his shoulders. "Now for a 2 click jog. Piece of cake, right?"

"We'll never make it, Casey," Bobby said.

"Not with that attitude we won't," Casey replied. They took off, for the first 15 minutes, Casey thought this just might work, and that's when the enemy spotted him, and began the chase. Casey knew there wasn't a chance in hell of them making it now, but he saw cover up ahead. That's when the first bullet hit his left leg. To his credit, he didn't

fall....on that shot. The second one in the same area, took him to the ground. He dragged them the few feet remaining to behind what little cover they had. He looked to see at least ten of the enemy coming toward them. He handed the kid his pistol and took his gun out. "Well, let's take a few of them with us," he said to the kid. Bobby nodded. The firefight began, but they were quickly running out of ammunition. Four of them remained, and were on the verge of taking out the two, when gunfire erupted behind them. His unit took out the four remaining enemy combatants and began to check on Casey and Bobby.

"Good job, Casey," his CO said. "We don't leave men behind. Thanks for watching my six on that one." Casey nodded.

"This isn't good," the medic said looking at Casey's knee.

"My legs never were that pretty," Casey grumbled.

"This may end you," the medic admitted. Casey shrugged.

"That's not the first time I've heard that," Casey replied. The two were transported to the Landing Zone and were evaced out.

"Casey, you gave me a chance to have a family," Bobby said, near tears. "If I can ever repay you, please let me know. I'll do anything." Casey looked at him.

"Kid, better watch those promises, I know who your dad is and how he takes those kinds of oaths," Casey said. Bobby reached over and grabbed Casey's forearm.

"I know you know, and that's why I'm telling you, I owe you."

}o{

Now

Casey pulled out his phone and called. He waited for the voice on the other end.

"Hey, Kid, how you making it?" Casey asked.

"Casey?" Bobby replied.

"Yeah, how you doin?"

"I'm good, Man, really good, it's good to hear from you," Bobby said.

"Look, Kid," Casey began.

"Casey, I said I owed you, what is it?"

"It's....well...he's my foster son, after the service I took him and his sister in. He's met someone, a good person, but her father, not so much. She's being blackmailed by Jimmy Sykes," Casey said, more than uncomfortable.

"That son of a bitch," Bobby spit out. "Why dad lets him...I'll arrange a sit-down. I'll call you when I have the details. Casey, thanks for calling me. I finally get a chance to try to pay back some of what you owe me."

"You out of that life and living right?" Casey asked.

"You know it man, you'd come kick my ass if I didn't, wheelchair or not," Bobby replied, laughing. "You gave me hope, Casey. I didn't have that for a long time. Thanks."

"Kid, you did all the work, I just carried you when you were down," Casey replied.

"I'll call you when I have it arranged," Bobby said, and hung up. Casey stood there a minute, staring at the scar on his leg.

"We both should of died that day, maybe you saved me as much as I saved you."

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October 18th, a little sandwich shop out of the way near Vegas...don't look for it, it doesn't exist...and neither do these people (gotta protect the kneecaps)

Jenny, Chuck, and Casey were sitting at a big round table, when the door opened, and a man in a wheelchair came in.

"Casey!" he yelled.

"Bobby Toletti," Casey said, grinning. "Wow, I didn't realized that day how God awful ugly you were, I probably should have left you behind so as to scare the enemy."

"Nah, it rubbed off of you, when you packed me around," Bobby fired back, grinning. The two men hugged. Bobby looked over at Chuck. "This guy probably never told you he

saved my life that day. Probably the same way he never tells anyone how he took you and your sister in, and that he just 'works' for you."

"For a guy who hates lady feelings, he sure seems to have a lot of them," Jenny said. Bobby grinned.

"You must be Jenny," Bobby said, shaking her hand. "I am so sorry about that jerk Jimmy."

"The jerk is here," Jimmy said.

"Cool it, Jimmy," Gino said, coming in behind him, flanked by two huge goons.

"I ain't lettin' no one talk about me like that, kid or no kid," Jimmy said.

"Perhaps you forget who you're talking to," Gino said quietly. The color drained from Jimmy's face.

"Sorry, Boss," Jimmy said. Introductions were made, and the sit down began.

"My son has filled me in on the reason for our meeting," Gino said. "You're father," he said looking at Jenny. "He knew the rules to work here, and he ignored them, so I sent Jimmy to tax him, but it seems he went into business for himself." Jimmy gulped. "A very....lucrative business, behind my back."

"I was making money," Jimmy said. Gino nodded.

"I'm torn, part of me thinks I should make him eat it, but he has people, and they need to eat," Gino said. Casey had warned them all not to speak until directly spoken to. Chuck wanted to speak so badly, but he liked his kneecaps so he kept quiet. "There's one place we will start, there is no more vig." Jimmy looked upset. "How much Jimmy?"

"800 large," he said.

"Is that without vig?" Gino asked softly. Jimmy nodded

"Yes, Boss, you said no vig, so no vig," Jimmy replied.

"Fine, we'll pay it off, now they owe me, and that we can work with. You can go Jimmy," Gino said. Jimmy nodded, stood and began to leave. "And, Jimmy," Gino added. "If any of

these fine people ever tell me you reached out to them again..." Gino didn't say anything else, Chuck's eyes went wide, but not as big as Jimmy's.

"Won't happen, Boss," Jimmy said, and fled.

"Now, the terms of your repayment," Gino said. "I would like to tell you not to worry about it, but I'm a business man, and if I do this, which would be the right thing to do, I might not be long for this earth, if you know what I mean." Chuck couldn't help but nod. "You could pay this off right now, yes?" Chuck started to speak, but Jenny's hand on his arm made his brain keep shut.

"He could, Sir," Jenny said. "But, it's not his to pay." Gino looked at her, and grinned.

"But it would settle my debt," Gino said.

"Yes, but it's my debt. You wouldn't ask one of your friends to pay one of your debts," she said.

"Forgive me for saying, but I do believe he is more than a friend," Gino replied.

"With all due respect, Sir," Jenny began. Chuck's and Casey's face were both filled with horror. "That's none of your business, and it's still my debt."

"If you were married?" he asked, curious.

"Again, none of your business, but maybe," she agreed.

"Are you not marrying because of this?"

"Well, he hasn't asked," Jenny began. "But, I told him not to until this is over. This is my problem. You don't put your problems on other people's doorsteps. You don't bring things like this into a marriage."

"It would be pocket change for him," Gino said.

"But that doesn't make it any less right," Jenny replied. Gino stared at her, and smiled. He looked at Chuck.

"You better treat this one right," he said. "She's got honor and loyalty and you don't see that these days. But, anyone raised by John Casey I expected nothing less from." He

turned back to Jenny. "Here is my problem. We have a lot of money at stake here, and I'm not making any anything off of it."

"Chuck and I have made a deal," Jenny began. Gino nodded to continue. "If we haven't raised the money by the WPT championships in April, he will pay off the balance." Gino made a face, thinking.

"Six months," he said, nodding. "Pay as you go, or in a lump sum?"

"If it's okay with you, whatever we win, minus entry fees, we'll pay to you as we go," Jenny replied. Gino nodded.

"I think we have a suitable arrangement," Gino said. He stuck out his hand, and Jenny shook. "Don't worry, I won't take the money he's going to try and give me after you leave." Jenny looked over at Chuck who was looking away.

"He's too nice for his own good," Jenny said.

"You should protect him," Gino said, grinning.

"Oh, I plan on it," Jenny said. "I plan on it." Gino stood, nodded, and exited.

"When you pay, just contact me, and I'll get the money to him," Bobby said. "I wish he could just make it go away, but he's right, with the life he leads, if he did, he'd be taken out by someone who wants to move up the ladder."

"That's gives a whole new meaning to the term separated from your employment," Chuck said. Jenny just looked at him.

"Really, you don't speak all this time, and that's what you say?" Jenny asked.

"Give the kid a break, he didn't talk for fifteen minutes, it could have been much worse," Casey said.

"So, we made him an offer he couldn't refuse, didn't we?" Chuck asked grinning. Jenny turned to Casey.

"You had to say it, didn't you?" she asked.

"My bad," Casey grumbled. "My bad."

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The next morning saw the two of them entering the Doyle Brunson North American Poker Championship. With buy-ins and fees of \$10,300 each, and with over 300 entrants, they knew they'd have to make the top fifty just to make any money, and they'd only make about \$1,700.00 if they only made it that far. The top ten was where the money was at. They survived the first day, both near in the top half in chips. Chuck made her promise to use the new math skills she had learned. He didn't really need to, because it had become an integrated part of her game.

When Chuck woke that morning, all he could do was stare at the blonde angel lying on his chest. He wanted to propose so badly. He wanted to just pay Gino off, but he knew what would happen if he tried. They both knew the other wasn't going anywhere, but it was getting to be torture. He had just created a new phone game, and was making a ton of money off of it, despite the fact it was only selling for \$.99. Chuck asked if they could use that money, and the look she gave him was all the answer he needed.

"I mean you could ask if all you're going to do is stare at me each morning trying to summon the courage, but I'm going to tell you I'll give you my answer in May," Jenny said, never looking at him.

"He agreed to the deal, he didn't say we couldn't get married," Chuck argued. She raised her head and gave him a look, smirking.

"What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas?" she asked. Chuck shifted, getting excited. "We could get secretly married and no one know?" she asked, her voice rising just a bit. Chuck didn't like where this was going. "Chuck, the guy runs Vegas, he'd know." Chuck slumped down. She was drawing her fingers lazily over his chest. "However, we could act like we are newlyweds," she said, raising her eyebrows.

"We have to be at the casino in two hours," Chuck said, giving her the Bartowski eyebrow dance. Jenny just smirked.

Three and a half hours later, both of them weak-kneed, they entered the casino. The grins on their faces leaving no clue as to why they were late. Today they would play

down to 27. They both knew they needed to survive the day to have any chance of making a dent in the amount they owed. They survived to the money, Jenny making her way up the leader board, slowly but surely.

"I'm just relaxed," she said to him, shrugging during a break. Chuck grinned. "You know we come in second and third, or better, this is all over," she said, turning to him, with a wicked grin on her face.

"Or, one of us could just win it," Chuck replied.

"There's that too," Jenny said, and then took a long pull from her water bottle. "I think today has taught us something." He looked at her and the look on her face turned even bawdier. "Even if we're not married, we need to pretend like this morning, we're on our honeymoon, each day before we play in a tournament." Chuck went red. "Unless you can't handle it," she said softly.

"I can handle it," he muttered. She never turned around. "I can," he said a little louder, she shrugged. "I can handle anything you throw at me," he said, causing those around him to turn and give him a knowing look. She took her seat, looked at him, winked, and slid on her shades. "I don't know if I can handle this," he muttered to himself.

"Chuck, my boy," Sammy Farha said as he sat down next to him. "I don't know how you managed to date her, but regardless of where you come in in this tournament...you're winning." Chuck just grinned.

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The next morning saw them scamper to their seats right before play began, there were only 27 left, and to be blinded off, meant to lose precious chips with high blinds, neither could afford if they were going to try and win this thing. They day was full of twists and turns but by the end they found themselves both at the ten-handed final table, and somehow, it was the first time they had been at the same table during the tournament. They were playing down to six, the six who would find themselves on TV. For each spot they could survive, they would move up in the money, and Chuck found himself wanting to win it so bad, just so they could end this. The random draw came, and they found

themselves beside each other.

It started with Carlos Mortensen making fun of the two, good naturally. Jenny raised Chuck, her being on his right, several times, driving him out of multiple pots. It all came to a head when Chuck didn't move all in from the short stack, but simply raised during a hand with her. She studied him, she knew so many tells now it wasn't even funny. She grinned at him and folded. He grinned back, and folded, face-up. 7-2 off-suit, with a flop of nothing but face cards. The shock on Jenny's face made the table explode.

"Oh, he's sleeping on the couch tonight!" Carlos yelled. The whole table got a big laugh. Two hands later, Chuck moved all in with pocket nines against an A-J offsuit. The Jack come on the flop, and Chuck was left with 2 outs. Two blanks hit, and Chuck busted, up \$26,000. The new payoff amount was \$774,000.00. He went to the pay window and got his money and came back to watch. Jenny survived another player, moving up in the money, but she simply ran out of chips much too soon, and busted out 8th, earning herself \$38,000.00 after the fees were excluded. The new payoff amount was \$736,000.00.

Jenny got her money, and grabbed Chuck by the elbow.

"I'm sorry," he said. She stopped and looked at him, her blue eyes sparkling.

"That was the hottest thing I have ever seen in my life," she said, breathily. "You bluffed me. No one has ever bluffed me like that!"

"So we're good?"

"Bartowski, we're going to my house right now, and we are so going to have what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas moment," she said. Chuck gulped. "Sure you still want to propose?"

"Never been surer," he replied.

"Damn it," she whispered.

"What?"

"I really wish I had won this tournament," she said, grabbed his hand and drug him out of the casino. Someone yelled there goes Chenny, but they were too busy heading home to answer.

A/N: We're progressing along nicely. I think two more chapters will do it. Three at the most. Hope you enjoyed it...take care...see you soon...til next time.

DC

Chapter 10: Ch 10, Ace of Spades

A/N: I'm about to take a short break (daughter on spring break) and I didn't want to leave anyone hanging, so this is the last chapter. This one has been fun, I truly appreciate all who have commented, either here, twitter, tumblr, DM, PM, or smoke signal. Thank you all for the support. It means a lot you enjoy my work. Anyone else notice I like a good Christmas chapter? I know I'm a sucker. For the last time, I give you Aces, Charles, Chapter 10, Ace of Spades.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, but if I did there would probably be 2 months' worth of Christmas episodes each season...

December 17th, 2004

Jenny pulled him over to the side, and started to say something when she caught the look in his eyes. She grinned and nodded a few times, he did the same. They were thinking the same thing. This could be over, by tomorrow, this could be over, and then...Jenny didn't want to think about that, because all it would accomplish would be to knock her off her game. There had been over 370 entrants to this tournament, and they had made it to the final last ten. They currently owed \$736,000.00, and even if they were to bust out back to back, they'd knock that number down to \$620,000.00. They were near the top in chips, 3rd, and 5th, and if they could actually finish that way, they'd be less than \$90,000.00 from paying it off. If one of them could just come in second it was over, if they could both come in at least 3rd and 4th, it was over, and Jenny...she could move on with her life. She so wanted to. He'd propose at Christmas, she wanted him to. She knew he had the ring, and she knew what she'd told him that he couldn't, not until this was over, and right now she hated herself for it. She wanted to be engaged...no, she wanted to drag him to a chapel right now and marry him, and the look in his eye told her that he was pretty much in the same place.

"No pressure," he said with a grin. She shoulder bumped him, grinning. "You've done 'the math' in your head too?" She nodded. He leaned in close. "How do you feel about a

Vegas wedding tomorrow?"

"How do you feel about a Vegas honeymoon, tomorrow night?" she asked, turned, and walked away. His chin was on the floor.

"G--good," he stammered. She never looked back, as the grin threatened to break her face. "Real good!"

When play began they got super serious. They clashed in pots twice, the entire table watching in amusement. Neither back down from the other, and neither really hurt chips wise when it was over. The table knew while they were together as a couple, but they were at war on the felt. Two busted pretty quickly, and Chuck did quick math in his head to see they had picked up another 55k in earnings should they bust out next...good, but not good enough, and then it happened.

Chuck was dealt pocket 2s in the big blind and it was only him and Daniel Negreanu in the hand. The flop came 2, 7, 9 rainbow. Chuck had a set. Daniel raised, and after some consideration, Chuck reraised. Daniel leaned back and thought. He was the current chip leader, so he had Chuck covered. Chuck sat there, stoic. Daniel announced all in, and Chuck snapped called. Daniel turned over the Ace of clubs and the Ace of hearts. Chuck showed his set. The table oooooed, and Humberto mumbled he had folded the Ace of diamonds. Jenny's eyes were huge. Chuck had to dodge one card. The Ace of spades. There was a five percent chance of Daniel winning this pot. The turn came and it was a 4 of clubs. Chuck got up, and walked away a bit. Jenny sat there, watching, knowing Daniel had one out, the Ace of Spades. If Chuck could dodge that card, they would be in 1st and 3rd in chips, and the chances of the wedding went up astronomically. She could barely breathe, and then she was confused. The card hit, and she heard a stifled cry. Chuck's head dropped, and there on the table was the Ace of Spades. Chuck was out, in 8th, having taken \$72,000.00 off of what they owed. The current balance was \$664,000.00, but it was chump changed compared to what he had been in position to earn. Daniel came over and apologized. The three of them had talked before the tournament and he knew what was going on. He knew what he had done, and he was sorry. Chuck told him not to worry about it. Jenny came over and Daniel apologized to

her. She gave him a hug, and said, "That's poker." She took Chuck and pulled him away telling the table to play on, she needed a minute. When they got away from the crowds, Chuck was nearly crying.

"I blew it," he said.

"No, Baby, you played it perfectly, what else were you suppose to do?" she asked, trying to get him to see reason.

"I blew my chance to marry you," he said. She shook her head, and put her hand behind his neck.

"No, we'll get married tomorrow, regardless," she said. Chuck smiled and shook his head.

"Jenny, listen, I don't want you to do this because you feel sorry for me, or are feeling especially frisky right now," Chuck said. She grinned at that one. "I need you to do this when you're ready, and I get you are ready in every way but one, but that's a big one. I don't have to agree with it, I don't have to like it, but I do have to respect it, so no, Jenny, we don't do this until you are ready." She stared at him.

"I've never gotten luckier in my life than having bought that iPod for that stupid amount of money," she said, he voice soft. "I can't even tell you how much I love you."

"Still think you overpaid for it?" he asked. She shook her head.

"I got it at a bargain," she said. They heard the announcement that the seventh player had busted out and they were done for the day. "Let's go bag my chips," she said, wiggling her eyebrows. "I've got a tournament I need to come in second or better tomorrow." Chuck grinned.

"Oh, boy," he said, with the same eyebrow wiggle.

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The next morning Jenny found herself under the bright lights of the televised final table, and Chuck found himself in the stands. In a very short time, Jenny found herself chipping up and moving into second chip position behind only the leader, Daniel

Negreanu. All she had to do was not get involved with him, and she could coast to third easily, and it wouldn't take much work to get to second. After the first bust she walked over to Chuck, grinning, but he wasn't as happy as she was.

"What are you doing?" he asked softly.

"Getting the money to get married," she said.

"Jenny, be honest, you want to win this thing?" he asked. The smile on her face gave him the answer. "I'm here no matter what happens, and in a few months I get to propose to you," he said. "Do you want to look back some day and thing, I could have won that tournament if I hadn't played it safe? We are together no matter what happens today."

"We are so getting married right after we get the money," she said, a hunger in her eyes. "We're not having a long drawn out engagement."

"Deal," Chuck replied. "Now quit playing it safe and go win that tournament. Future Mrs. Bartowski," he added. She gave him a kiss and walked back over to the table, determined. Soon the fifth place player busted, and Jenny was starting to feel it. She got pocket fives on the button, and raised Daniel in the big blind. He called. The flop came 5, 9, Jack, rainbow on the suites. Jenny was looking at the board, she had a set, what were the odds Daniel was sitting on pocket Aces? Daniel checked, she thought for a second, and raised. He flat called. The turn was a 2, Daniel raised, she reraised, and Daniel went into the tank. Jenny began to worry. She knew she had him beat, but the river worried her. Surely it couldn't happen again. She really wanted him to fold and she was afraid she was giving off a tell. Daniel moved all-in. Jenny took off her sunglasses and leaned back.

"I'm supposed to call you, but I got a bad feeling," she said.

"Won't hurt my feelings if you fold," Daniel said, grinning. Jenny smiled at him. She huffed, and looked at the dealer.

"All-in," she said and flipped over pocket fives, showing her set. Daniel shook his head and flipped over pocket Aces. They both turned to Humberto who shrugged.

"I folded an Ace," he said, grinning. "Of hearts." They all looked at the board.

"So the only card that you can win with is the Ace of Spades," Jenny said. She groaned, got up out of her seat, and walked over to Chuck.

"I'm not too proud to suck out twice with the Ace of Spades," Daniel said, earning a laugh from the crowd. Chuck had his arms wrapped around her.

"It's coming," she muttered.

"If it is, it is," he replied. She didn't look and could feel his body react to it hitting. Twice in one tournament they had both been knocked out on a 2 percent draw. "Come on, you have hands to shake."

"I really wanted to get married tonight," she said where only he could hear.

"I really wanted a honeymoon tonight," he replied. She grinned against him and gave him a little shove. She turned and gave Daniel a hug.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered. "I feel awful." She pulled away from the hug.

"Don't," she said honestly. "Just go win it."

"You got it," he said. "Best of luck to you two."

"Thanks, Daniel," Chuck said. Daniel came over and shook his hand. They had earned another \$284,000.00 and cut the amount owed down to \$380,000.00...so why didn't it feel like a win...

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December 25th, 2004

"Are you two all right?" Ellie asked. Chuck looked up at his sister and smiled.

"Yeah, I don't want to speak for Jenny, but I didn't get what I wanted for Christmas," he said, looking at her. She gave him the tiniest of shoulder bumps and a sad smile.

"Me either," she agreed. Ellie gave them a strange look.

"I have a feeling we're not talking about normal presents," Ellie said.

"Do you promise you won't squeal?" Chuck asked.

"Christ," Casey muttered and prepared to flee the room. Emma grabbed his hand and made him stay. Jenny and Chuck shared a look.

"We wanted to make Casey and Emma in-laws before they made us step-siblings," Jenny said, grinning. Casey grunted disgustedly and left the room. Emma's hand was covering her mouth fighting laughter, joy, and tears, all at the same time. Chuck shut one eye as Ellie squealed and dove out of the way as she crushed Jenny with a hug.

"Help," Jenny croaked.

"Nope," Chuck said. "You lit the Ellie bomb, I'm getting away while I can," as he turned to flee, and was crushed in a hug by his brother-in-law.

"Awesome," Devon said grinning.

"No, Devon, not yet it's not," Chuck said, somberly. Ellie pulled away and looked at the two.

"Okay," Ellie began looking back and forth between them. "What is going on? You two love each other, right?" They both nodded. "You both want to be married, right?" They both nodded. "To each other?" They smiled as they nodded. "Then what is the problem?"

"Me," Jenny said. "You know about dad. Well, I've been paying off his debts, and I told Chuck I didn't want to get married until it was cleared. We made a deal when the WPT Final gets here, if I haven't paid it off, he'd pay the rest, and I was good with it, until last week." She looked at Chuck, sadness on her face, and saw the sadness on his. "Ellie, we were SO close. We played it perfect. Chuck was on his way to being the chip leader, and a one card suck-out with eight players to go, I was going to be chip leader with three to go and a one card suck-out. We were right there." Ellie was smiling.

"Then screw it, and get married," she said. Jenny shook her head.

"See, the dork over here," she began.

"Nerd," he replied.

"Wonderful, charming, sexy beast of a man that I love over here," she corrected. Ellie held up her hand.

"I love you, and am glad you're joining the family, but that kinda talk is reserved for when we are way too drunk at a girl's night," Ellie said. Chuck groaned, placing his hand over his eyes. Jenny's face was about to split from the smile.

"I said we should get married, and now he refuses because he thinks somewhere down the road I'd be mad at myself if I gave in now," Jenny confessed. "He's probably right." Ellie smiled at her brother. He just shrugged. "He is right."

"I don't get it, but you two have to do what works for you, so go play a tournament and end it," she said.

"There aren't any more tournaments that aren't on cruises until February," she said. "I get a little seasick, and all the big whales are either there, taking time off for the holidays, or with their families."

"So you're stuck for a while," Ellie said. Jenny nodded, a sad smile on her face.

"April's only four months away," she said.

"Well, will this help?" Chuck said, handing her a box. She gave him a look. "It's not that, that's in the room, but I'll go get it if you want."

"Hush," she said, softly giving him a quick hug. "I'm weak, and it wouldn't take much to change my mind."

"You know telling me that isn't making it easier on me," Chuck replied. She smiled at him and unwrapped the gift. A tear formed in her eye.

"It was our mom's," Ellie said, the least emotional of the three right now, and that wasn't saying much. Chuck lifted the charm bracelet out of the box and put it on her wrist. "Jenny, you are a part of this family, and you always will be, and if you ever question that, remember we've made Casey a member."

"Nice, Bartowski," Casey said, having come back into the room.

"Thanks, John," Chuck said.

"Only a multimillionaire would scrimp out on buying a gift and give away his dead mother's jewelry," Casey continued. Chuck turned to Ellie.

"There it is," he began.

"Caseyfried," the two said together, smiling. Jenny hugged them both. Soon it would be an official Bartowski hug...soon.

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February 21st, 2005

Jenny was exhausted. She looked over at Chuck and knew he was feeling the same. They had played marvelously, but at some point you have to have cards, and they hadn't even come close to having the hands they needed. Chuck was the short stack, and Jenny was right behind him in chips.

They were huddled in the corner before the final table began to get them to six.

"All we have to do is come in 4th and 7th or better, or one of us just come in 3rd," Jenny said. Chuck grinned at her.

"I love your enthusiasm, but everyone at that table knows I'm going to have to shove the first decent hand I get," Chuck replied. "There's no way I can survive the blinds to grind to seventh as is." Jenny nodded.

"We are so close," she said, almost desperate.

"I know," Chuck said. "We're playing well, but the deck has been against us."

"We should just take what we get and pay it off and get married," Jenny said. Chuck gave her a look, and she rolled her eyes. "Why won't you let me be spontaneous with this?"

"Because you'll be upset about it one day," Chuck replied.

"You're so meeeaaaannn," she whined. Chuck's eyebrow raised.

"I've not heard you whine like that since you had to get up at 5 AM," Chuck replied. She huffed.

"Let's go," she said. She stopped, turned toward him, and pulled him in for a kiss. When she separated his eyes were a little cloudy and he had a goofy grin on his face. "I love

you.”

“I love you,” he replied. “I hope I win this.”

“Me to,” she said softly.

Back to the tables they went. Chuck looked down at his first hand, and was trying to figure out to show or not, when one of the stacks a little bigger than his went all in. He was looking at a J 8, not a terrible hand to shove with, but not one to call with. He folded and got out of the way. Jenny folded when it came to her, and the small blind and big blind both called. She looked over at him and they knew they may have just climbed one more spot up the ladder. Sure enough a few minutes later, Erik Seidel was eliminated and they knew they had just climbed over \$20,000.00 more up the ladder. Jenny took a deep breath. There was a chance.

The next hand was A 4 for Chuck and he moved all in. He was instacalled by Michael Mizrachi in the big blind, and the chip leader. Mizrachi flipped over pocket Kings, and Chuck had three outs. The Ace never came, and he was eliminated in 9th place, earning him a net of \$67,000.00. The total owed was now \$313,000.00. Chuck shook everyone’s hand, but Jenny’s. She gave him a hug, and whispered in his ear that she loved him.

They played for another hour before there was an elimination. Ben Johnson was out, moving her one more spot up the rung, but it would take 3rd for them to pay off the debt. She was getting short stacked and the cards were not coming her way. When she picked up pocket Jacks a few hands later, she knew it was time. She pushed all in, only to be called by pocket Queens. Neither of the two Jacks came, and it was game over. She shook everyone’s hand, and Chuck met her to walk to the cashier’s cage. They knew this hadn’t been their tournament. She had made \$119,000.00 after the buy-in, and the total amount owed was down to \$194,000.00.

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April 23rd, 2005

Jenny took a deep breath. They had made the money. It didn’t really matter, in two days this nightmare was over. She was mad at her pride for not allowing Chuck to propose

sooner, but he was right, it would have bugged her for the rest of her life. After the LA Poker classic, the two decided to see how much they could win in cash games...it was a disaster. They were so nervous and worried they had lost nearly \$200,000.00 in no time, and it had taken them the past two months just to earn back that amount to get to even. They had gone to the Bay 101 Shooting Star tournament, and like last year, she had been a shooting star. Unlike last year, she couldn't avoid all the people who wanted the bounty on her head, and she hadn't even made the money this time. Chuck battled like a pro, made the final table, but could only manage a 9th place finish. Jenny insisted on taking her buy-in out of those winnings as well, so they only netted \$80,000.00 at that tournament bringing the running total to \$114,000.00 they owed. It didn't matter, tomorrow it would be over with, one way or another, but Jenny hadn't forgotten the promise she had made Chuck she was going to win this tournament. He hadn't forgotten that he had promised her the same thing.

"Getting cold feet?" the voice came behind her. She grinned and never turned around.

"Baby, I ain't got cold anything," she replied. "You better get all the sleep you can tonight Mr. Bartowski, because tomorrow night....you're gonna be on your honeymoon." With that she walked off. A second later Chuck's brain rebooted.

"What if that hadn't of been me?" he shouted after her. She shook her head, never turning around.

"I knew it was," she answered. Chuck stood there grinning stupidly. He then sobered at the thought he had to get through 99 other players, this tournament...it was going to be his.

It was a long day, the two of them dodging potential landmines on the felt. They kept watching the leader boards to figure out where the other one was, and Chuck noticed Jenny was steadily falling down in chip count. They were down to fifty players when they took a break. They had netted \$24,000.00 between them if they both busted out now, and the next pay bump was at 40th place. Chuck knew he had to talk to her, now.

"So you're just gonna let me win the bet," Chuck said.

"What are you talking about?" Jenny asked.

"I mean it just seems like you've given up, which is understandable," Chuck said grinning. Jenny's face darkened a bit. "I mean we both know I'm the better player." She walked up to him, inches between them.

"Really, Bartowski?"

"Really, Burton."

"It's on, Bub, and when I win, don't forget our bet," Jenny said. Chuck smiled.

"It's all I've thought about," he said, walking off and leaving her there.

"Damn it," she muttered. "I think he won that one."

Back at the table, Jenny began to play, and Chuck watched her slowly climb the leaderboard in chips. They got down to forty players, and Jenny, stood up and pointed to the leaderboard. They were both in the middle of the pack in chips, neck and neck. They got down to 30 players left, and Chuck stood up, pointing to the leaderboard where he was in the upper third, and she was only in the upper half. They played as well as they remember playing and when they got down to 20, Chuck stood up to point that he was in the top five in chips, but he saw Jenny's face and he was quiet.

"Bartowski," she shouted, her face covered with a smile. "We did it!" Chuck pointed over to the gallery, where Casey stood, a grin on his face. Bobby was there, and they saw Casey hand Bobby a stack of chips. He waved to them, letting them know it was over. The nightmare was finally over. Her father's debts were paid off, they were free and clear. Chuck turned back to her and winked. "Try and make it to the final table, Bartowski," she said, about to sit down.

"Hey, Burton," Chuck yelled back. "Make it to the final table, and I'll give you a free lesson. The cost is all your stack when I take it from you."

"Oh, it's on, Nerd boy," she said.

"Hey!" Phil Gordon yelled from the gallery where he was watching. "I resemble that comment."

"I'm about to school all you nerds," she yelled back smiling. Chuck and Phil shared a look as she sit down.

"About time you went all-in, Bartowski," Phil said. Chuck just grinned.

The push was on for the TV final table of six. The play was furious, but not fast. It was two more hours until they made the final table of ten, which found Chuck and Jenny nowhere near each other in the seating arrangement. They were third and fifth in chips, each of them making comments to the other, the table amused. One by one, players were eliminated until only six remained, Chuck and Jenny being two of them. The chips were counted and they were told what time to be back tomorrow.

"Truce?" Jenny asked, her eyebrow raised.

"You willing to sleep with the enemy tonight?" Chuck asked.

"Who said anything about sleeping?" Jenny asked, walking away. When Chuck's brain rebooted he scurried after her.

The next day they arrived at the table, not sure how to act. They both began play tight, and at the first break, Jenny pulled Chuck aside.

"We aren't going out like this," she said. "We go out the way we got here."

"Inappropriate flirting?" Chuck asked. Jenny smiled.

"Exactly," she replied.

They got back to the table, and acted like they always did, the other players never for a second thought they were working together. They talked trash to each other, made little remarks, and they clashed several times over pots. The table dropped to five players, then four, and then three. When Chuck busted out Tuan Le in third place, he eyebrow wagged Jenny, who rolled her eyes at him.

"You've never beat me you know," he said, as the cameras came back on.

"I'm glad the TV cameras are here to record history then," she fired back, good-naturedly.

After a while of heads-up play, the blinds had begun to go up, and Chuck knew it was only a matter of time before he was going to be in trouble. He looked down at pocket Aces, hearts and clubs, and raised. Jenny called. The flop came seven, eight of spades, and the three of diamonds. Chuck raised, and Jenny called. The King of diamonds hit on the turn. Chuck looked at the board. It looked eerily familiar. He thought for a second. It was the same board as the first time he busted her. She had held Aces, and he had the nine, six of diamonds. The flop on that board had been seven eight of diamonds, and the three of spades. He looked up at Jenny who had a grin on her face.

"Kinda familiar, isn't it?" he asked. She nodded. He sat back in his chair. If she was on a draw, he didn't think she would call. As much as she had added math to her game she just wouldn't do it. He looked at her stack which was bigger than his, but just slightly.

"My eyes are up here," she said, earning a laugh from the audience.

"Don't worry, I'll treat your stack nice when I take it," he replied. She grinned at him. "I'm all-in."

"Call," she said, in a snap. Chuck's eyes got huge. He turned over the cards to show his pocket Aces and Jenny showed the six, nine of spades. The announcer told everyone what was going on, and Chuck grinned at her. Chuck stood up.

"Can we hold on, just a second?" Chuck asked. Everyone looked around, confused. Jenny began to grin. She knew. Chuck turned to her, a smile on his face. "Last year, you and I made a bet, the loser, had to make the other one happy for the rest of their life." Jenny smiled. "I know right now, I'm a small favorite, but I've decided, either way, the best way you can make me happy, or I can make you happy is to do this." He reached into his pocket, pulled out a box, opened it, showing the ring inside, and sunk down to one knee. The announcer rushed over to get the mike in his face, making Chuck laugh. "Jenny Lisa Burton, you make me the happiest I have ever been, will you please do me the honor of spending the rest of your life with me, and marry me?"

"Still making me chocolate chip pancakes if I lose?" She asked, grinning.

“Oh, for the love of God, Woman!” he said, laughing. “Win or lose!” She pretended to think a minute, tapping her right index finger on her lips, her left hand holding her right elbow.

“Hmmm,” she hummed, trying not to laugh. “Of course, I’ll marry you, you nerd!” she said, kissing him. The audience exploded in applause. Chuck put the ring on her finger, and she hugged him.

“Uh, we still have a tournament to finish,” the announcer said. The two stood, Jenny leaning her head into Chuck’s chest, his arms around her, her arms wrapped around his waist.

“You know it’s the Ace of spades, right?” Chuck asked. She giggled into his chest. The card came out...the Ace of spades. Jenny won the tournament, but she never moved, clinging to Chuck. They shot the last of the TV part with her holding the check in one hand, and Chuck with the other. Mike Sexton toasted them and wished them a long and happy marriage, and then they finally were able to leave. As they walked off, Chuck started laughing.

“What?” Jenny asked.

“I need to by an iPod,” he said, grinning. “I haven’t had one in a while.” Jenny laughed into his chest.

“I’ll let you borrow mine, I got a deal on it,” she said, as they walked off to find an all-night wedding chapel.

A/N: I enjoyed it, hope you did. Again thank you all for the reviews, follows, favorites, and the love. I’ll be back soon with Break Up, Buy More High, Casey & Walker, and of course, the Life Unexpected...take care...see you soon...til next time.

DC

Chapter 11: Ch 11, Epilogue

A/N: I feel so bad. I had always planned an epilogue after a short break from this story, but I forgot, because I'm old. I went back and read Aces, Charles a few days ago, and I was like, wait, that's not how it ends! I dug in my computer and found the epilogue half finished. Muh bad. So, I apologize, but I'm trying to correct my mistake. As they say, one more time, with feeling, I give you Aces, Charles, Chapter 11, The Epilogue

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, but seriously, WB, some of us on here will gladly write a movie, season 6, a miniseries, WHATEVER YOU WANT!...sorry, I miss them.

December 24th, 2010

"Kid, we can't fall in love." Those words played through his head over and over. He knew what he was getting into marrying Jenny. It was over 5 ½ years later, but he knew this day would come, there was no way it couldn't. He looked around the room, and saw it was a disaster area. He sighed, and ran his hand through his hair, trying to figure out where to start. Almost two months it had been him trying to care for his daughter, but when you're a momma's girl and she wasn't around, it begins to take its toll.

"Come in," Chuck yelled to the knock on the door. The door opened and Ellie came in, a sad smile on her face. Ellie looked around, there were no Christmas decorations anywhere. The day before Christmas and nothing, it was sad. She wasn't surprised, though. It didn't feel like Christmas, and it wouldn't as long as Jenny was gone. Ellie walked into the kitchen, and there stood Chuck, he hadn't shaved, and he definitely needed a shower.

"Did any of the food get in her?" she asked, grinning. Chuck shrugged.

"I'm not really sure," Chuck admitted. "She's just mad because her mom's not here.

"Chuck," Ellie began.

"Ellie, it's what she wants, and I have to honor it," Chuck said. "Remember how she was about getting married?" Ellie nodded. "She does things a certain way, her way, and

that's just the way it is. She's rather hard headed that way."

"Mama?" the little voice asked. Chuck turned around and scooped the little one off of the floor.

"Hey, Sarah," Ellie said, reaching for her. Chuck handed the curly blond-headed, brown-eyed angel to her aunt. He huffed out a sigh, and that's when he heard the door close.

"Hey, guys, I'm sorry it took so long, I thought today would be quick, but I've thought that for the last two months," Jenny said, coming into the kitchen. She stopped short seeing Chuck and their daughter, and snickered. "The food was supposed to go in her, not on you."

"Ha, ha," he said, leaning over to kiss her. She smiled at him, and he studied her. As usual, he couldn't get a read on her, and she smirked, knowing what he was doing. "Well?" Jenny sighed.

"Twenty years," she said. "Dad's going to prison for twenty years. I'm sorry, Chuck. I know this has been hard on us, but I had to be there. I needed it. I needed the closure." Chuck gave her the same smile and understanding nod when she told him what she had to do when this all started back in November. Ellie had a sad look on her face.

"Sweetie," Ellie began. Jenny shook her head.

"Nope, Ellie," Jenny said. "He made his choice. Dad knew what could happen, now, we need to decorate this place for Christmas, because I'm a Bartowski and Bartowski's heartwarm Christmas until you can't stand it." Everyone smiled, and she turned to Chuck. "Except you, Mister. You go shower. NOW!"

December 25th, 2010

"Do we really have to watch the marathon?" Casey grouched.

"Yes, Dad," Jenny replied. Casey gave her a look, but didn't say anything. Jenny was tired of this, and she was going to do something about it. "Okay, I've had it," she said. Everyone turned to look at her. "Look, dad came back, he got arrested, and it was bad enough for two months I was at the courthouse almost every day watching him try to

find a way to blame things on others, but you, you of all people, know that you are my family, so quit walking on eggshells around me.” She spun toward Chuck. “You know, we have money, and you could have hired someone to help you with Sarah.”

“Sarah only wants her mother, so hiring someone wouldn’t have helped,” Chuck retorted.

“This ought to be good,” Casey whispered to Emma. “Numbnuts over there is going to try and stand up to her. I give him three minutes top.”

“Well, everything he learned he learned from you,” Emma replied. Casey grinned and then realized what she had said. He turned toward her trying to look irritated, but failed. She gave him a peck on the lips.

“Mom, Dad, can you quit making out in front of the kids?” Ellie said, grinning. Casey tried to glare at her, but Emma grabbed Casey and kissed him hard. “Well,” Ellie said, still grinning. She turned to Jenny.

“So, girl’s night?” she asked, grinning. Jenny made a face and glanced at Chuck. He shrugged, looked at Devon, who shrugged, and grinned.

“I have a request if you do,” Chuck said. “I need you to get Sarah in bed, because she wants nothing to do with me right now.”

“Don’t pout dear, it’s not that good of a look on you,” Jenny said, patting his cheek. Chuck leaned in and kissed her, making Casey make a disgusted noise. They separated and Jenny looked over at Ellie. “Yeah, this week would be good, there’s not much going on. No drinking though, I need a clear head.”

“Are you going to be in Vegas much next week?” Ellie asked, eyeing her.

“I’m really not sure, Ellie, my schedule is so messed up with dad’s trial,” she admitted. She turned to Chuck.

“No, I think we’ve got everything covered,” Chuck replied. “Besides, Carina knows to call us if she needs anything.” After Jenny and Chuck’s marriage, Chuck surprised her with a gift she really wasn’t prepared for. Chuck had opened a foundation for runaway

girls in Las Vegas, and Carina, one of Jenny's true friends, and one who had run to Vegas herself to try and find a new life, managed the foundation there. There was also a foundation in Los Angeles as well, that was run by Zondra. The four women had gotten close over the years. Ellie worked with any of the girls to help with whatever they needed medically. Jenny had told Chuck so many times how she wished something like that had been around when she had run away. Jenny visited each site multiple times a month, and did quite a bit of fundraising. Any tournament the two played in, they donated all winnings to the foundations.

Jenny's work load had lessened quite a bit since they had Sarah. She was eleven months old now, and as headstrong as her mother. Jenny had wanted to be home with Sarah as much as possible, and Carina and Zondra encouraged her to do so. Chuck continued to make apps, tinker with computer programs, and now Orion Industries did much more than just computer games. They had created anti-virus programs, Chuck created a new firewall for the NSA, and the CIA had been interested in the Intersect. Chuck explained to them it was all sci-fi. They persisted and wondered if it was possible. He gave them a hard no, and had no more dealings with the CIA after that.

Jenny was biting her bottom lip and trying not to smile. Ellie was still eyeing her, and when Chuck wasn't looking Jenny gave Ellie a wink. Ellie looked like she was about to burst. Emma noticed, and watched them. She turned to Casey who rolled his eyes. Chuck continued to watch the marathon, not even paying attention to what was going on.

"Hey, Numbnuts," Casey said. "Think you can tear yourself away so we can open presents?" Chuck looked over at Casey, and noticed everyone else seemingly excited.

"Uh, sure," he said, confused. "Shall I get the presents out?"

"You know what, Chuck, if you don't mind, I'd like to go first," Jenny said. Chuck beamed.

"I don't mind at all," Chuck replied. She walked over to a gift sitting on top of the pile of presents. Chuck thought Ellie was more anxious for him to get the gift than he was. Jenny brought it over to him, smiling.

"Go ahead," she said, grinning. Chuck unwrapped it, opened the box, and looked inside.

"What's this?" he asked, looking at the piece of paper with a date on it.

"That's the date I need you to keep clear on your calendar for our OB/GYN appointment," Jenny said. Chuck took a second to process what she said, and turned to her, a smile on his face.

"You're....we're....again?" Chuck asked. Jenny nodded and Chuck engulfed her with a hug. Everyone wished them congratulations. After the present unwrapping was over, Ellie found John off by himself.

"I guess your glad I didn't listen to you," she said. Casey gave her a look. "Christmas, a few years back," she said, reminding him of when John told Ellie about Jenny.

"I'm just glad it all worked out," John said. Ellie hugged him.

"Merry Christmas, Dad," she said. Casey didn't even object, he just hugged her back.

"MERRY CHRISTMAS, DAD!" Chuck yelled catching both of them in a hug.

"Christ, Bartowski!" Casey yelled. "What did I say about the hugging?"

"Don't care, it's Christmas and your gonna be a grandfather again!" Chuck replied, not letting go.

"Merry Christmas, Chuck," Casey muttered. "You've turned into a hell of a guy."

"Casey," Chuck began.

"Of course with me teaching you everything even you couldn't screw it up," Casey said. Chuck and Ellie looked at each other.

"There it is, another perfectly good moment," they said together. "Caseyfied!"

A/N: I know it was short, but I think we left them the best we could. I enjoyed it, hope you did. Again thank you all for the reviews, follows, favorites, and the love. I'll be back soon with Break Up, Buy More High, The Kiss, and Casey & Walker...take care...see you soon...til next time.

DC

Chapter 12: Ch 12, Epilogue 2: Aces, Charles as Christmas Time, NYC

A/N: I got a PM the other day from PeterOinNYC and he asked for a Christmas fic. As he explained the parameters, a movie came to mind, one of my favorite Christmas movies, that features one of my favorite Christmas songs. To top it off, the world he suggested, well, there's only one word for it, Aces. I'm getting to visit some amazing worlds in this David vs The Christmas Fics, 2018 challenge. Folks, it's time to come on home. It's Ace, Charles at Christmas, in NYC.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck, Home Alone 2, All I Want for Christmas is You, Darlene Love or the E Street Band, but I do miss Clarence Clemons.

"You ask him," Ellie said to Jenny.

"He's your brother," Jenny retorted, grinning at the absurdness of it all.

"Yeah, but you married him," Ellie replied, grinning.

Jenny sighed, and leaned back in toward her husband. "Are we really staying at the Plaza Hotel.

Chuck picked up the Talkboy tape recorder beside him, and said. "Yes." He then pointed it toward Jenny and hit play. "Yes." He burst out laughing.

"I never should have agreed to this," Jenny muttered.

"I'm just glad we all get to come along," Carina said, leaning over Chuck and Jenny's seat.

"I'm just glad he payed for first class on this flight," Casey pipped up. Emma swatted him.

"You do know, if this is Home Alone, that makes you Uncle Frank?" Ellie asked John.

John shrugged. "I'm good with that."

Jenny laughed. She needed this. It was three years after Jack was sentenced to jail time and each year around Christmas, Jenny got a bit depressed. She tried not to given how much Chuck, Ellie, and the whole Bartowski clan just loved Christmas, but her father...he had just made an imprint over so much of her life. Thanksgiving night, when Chuck put on Home Alone 2 after dinner, and Jenny had seen the huge Christmas Tree at Rockefeller, she had softly said to him that she'd love to see it live. She didn't notice the grin that Chuck got on his face.

Two weeks later he surprised, her, the kids, Ellie, her family, Carina, and Zondra by booking them a stay in the Plaza hotel over Christmas, complete with their trip to see the tree and anything else he could do from the movie. Ellie made him promise no breaking into any house and rigging it up to be a deathtrap. Jenny thought he was Christmas crazy before but once he found the Talkboy tape recorder....he was just another level of Christmas that she didn't know existed. If he exploded, he might be nothing but tinsel and lights....

Jenny hoped the trip would be able to help her get over her dad, but how was Chuck to know what happened to her at Christmas as a kid? She had told him so much of her past, but that part....it was just too much. It wasn't she didn't want to tell him, but by telling him, it forced her to relive it, and she was trying to forget her life pre-Chuck. She grinned as she saw Chuck's face light up as the plane began the decent into New York City. She may have two daughters, but for the next week, she was about to have an overgrown child, and she found herself not minding one bit.

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"It's beautiful," Jenny said softly to Chuck staring at the huge beautiful tree in front of her. Zondra and Carina had told Chuck and Jenny they were on babysitting duty so the two of them could enjoy the night. It was the 23rd of December, and while there were many out and about, they might as well have been the only two there.

"I mean it's alright," Chuck replied. She gave him a look. He shrugged. "It's got nothing on you."

"Bartowski, it's that kind of talking as to why we have two kids," Jenny replied, with a grin on her face. "It is cold out here, think you could help me warm up?"

Chuck smiled. "I would do all I can," he replied. "Want me to get a cab?"

"Nah, let's just walk, it's only a mile or so." "Are you trying to get mugged?" She gave him a look. "Right, if someone was dumb enough to try you'd protect me." She laughed and took his arm, walking toward their hotel. It didn't take long until she heard it, and it felt like a knot seized in her stomach. She tried to pull him away.

"Wait a minute," he said, and headed toward the Salvation Army donation bucket with someone in a Santa Claus suit ringing a bell manning it. He put something in the container, told the Santa, "Merry Christmas," and headed back to Jenny.

"How much?" she asked softly.

"Five hundred," he replied. He wasn't bragging, in fact she was a little surprised he didn't do more. Chuck Bartowski was always looking out for a way to help out others.

"You a good one, Chuck," she said softly. She wrapped her arms around herself and felt sick inside. As they walked, she could feel the confusion from Chuck. He had done nothing wrong, but she felt her wall go up. The one that had not been up around him in years. She didn't want it up but she couldn't help it. He was so good, and there were times, admittedly long ago...she wasn't. They got back to the hotel, and she needed some time to herself. "I'm gonna go check on the girls, okay?"

"I need to talk to Casey anyway," Chuck replied.

She didn't really believe him, but she wasn't about to call him on it, when he let her strange actions go. She did swing by for a second, but the girls were asleep and Carina and Zondra shooed her off. She slipped away, went up the stairs, and found herself on the roof, looking over the city. She was going to stand there quietly, enjoy the view, and collect herself, but someone was already up there. She shouldn't have been surprised.

"I don't see Casey," she said softly. Chuck whipped his head around, surprised. She shook her head. "I-I need to talk to you, and no, you've done nothing wrong, it's something I did wrong."

"Jenny-" "Chuck," she said in a tone that conveyed "shut up and let me say this." Chuck made a miming motion of zipping his lips. "Christmas for years with Dad and I...it mean running the Salvation Army con."

He stood there quietly and dropped his head. "I'm sorry, Jenny, I didn't know."

She stepped towards him and pulled him into a hug. "I know, Chuck, and it's not your fault, but..." she moved away, looking him in his eyes. "Christmas....it's just not for me what it is for you and I..."

"I get it, it's hard."

She shook her head. "You a wonderful man, but thickheaded some days." He blinked. "I'm jealous, Chuck. You're early life was hell too, but Casey...Casey didn't do you the way Dad did me. I was dressed as an elf while Dad rang that damn bell and we stole money from KIDS!" Tears were in her eyes. "Kids, Chuck! We took money out of kids' hands that needed it. We were the worst kind of awful."

"Jenny," Chuck began, but just stopped and pulled her into him.

"I know, Chuck, it's not fair to you, but somehow, I need to get this off of me, to cleanse my soul. And I can't seem to forget it."

He looked her in the eye, and grinned. "Trust me?" She nodded.

-ooooo-

It was Christmas day, presents had been exchanged, and Jenny was smiling as she put a serving of mashed potatoes on the child's plate that came through the line.

"I was thinking that instead of watching Twilight Zone all day, we could do this at home to, and maybe you could even be in charge of the menu," Chuck said, putting green peas on a child's plate. The kid gave the peas a disgusted look. "They're good for you."

"Why they gotta look like that?" the kid asked, walking off.

"Thank you, ma'am," one of the kids said to Jenny. Chuck thought she was going to bawl, but she steeled herself and grinned at the kid.

"You're welcome, Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," the kid said, walking away.

"God bless, how do I let you two rope me into this?" Casey muttered, in charge of the gravy.

"He grinned when he said that," Chuck loud whispered to Jenny.

"I noticed the same thing," Jenny replied. "Thank you, Chuck."

"Always, Jenny, always."

"Merry Christmas, Chuck."

He turned to her, saw her grin, and gave her the full Bartowski smile. "Merry Christmas, Jenny."

A/N: When I got the request from Peter, I went and reread Aces, and realized I had already done three chapters of Christmas in the fic. I needed this to be really different, and given how they had changed their lives in the end, this seemed to be the only logical conclusion. Thank you, sir, for letting me come back to the is world for just a few moments. For the record, I typed the entire thing before I remembered Sarah was Jenny and Chuck's daughter and had to change every single Sarah to Jenny.