

Just Out of Reach AKA Avocados

by David Carner

AU At his birthday party thrown by his sister, a mysterious box is delivered to Chuck Bartowski. What he learns will change the course of his life in ways he never thought. No Intersect. All me.

Rated: T · Genre: Humor, Romance · Chapters: 17

Chapter 1: Just Out of Reach AKA Avocados

A/N: Please note that this AU takes place in modern day. (It's been over fifteen years since this show was on TV. I'm old, and have ADHD. It's just easier this way) Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck *It's my party and I'll cry if I want to*, played through his head. It was his party, his birthday party...but it wasn't. It was Ellie's party. The one she thought he should have, the one he deserved. Ellie thought so highly of him...that had never been in question his entire life. Other people in his life...not so much. "I remember when I met Jill, I was... it was an economics class," Chuck said to the woman in front of him, Janet he thought her name was. He began thinking back to what he considered a simpler time. A time where he had friends, where he felt like he had his whole life in front of him. A time where he had a future and it was going to be amazing. He was looking at the woman in front of him, but he didn't see her. He was back. Back at Stanford. In the quad. "I was walking across the quad and she had dropped her bag, and I was like, you know, rushing to... to go and pick it up for her, and, uh... and we kind of, like, did that whole, like, you know, kind of in a cartoon, kind of bumped heads, and... there was a whole gang of us... Jill and Bryce. We had so much in common then. So there I was, Jill with Bryce, me on a train home. I guess she thought he was more exciting." From across the way, Ellie was trying to be a host, but also watch out for her younger brother. She had watched out for him his entire life, and then...then she couldn't. This was his birthday party. A time...a time that was supposed to be a celebration, but it wasn't. It

might has well have been a funeral. She didn't know what to do for her brother. She didn't know if there was anything she COULD do for her brother, and that was the most frustrating part. For several years she had watched her brother do...nothing. Just exist. She wanted for him the life he deserved, the life she knew he could have, but he couldn't get out of the past. Ellie poured herself a glass of punch, and saw the love of her life walking toward her, a look on his face that was unusual for him. It was one of sadness. "How's he doing?" Ellie asked, praying she was wrong about why Devon looked that way. "Not awesome," Devon replied in the most un-Devon like way ever. "He's....he's just not awesome." He shook his head. "At least he's not singing *Hello* by Adele tonight." "Thank God," Ellie agreed. She put down the spoon she had been stirring the punch with and turned toward Devon. "Why is he listening to that song? It doesn't make sense." "Oh," Devon replied, picking up a glass that she had scooped out. "I think he is manifesting Jill and Bryce singing that song to him as a way of apology." Ellie thought about that for a second, and looked up at him. "You know, that's...that's deep." Devon gave her a look. "Yeah," he replied. "Of course it's deep. I may not look deep, but I am." Ellie snorted a laugh, and laid her hand affectionately on his arm. "Uh, babe?" He said, a concerned look on his face. "I don't think that guy is on the guest list. She followed his gaze and saw the man that had gotten Devon's attention. "Chuck have some new friends he didn't tell you about?" The two studied the man deck out in a military uniform. "No," Ellie replied. "He doesn't look like one of those he would know from the Buy More." "One look from him would probably scare that entire crew," Devon said. He headed toward the man dressed in military garb. Ellie stayed behind and watched, curious as to why he was here. She tried to see what name was on his uniform, but it was too far away. "Can I help you, Sir?" Devon asked. "Major Casey," the man replied. "Are you Charles Bartowski?" "I am not," Devon replied. "I am his sister's boyfriend." Devon turned toward where Chuck was, and blew out a breath. Chuck was standing there, talking, and no one was near by. Devon recognized the look on Chuck's face. It was the one Chuck always had when he got lost in the past. "That's Chuck," Devon said, shaking his head. "The one...talking to himself?" The Major asked. "I mean, it does appear that way, but....you know what, yeah," Devon said, shaking his head and not knowing how to defend the younger man's actions. Devon turned back to the major. "Bring him a gift?"

The major lifted an eyebrow. "It's his birthday." The major made a noise that sounded like a cross between a grunt and "hmm". "Would you give this to him?" the major asked. "I don't want to..." he trailed off, observing Chuck still talking, and no one being around him. "Bother him." "He's not..." Devon began, but gave up, taking the package from Casey. "Yeah, I'll give it to him. Is it from you?" "No," Casey said quickly and crisply. "It's from...it's from Bryce Larkin." Devon started to speak. "It was a request in his will." "Wait, what?" Devon asked. "I'm just delivering the package," Casey said. "Have a good evening." With that, the career military man turned, and left the property, leaving Devon standing there, holding the package Casey had given him. "What was that about?" Ellie asked, having walked up to Devon. "Did he leave Chuck a present?" "Not exactly," Devon replied. "It's from Bryce." "Burn it," Ellie said in a near growl. "El...it was a request in his will," Devon told her gently. She stared at Devon, and then turned to watch her brother, who was just realizing that no one was around him that he was earlier talking to. }o{ It was a half hour or so later that Devon approached Chuck. Ellie and Devon had decided to wait until after the party but Devon had noticed Chuck slip away from the party after another woman that Ellie had invited walked away from him while he was waxing on about the past. "So not awesome," Devon muttered, shaking his head. He loved his hopefully eventually brother-in-law. Devon had older brothers, and in a way, he felt like he was becoming Chuck's older brother. Life had treated Chuck awful, and while Chuck may have rolled around in the depression of his life like a pig in mud, Chuck still looked out for people and believed in the best of people. It honestly amazed Devon...and he couldn't lie. He really enjoyed it when Chuck called him Captain Awesome. Devon knew who he was. He knew he looked like a frat boy jock, but he also knew when Chuck called him Awesome that it was a compliment, and not a dig. He admired Chuck...he just wished the younger man could see himself through Ellie's eyes, or his eyes, even Morgans. "The falcon has escaped quarantine," Devon whispered to Ellie. "Well, put it back in the cage, there are single women here, and that's mine," Ellie replied to him, a smirk on her face. "I'm talking about your brother, ma'am," Devon replied. "And you know you're the only falcon handler for me." "And while I am interested in revisiting this conversation tonight...alone...in our bedroom-" "What about the bedroom closet?" Devon asked. Ellie bit her lip and gave him a look to hush, but she

really didn't want him to. "Sorry." "Don't be," Ellie said, smirking. "I need to know where my brother went." "Look, El...you know I love him...and I love what you're doing for him..." Devon paused, not wanting to ruin his plans for later, but also, needing to be completely honest with his girlfriend. "This is not his scene." "I know," Ellie said, blowing out a breath that seemed to take all of the wind out of her sails. She loved her brother. She had practically raised him and only wanted the best for him. She had hoped and prayed this party would let him find someone...anyone...to just help him move on. "And we need to tell him about...." She couldn't finish the sentence using Bryce's name without wanting to spit or curse but she didn't want to talk disparagingly about the apparent dead. "Let me go talk to him about that package and you keep entertaining these....guests," Devon offered. "I don't know," Ellie said. "Well, you could go do it, and I could stay here, but I have to warn you that Samantha was asking me about my workout routine earlier-" "Okay," Ellie said, fire in her eyes. "You go talk to Chuck and I'll talk to Samantha." "She was trying to figure out the best routine for her girlfriend to rehab her hurt shoulder," Devon said, with the most innocent look on his face. Ellie was staring daggers on him. "Definitely reenacting our first meeting in the closet later, huh?" "Yes," Ellie nearly spat, both wanting to kill her boyfriend and ravage him in front of God and everyone. He leaned in and gave her a kiss on the forehead, and he felt her nearly melt. "I love you," she whispered. "Love you, I got this," he told her, squeezing her upper arm gently. "Devon...thank you." "You're not alone anymore, El," he told her as kindly and as gently as he could. "I know," she said, smiling. She drew herself up. "Now, please go show that package to my brother." "Will do," he said, saluting. He started to saunter off, and then turned back. "Kaaakkk!" "What the hell was that?" Ellie asked, one part confused, and one part horrified as the people around him turned to stare at him. "The noise a falcon makes," Devon said, his hands spread and confusion on his face. He was even more confused as Ellie rolled her eyes, turned away, and pointed toward the apartment not looking at him. "I thought it was a good impression," he muttered walking away. }o{ "He's not dead," Chuck said. Devon didn't know what to say to that. He had told Chuck everything that had happened and gave him the package. "I mean, I get it, how it looks." He looked up from the package to Devon. They were in Chuck's room, where he had gone to retreat and play video games. "He plays games with

people.” “Bro,” Devon began. “I thought I was his best friend and he planted that test in my room...I mean...who else could have,” Chuck said. Devon sighed. Chuck was back in pity world, population Chuck, and he wasn’t going to hear or see anyone else. “He then took my girlfriend.” “You don’t know that she didn’t seduce him,” Devon offered. Chuck blinked, and then slowly turned to look at him. “Right, that’s not any better.” “No,” Chuck agreed. He shook his head. “And now, some military looking dude shows up with a package, on my birthday, saying Bryce is dead...” Chuck snorted. “It’s a prank. He’s not dead, he’s playing another sick joke, letting me think he’s dead...thinking that would give me pleasure...it doesn’t...” Chuck looked back at Awesome. “I know, he’s done me awful, but want to see him dead? Did he even know me?” Devon laid his hand on Chuck’s shoulder. “You’re a good person, Chuck.” “Yeah, lot of good that’s done me,” he muttered. Devon removed his hand, and Chuck tossed the package on the bed. “He got me again.” Devon didn’t know what to say. “Look, tell Ellie I’m....processing this...I just can’t-” “I got you, Bro,” Devon said. He stooped just a bit to look the younger man in the eyes. “I got you.” “I know,” Chuck said, nodding with an appreciative soft smile on his face. “You two...you’re the best-” “We’re family,” Devon said. He clapped Chuck gently on the back, and it took everything in Chuck not to wince or cry out in pain. “Yeah,” Chuck said nodding. Devon nodded, pointed at him, and headed out of the room. Chuck sat down to turn on his game system. He played a few minutes and found himself turning to look at the box. “Nope,” he said and turned back to his game. A few minutes later he did the same thing. He sighed, turned off his game and picked up the box. “I shouldn’t do this,” he muttered as he began to take off the packaging. There was a small box inside the packaging, one that looked big enough to hold some of the figures he and Bryce had bought while at Stanford. He opened the lid and there stared a figure back at him. For some reason, in the corner of the box was a small slit that caught his eye. He pulled the figure out of the box. “What the hell,” he muttered. “Is this...is this a troll?” He looked at the base of the figure and saw words there. He shook his head. “Holy shit, it’s the Zork troll.” He positioned it so he could read the inscription on the bottom. *Attack troll with nice knife* Chuck stared at the figure for a second. “You fucked up the prompt,” Chuck muttered. “Everything is a damn game for you.” He shook his head and put the troll back in the box. Reached over, turned back on the gaming system and

began to play. He played for a few minutes, blew a raspberry out of his lips, reached over, turned off the system and turned back to the figure. "You wouldn't have messed that up," Chuck muttered. He couldn't help but think of their days at Stanford. How Bryce had gotten him the nerf gun and the two would have wars all over campus. And how Bryce had these drop locations where he hid stuff. Something about that troll was bothering Chuck. He reached over, picked up, and examined the figure. There was a knife in the trolls hand, and it was not nasty. It was in fact, nice. Chuck pulled at it, wondering if it came off, if maybe it would fit in the slot he had seen earlier. The knife didn't move. He looked at the wording, and his eyes wouldn't leave the word nice. He put his finger on it, and he didn't know why, but gently pushed and pulled downward. His eyes went wide as the word began to move down. He kept moving it down until the word nice had rolled away, and the word nasty took it's place. He studied the figure and looked at the knife again. He reached over, grabbed the knife gently between his fingers and pulled, and this time the knife came away, like a sheath that was covering something else. A gnarled looking, much smaller blade was underneath it. He took the "nice" knife and tried to put it in the slot in the box, but it wouldn't fit. He stared at the figure. He turned the figure upside down, positioned the knife in the trolls hand over the slot in the box, and gently pushed the knife down and into the slot. He heard a click. He noticed what had previously seemed to be one continuous piece of felt at the bottom of the box now had a line across it. He pushed at it and found a false bottom. He started at what was under it. A USB drive. }o{ He was playing his video game, blowing up everything, shooting anything that moved, just so he couldn't look over at his desk and the USB drive that sat there. Every time he started to look over, he shook his head and forced himself to look straight ahead. He refused to put that drive into his computer. Who knew what kind of virus was on there? Not that he couldn't fix it if it was a virus. No, it was a bad idea. The worst idea. "No the worst idea was rooming with him, and dating Jill," Chuck muttered to himself. He laid down the controller in frustration, leaned forward, ran his hands through is hair, and blew out a rough breath. "What is it they say, everyone wants closure?" He looked up and found himself staring at the USB drive. He reached over, turned off his system, booted up his computer, and paused. "I swear to God, if this gives me a virus I will find him and....gah!" He wouldn't do

anything, and he knew it. He put the drive in and waited. He rolled his eyes at the folder that appeared in the drive that said, Chuck Open Me. It was a video. "Really?" Chuck asked. "Let me guess, your and Jill's video for some porn site?" He was not going to open the video. He swore he wasn't. He click the video and sat back on his bed. Bryce appeared on the screen...fully clothed...sans Jill...he appeared to be in some sort of apartment, that was all green. Bryce looked tense. "Most of been a rough tax filing season," Chuck snarked at his former friend who he thought was now an accountant. "Hey, Chuck." Bryce began, but paused looking unsure of how to continue. "Look I know you must hate me." He paused again and smiled. "No...no you don't do you? You're hurt by me, probably disappointed in my actions but not in me." "I want to hate you," Chuck mumbled. "But..." Bryce looked away from the camera, and then back to it. "I know this is going to sound dramatic, and you're probably not going to believe it but....if you're seeing this...I'm probably dead." "You're not dead," Chuck insisted, but couldn't stop the sinking feeling in his stomach. "You know what, scratch the probably," Bryce continued. "See," Chuck replied to the recording. "Told ya." "If you're seeing this...I'm dead," Bryce paused. "Graveyard dead, not comic book, not movie dead, not mostly dead..." Bryce paused, looking as serious as Chuck had ever seen Bryce in Chuck's entire life. "Dead." "Oh, no," Chuck replied and dropped his head into his hands. He didn't want to cry. He didn't. He was mad at Bryce. He was hurt by Bryce. But...Bryce had been his friend. He loved him like a brother...and now Bryce was gone. "I'm gonna give you a second to process that, cause I know you, Chuck, and when you're ready..." Bryce paused and Chuck looked up at the screen and saw what he thought was regret in Bryce's face. "I need to explain some things, but most importantly, apologize for what I did." Bryce blew out a breath. "But yeah...I'm dead." A/N: BTW, no Intersect in this story.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2

A/N:will there be Charah.....will there be Charah?....(walks off mumbling about have they read the other 150+ fics, come back)...WILL THERE BE CHARAH!?!?!?

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

"You would think with OnlyFans, we wouldn't get as many of these customers with porn viruses," Anna groused, making Chuck laugh.

"Come on, Anna, you know people have limited funds in this economy, and those 'free' sites are littered with viruses," Lester replied.

"You would know," Anna replied, shaking her head.

"Speaking of which," Lester continued, ignoring her dig. "Have you considered my proposal?" Chuck looked up to see the glare Anna gave Lester. Lester scurried away, scared out of his mind. Chuck thought about asking Anna what proposal Lester had given, when something on the large TV caught his attention. He grabbed the universal remote, and turned up the sound as he walked toward the TV, the other Nerd Herders watching him.

"Again, CIA director Langston Graham has been arrested for crimes of Treason," the news anchor said as the video showed Langston Graham being walked away, in cuffs, by law enforcement officials.

"He did it," Chuck said softly.

"Didn't know you to be one of those people," Lester said coming up beside him.

"What kind of people?" Morgan asked, having overheard the comment as he was approaching Chuck.

"Informed," Lester replied. "Chuck is the least informed person I know," Morgan said, trying to defend his friend. Chuck turned to him slowly. "Nope, don't have to say a thing. Heard it when it came out of my mouth," Morgan admitted, wincing. Chuck shook his

head and turned down the TV.

"I'm going to the cage to repair computers," Chuck told Morgan. "If those two do something stupid, come get me."

"You think we'll do something stupid?" Lester asked. "Charles, I'm offended."

"You propositioned Anna," Chuck replied walking away. "If that's not the definition of stupid, then I don't know what is."

"He's got a point," Morgan said softly. "I know," Lester said grimacing and walking away. Chuck walked away from the madness, his thoughts still on everything he learned last night.

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"So, I'm a spy," Bryce said. "Now, before you turn this off, hear me out. Remember all the Nerf wars we had? The drop boxes? That was all things I learned in my spy craft lessons with the CIA."

Chuck paused the computer and thought about his time with Bryce. Chuck had believed him to be an accountant, because that's what Bryce claimed to be studying, and because of his analytical way of thinking. But, if Bryce truly was a spy, then the calculated risks he took in those games...the ideas he had...Chuck shook his head. It was POSSIBLE. He didn't believe it, but it was POSSIBLE. He looked at the screen and his former friend. The day Chuck was kicked out of college, Bryce had told him he had done this to himself, and Chuck knew Bryce had meant it. It had bothered him. Chuck knew Bryce. He knew when Bryce was talking bullshit and when it was the truth. He wanted to walk away from this video, but he was so intrigued, he pressed play.

"That test you took, that I did plant under your bed-"

"I KNEW IT!" Chuck yelled, having hit pause. "I KNEW IT!" Validated, Chuck hit play.

"It was a test that would have led to them recruiting you to the CIA." Chuck didn't pause the video this time. He was too busy picking his jaw up off the floor.

Bryce blew out a breath, and looked conflicted. "I messed up. I know I did. I should...dude..." He looked directly into the camera, tears in his eyes. "Dude...you're my brother...I love you like a brother, and...I couldn't...I couldn't watch you....Chuck...you're the best person I know and this life..." Bryce shook his head. "And I did this the worst way possible, I know, and for that I will always be sorry. I did you wrong, and I know this changes nothing, cause I'm dead, and no one will believe you, and you really can't show this to anyone."

"Why not?" Chuck asked aloud.

"What I'm about to show you and ask you to do...it would put someone else's life in danger. An innocent in this...thought she'll tell you..." he shook his head, a wry smile on his face. "She'll tell you she's not innocent." He chuckled, and smiled at the camera. "She reminds me of you in a way. Life has not been fair to her. Hell, I wasn't fair to her."

Chuck blew out a breath. He had NOT expected to be watching his former friend's deathbed confessions on his birthday.

"Let me tell you about Langston Graham, Director of the CIA."

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Chuck had the small TV on as he worked on the computers in the back, listening for any more information on the arrest of the former CIA Director. Bryce had told him all of the awful things Graham had done, and how someone had to stop him. How his "assassins" were taking out political enemies abroad, and the dirt he had on people in power in the US. Bryce's plan was simple. He would break into the compound where the blackmail material was held against those in power. He would access the files that showed Graham's corruption, email them to various government officials, and press people, and Langston would go down. He might be able to pull it off without anyone being the wiser, but, if Chuck were to get the video, chances are he was caught, a gun fight ensued, and he was labeled a traitor to the United States. If that happened, his personal belongings would be gone through by the NSA and anything that was to go to someone else upon his death would be delivered by the NSA.

"Explains the military guy," Chuck muttered to himself.

"Sorry I bolted on you last night," Morgan called across the back room, due to his irrational fear of the broken computers. Chuck looked up at his friend, and gave him a grin. "No you're not." "Fine, sorry I abandoned you," Morgan corrected. "Wasn't my scene."

"Wasn't mine," Chuck admitted. "But, you had to save yourself." Morgan was silent, and studied Chuck for a moment. "What is it Morgan?"

"You okay? You seem...different this morning," Morgan said. "More of...more of the Chuck before...you know."

Chuck laid down his screwdriver and studied his friend. "How have I acted different?"

"I don't know, but you seem...you seem more confident...like you do when you smoke my ass playing video games," Morgan replied, shrugging. "My bud's back."

"I've always been right here," Chuck told Morgan. "No," Morgan said, shaking his head. "You left a part of you at Stanford, and...you know what, maybe it's me but..." He started to walk off, and smiled at his friend. "But, it's good to have all of you back."

"Yeah," Chuck said softly after his friend had left the back. "All of me...back..."

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"I know, my plan is insane," Bryce admitted. "And if you're seeing this...well....it went as bad as possible. So there's two things I ask, watch the news to see if he does go down. Scour the Internet. I pray this works, cause if it doesn't..." Bryce shook his head. "He's the worst of the worst and one of the reasons I didn't want you to join the CIA."

"I can do that," Chuck said softly.

"Chuck, I'm really sorry for what I did to you," Bryce said, shame on his face. "Looking back, there were so many better ways I could have handled the whole situation, but fear gripped me that said you would argue with me, want to join, prove that you could do it." Bryce was silent for a moment. "And that's the thing, you could of. You could have been an amazing spy, but it would have killed who you are. The good person you are, and I

did you wrong."

"I forgive you," Chuck said softly. "I do."

"And I wish to God I could say that you are the person I have done the worst," Bryce continued, his eyes...haunted. "I wish to God that I could say that I've done no one wrong like I have you." "Oh God," Chuck muttered

"It's not," Bryce continued. "And the worst part is, I love her." He chuckled for a moment. "I guess loved, if you're seeing this."

"This is getting a bit too macabre," Chuck said softly.

"I need to tell you about the woman I love, and how I did her worse than you," Bryce told him.

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Chuck walked back to the Nerd Herd desk, having finished all of the repairs in the back. He was reading over one of the many information sheets about different upcoming products, when the bell rang. He put down the sheet and turned to look at the woman who had rang the bell.

"You're brave," Chuck told her, grinning.

"Why would you say that?"

"You know how these guys are about you," Chuck said in a low voice. "And look, I'm your brother. They don't care. They talk about you-"

"Okay,okay,okay," Ellie rushed out having a full on hebbie-jebbie attack. "I have a favor to ask." "Is it another birthday party?" Chuck asked, his voice flat, but unable to stop the grin.

Ellie studied him for a moment. "Something's different about you," she said softly.

"Maybe I grew again?" Chuck offered.

"Funny enough, that's one reason I'm here," Ellie told him.

"Can't reach a dish on the top shelf?" Ellie swatted him. "Need me to get a box down from that shelf over there?"

"You are such a brat," Ellie told him, shaking her head and laughing. "So...I saw the strangest think on Friendster."

"You mean other than you use Friendster?" Chuck asked. "Who's on there, you and what grandmothers?"

"Chuck," Ellie said, the tone in her voice dangerous. Chuck held up his hands in surrender. "There's a nice young lady on there that said free avocados to anyone taller than five foot ten."

"Okay, that totally doesn't sound like a line a serial killer might use," Chuck replied.

"I knew you would say that," Ellie began.

"Wait...are you going to send me there like you did last time something was on Facebook market place?" Chuck asked.

"You two got along," Ellie insisted.

"I got taken to a bar by that woman's husband, and he basically forced me to watch some MMA event to get the things you sent me after," Chuck reminded her. "You know how I feel about that much blood."

"I know," Ellie said. "But I've talked to the woman who posted this on Friendster."

"Cause that makes it better," Chuck grumbled. "Chuck," she said in a flat voice.

"I really wanna say, 'Yes, Mom,' when you do that," Chuck admitted. She gave him the flattest look. "Yes, Sister," he muttered.

She laughed at that. "So the woman that posted this, is five foot ten, and that's why you have to be taller than that."

"So she picked all the avocados she could reach," Chuck replied.

"No joke about how she could pick more than me?" Ellie asked.

"Pretty sure I've already made it," Chuck reminded her. "Where is she?"

"The Azusa Foothills," Ellie told him.

"Can I go tomorrow on my day off?" he asked her.

"That would be perfect," Ellie told him. "I owe you little brother." "For going to pick your avocados or what I'm about to hear from my co-workers?" Chuck asked. Ellie turned and ran, her fingers in her ears making some noise as to chase away the bad thoughts. "Totally sounds like a serial killer," he muttered. He went back to the papers he was reading, but his mind kept going back to last night.

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"There's a woman I met in the CIA. She was an agent, and dude...I fell in love with her so hard," Bryce told him. "She was very closed off, but we were together. We were partners, and then..." he blew out a breath. "To be honest, it's what started my obsession with taking down Graham. He recruited her. I only found out because I accessed her files. Now before you get mad that I used the skills you taught me, she was closed off, and I was very worried about her. Turns out I should have been worried about her, and no, I shouldn't have done it." He was silent for a moment, but then looked into the camera, with that mischievous glint in his eye that Chuck knew so well. "What is it your sister always says? You can't go to far for love?"

"Yeah, but that's akin to stalking," Chuck muttered.

"He blackmailed her at sixteen to join the CIA," Bryce continued.

"That's illegal!" Chuck blurted out, suddenly mad. "Wait? Blackmailed?"

"Her father was arrested and he told her she could go to jail or she could join the CIA," Bryce explained. "He didn't have that kind of authority then, but...." Bryce shook his head. "He exploited her."

Chuck didn't know this woman and he was angry for her.

Bryce was silent for a few moments. "Chuck, you know that saying that if you love someone to set them free...."

"Oh, Bryce," Chuck muttered.

"She was never going to know that he was free, Langston made sure of it," Bryce told him. He looked away. "So...I did what Jill accused me of."

"What?" Chuck said.

"I didn't sleep with her, man," Bryce explained. "I don't know why she wanted you gone, but that...that didn't happen. I did NOT sleep with Jill. However, I did cheat on my girlfriend. I didn't want to. Okay, I didn't want to hurt her but she had to believe it was over between us."

"That was overkill you idiot," Chuck said, and immediately felt awful about talking ill of the dead.

"I'm not going to bother you with the details, but...I had a contact that took in my ex-girlfriend's father. Helped him go straight...and then...then made sure a newspaper interviewed my contact about helping people turn their life around. I made sure my ex-girlfriend saw it."

"Bryce," Chuck said softly. "That...that was good of you. The other stuff sucked. But that...that was good."

"I did some convoluted shit to make sure she left me, and then I back-channeled getting her out of the CIA," Bryce told him. He looked away. "Okay, I fucked that part up." Chuck dropped his head into his hands. *"I let the information about when she was recruited into someone's hands that would get her the option to leave," Bryce began. He was silent. "Or so I thought," he said softly.*

"They forced her out," Chuck said, looking up, just knowing where this was going. *"They forced her out," Bryce confirmed. "I fucked that up."*

"Yeah you did," Chuck said, shaking her head.

"She left the CIA, and then her and her father dropped off the map," Bryce continued. "I tried to find them, but I'm not as good as you." He reached over and grabbed something, and held a picture of a beautiful blond woman to the screen. "And as beautiful as she is, she's a better person."

"She is pretty," Chuck agreed. "I have no idea of what name she's using," Bryce admitted. "On this drive there is a list of aliases that her and her father used, but the way she is...I doubt she'd ever use any of them again. So, this is where I need your help."

"Here we go," Chuck muttered.

"IF, you could do a little..." he grinned. "Fishing expedition."

Chuck groaned.

"And just see if she's okay," Bryce told him. "And look, the chances of you finding her are remote. If she wants to disappear she will, but if anyone can find her, it's you."

Chuck sat there, nodding, not saying anything.

"So, I'm off to do this mission, and I pray to God you never see this, and I get to tell you all of it face to face...but if you're seeing it...you're the best friend I ever had, and I ruined." Bryce was trying to hold back tears but failing. "I know I did you dirty, and while it was a good intention, it was wrong."

"It's okay," Chuck said softly, his own tears falling.

"And what I did to her may have been worse," Bryce continued. "Every man in her life had let her down, and I did as well" Bryce shook his head. "I mean, let's be honest, I kinda suck at long term planning...hence why you're seeing this video." "Really?" Chuck groaned.

"I hope you have the life you deserve. The one Ellie thinks you should. Love you, Bro." With that, Bryce reached up and turned off the video recording.

"Love you, Bryce," Chuck said softly.

}o{

Chuck walked out to his car after his shift, got in, started the car, and Spotify instantly connected. He heard the notes of *Hello* hit, and pulled out his phone. He stopped the song, and scrolled through his music. He stared at a song, grinned, and picked it.

Birds flying high you know how I feel

Sun in the sky you know how I feel

Leaves drifting on by, you know how I feel

It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life for me yeah

It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life for me

And I'm feeling good

“Maybe I should set up a facial recognition search,” Chuck muttered to himself. “Just take a screen grab of that photo...” He smiled. He would go on a *fishing expedition*. And tomorrow, he would go pick some avocados. Things were changing. The peace that had felt always just out of reach now seemed closer. He couldn't touch it just yet, but it felt closer than ever. Things were changing and for the better. “AND I'M FEELING GOOD!” He sang at the top of his lungs.

A/N: Now who do we know that uses Friendster and is five foot ten.....See you next time.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3

A/N: On with the reposting.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

She stood there, examining the building, the clipboard in her left hand, a pencil behind her right ear, wondering how they were going to fix this mess. Neither of them had any plumbing or electrician skills. Because her father had owned the property for twelve months, they could do the repairs legally in the state of California, but would they work, and NOT burn down the building...

"That's gonna cost," she muttered, reaching for the pencil.

"Angel, I love you, but nothing hurts me more than each time you reach for that pencil," came the teasing voice behind her. She snorted as she made a notation on the paper she was writing on. She hadn't tallied the cost yet...Bryce would have by now. She pushed that thought out of her mind.

As mad as she was at him...she owed him. She had her father back. Sarah lifted her head and studied the abandoned dormitory on the farm, and wondered exactly how long it had been abandoned. At least she tried to. The thoughts of Bryce came back to her. She blew out a breath and shook her head.

It had been six months, and it still hurt her. She remembered one of the first nights her father and her had been living at this property. They were sitting outside, a bonfire going, both of them sipping beer out of the bottle, looking at the sky, and enjoying the peace. It was then Jack had asked her if there had been anyone in her life.

She didn't know why she had told him about Bryce. They had never had that kind of relationship, but something was different about her father since he had left prison.

He had sat there quietly, and then he spoke, and what he said had nearly floored her.

You know of everything I've done wrong in my life, it's how I've treated you and Em that I regret the most. You both loved me. You loved a broken, no good con-man, and I took

advantage of that love. You don't choose who you love in this world. You just...love. And when you decide to act on that love...when you decide to give it a voice, or with action...and the person you love...abuses it...takes it for granted...takes advantage of it...he had trailed off, and she swore she saw a tear fall from his face.

"That bad?" she heard the worried voice behind her, pulling her out of her thoughts.

"No," she replied quickly as she spun toward him. She glanced at the clipboard and then frowned. "Well...maybe. Dad...we aren't electricians."

"But we are some hell of some dancers," Jack replied, grinning at her.

She rolled her eyes and grinned at him. "Yes, but that doesn't help us run wiring or keep the place from burning down when we flip on the lights."

"That could be a problem," Jack agreed, nodding.

"Yeah," Sarah said.

"Well," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder, and squeezing it affectionately. "That's why your in charge."

"Dad," Sarah began.

"Nope, Angel," he said, shaking his head. "We both know that while I mean well, if I see a way to take a shortcut..." He widened his eyes, and she couldn't help but giggle. He knew his flaws and like an alcoholic, he thought the best way to keep from slipping back into his old ways was to limit his exposure to it.

"You called mom?" Sarah asked. Jack looked a bit ashamed and shook his head. "Dad-"

"Listen, kid," Jack told her. "She...she gave me a wake up call with that come to Jesus meeting we had while I was in prison...how the hell did she even find me?"

"No idea," Sarah admitted, holding up her hands, and then...then she wondered. Did Bryce...no...surely not...

"Anyway," Jack continued. "When we get this all going right, maybe...maybe then. Maybe when I show her..." he trailed off, tears in his eyes.

"You know, it's supposed to be about the journey, not the final destination," Sarah told him.

"Look at you, and the philosophies you learned at that fancy school," Jack teased.

"I mean, I am a Harvard graduate," Sarah said, flipping her hair and sounding as highfalutin as possible. Her father roared with laughter. While proud of his daughter and everything they had accomplished, she had admitted to him that she had gotten through some of her classes armed with nothing but the knowledge she had gained from him.

As mad as she was at Bryce for what he had done to her, she had to admit, she had her father back because of it...of course that didn't excuse him for cheating on her.

"Mom would be proud of you," Sarah said.

"For what, doing the bare minimum of finally being a father?" Jack asked. He shook his head. "I've committed too many sins to be forgiven that easily."

"Isn't it the choice of the person you wronged to decide when to forgive you?" Sarah asked him.

He grinned at her. "Learn that at Harvard?"

"No, the real world...a few months ago," Sarah told him. He looked teary-eyed. "Oh, God, you've gotten all weepy since you went inside," she said, teasing and pulling him into a hug.

"That place changes you," he said in a deep voice, like he was in some kind of trauma. She burst out laughing. He pulled away, his hands on her shoulders, smiling at her in pride. "Listen...I know your doing what you love most...spending my money--"

"It's every daughter's dream," she said, making him chuckle.

"But, Mrs. Lewis needs your help," Jack told her.

"You know I know next to nothing about how to program that VCR," Sarah told him.

"It's a DVR," Jack told her. "How are you worse at this than me? I was in prison."

"I was in the CIA, I can help her clean her weapon," Sarah replied. Jack blew out a breath. "Look, I'm supposed to meet someone to get avocados."

"I can't believe you're giving them all away," Jack told her.

"Do you want to go sit at the farmer's market and sell them?" Sarah asked.

"Do you know how many scams I would come up with sitting there watching those folks?" Jack countered.

"I do," Sarah said, nodding. "And while I am glad to visit one, if I sat there, do you know how many back stories I would invent of people just out and about."

"Invent, or sus out just watching?" Jack asked, a bit of pride in his voice. She didn't answer, but the small smile on her face and the head tilt told the story. "Look, just go help her, and I promise I'll be nice to the mass murder that's coming here to kill us and get our avocados."

"You need to quit watching those true crime shows," she said pointing at him, but turning and heading down the road to Mrs Lewis's house.

"I mean really, you just put up an ad online about free avocados?" Jack continued.

Sarah kept walking, ignoring his complaints, "His name is Chuck," she said, walking backwards, talking to him.

"Who in the hell calls their kid Chuck?" Jack asked.

"He's probably a Charles or something," Sarah said, shrugging and turning back toward the road.

"Or...a Charlie," Jack said, a grin on his face. He looked around the property. It was a disaster, but it had potential...kind of like his life right now. "That was deep...maybe I could have gone to Harvard," he said softly. He made a face and shook his head. "Nah."

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"Chuck, you are absolutely the best spending your day off going to get these avocados for me," Ellie told him as he headed toward the door. He paused, his hand on the door

knob. "I promise, she's not a mass murderer."

"Are you setting me up?" Chuck asked, not looking at her, his hand still on the door knob.

"No, why would I want you killed?" Ellie asked.

Chuck turned from the door and looked his sister directly in the eye. "I mean on a meet cute or some kind of romantic thing?"

"No, as you said, only me and grandmas on on Friendster," Ellie remind him.

"So, you're setting me up with a grandma?" Chuck asked her. "How desperate are you?" Ellie looked away, and Chuck held his hands up. "You know what. That's on me? I get it, I've been pretty low lately." Ellie giggled.

"Just go meet Sarah and get me avocados, please," Ellie said. "And if you romance her, well, that's between you and her family who has to be worried that some twenty year old is romancing a seventy year old."

Chuck was laughing at that. "You said, Sarah?"

"Yeah, Sarah Walker," Ellie told him. "She's at the Just Out of Reach farm. She's running it with her dad." Ellie watched her brother as he stood there, frozen, like he was processing something. "Is something wrong?"

"That's...that's a weird name for a farm," Chuck said. He had gone through the lists of names the night before that Bryce's ex-girlfriend had used in the past. Sarah Walker was one of them. And here was a Sarah Walker, at a farm...with...her dad.

"Yes, it is!" Ellie agreed. "I asked her about it, and her and her father want to turn it into a halfway center for those who are out of prison."

"Oh?" Chuck replied, trying to keep his voice down an octave, thinking about what Bryce had said about his ex-girlfriend's father and what he had been through when he got out of prison. "That's...that's some good work."

"Right?" Ellie told him. "Again, thank you."

"No, thank you," Chuck told her. "This is what I need. A drive, some fresh air."

"Yes," Ellie said, smiling and nodding. "You do."

"So, I'll see you later...with avocados...and if I don't...it's because I was murdered," Chuck said, grinning.

"Well, at least get the avocados before they kill you," Ellie told him.

Chuck rolled his eyes, grinned at her, and left. He walked to his car, his mind spinning. It couldn't be. It absolutely couldn't be. What were the odds?

Approximately 3,720 to 1 C3PO quote came to mind.

Yeah. It couldn't be her.

Couldn't.

}o{

As he pulled past the sign for Just Out of Reach Farm and drove down the driveway, he saw a man sitting on the front porch of the main house. He looked around and saw multiple buildings all in a state of disrepair. Chuck opened the door of his car, and stepped out. "Hi, I'm looking for Sarah Walker," he said.

The man sitting on the front porch stood. "You must be Charlie," he replied, a grin on his face. He walked toward Chuck, his hand outstretched. "I'm Jack Burton, owner of the farm."

Chuck shook Jack's hand as his mind reeled. Jack Burton was one of the names in the file Bryce had left him. Chuck wasn't sure how Bryce hadn't found him, unless someone had created multiple shell companies to hide Jack...that sounded like something someone in the CIA might know a little something about...that, or someone who used to be a conman.

"My daughter is Sarah," Jack continued. Jack followed Chuck's gaze to the worn down buildings. "Yeah, it needs some work."

"What happened?" Chuck asked.

"Farm has been in the family for generations," Jack began, looking over the land. "It was my grandparents', but my Dad didn't want to work it, or have anything to do with it. He believed in getting money in easier ways."

"Farming is hard work," Chuck agreed, nodding.

Jack, with a smile on his face, was watching Chuck. "Yeah, my old man thought scamming people was a better idea." His smile grew as Chuck whipped his head around toward Jack. "And, I felt the same way."

"I...uh..."

"Take it easy, Charlie, I'm out of that life," Jack told him. "I got busted years ago, and went to prison. While I was there...Emma...Sarah's mom...she visited me, and read me the riot act." Jack grinned and looked out over the land again, and when he spoke his voice was lower, and the grin seemed to have dimmed some. "Em told me that I was falling into the same life as my dad, and how had that worked out for him?"

Chuck didn't know what to say. "Uhhhh."

Jack chuckled, and this time, the smile was forced on Jack's face. "Stabbed to death in an alley for conning the wrong people." He looked at Chuck. "I told the guard I wanted to go back to my cell, and he wouldn't take me. He said I'd do well to listen to her." Jack nodded, and began to walk over toward the avocado trees. "He was right."

Chuck began to follow after him. "And that changed your life?"

"Well, not exactly," Jack told him. He stopped walking, and turned to Chuck. "Oh, what the hell," he said, and lifted his shirt. There was a scar there, on his abdomen. "Got shanked."

"Oh, God," Chuck muttered.

"Yep," Jack agreed, and lowered his shirt. "I was about to walk down the same life, and the same death as my old man." Jack started back toward the trees, motioning Chuck to follow.

Chuck followed, now wrapped in the story. "So, I found out that I owned this little slice of heaven, and after I realized I was going to make it and not die, I decided to do what my old man refused to do, and that's do some honest, hard labor."

"How's that going?" Chuck asked.

"Hard," Jack admitted, making Chuck laugh. "And it's not the hard work part, it's the old life keeps popping up. Take these avocados," he said, pointing toward the trees. "I could go sell these at the farmers market, I have a spot that belongs to this farm."

"What?" Chuck said, confused.

"So apparently back when this market started, my grandparents, or maybe great-grandparents, were one of the original investors, and as part of that, we always have a booth. It apparently sits open. Anyone can sit there, but anything they sell, the money goes into our account. We recently connected the account to a bank, but I can't go sell stuff there." He held up his hand. "Before you think that I'm against the work, it's...it's me."

"I don't understand," Chuck admitted.

"I'd see people out and about and talking, and...my mind...it never stops working," Jack told him.

"You'd...you'd con them," Chuck said hesitantly, not wanting to offend Jack. Jack nodded. "So, what about your daughter?"

"It just wouldn't work for her either," Jack replied. "What do you do?"

"I work for the Nerd Herd of the Buy More," Chuck told Jack.

"Now, I know all those words, but when you put them in a sentence like that..." Jack trailed off.

"I fix phones...computers...work customer service," Chuck explained.

"So you could work that booth," Jack said nodding. "What about something like this farm? Could you work here?"

"I mean...maybe? I have no experience," Chuck admitted.

"Neither do we," Jack admitted, making Chuck laugh. "But here, I have a chance to help others rebuild their lives if we can turn this into a rehabilitation center," Jack told him. "If...if we can figure out how to repair and replace all this stuff. I mean...we can't afford to hire a bunch of people."

"You could YouTube repair videos," Chuck offered. Jack looked at him. "Yeah, you're probably not ready for that."

"No," Jack admitted. "I have no idea what you said, but I'm sure I'm not ready for it." He glanced at his watch. "So, my daughter will be back in a bit. She's helping a neighbor program her DVR. She's not that technologically advanced, but I really think Mrs. Lewis wants another woman to talk to, so it's okay. Anyway, you're welcome to any and all of these avocados."

Chuck looked at all the fruit. "So...you could sell these at the market."

"I could," Jack said. "But...it's not a good idea."

"But, if you did sell them, you'd have some money," Chuck began.

"Charlie," Jack said, clapping Chuck on the back. "I can see your wheels spinning from here. We wouldn't make enough to pay for all the repairs." Chuck couldn't hide his disappointment. "Electricians...plumbers...they're not cheap."

"Yeah," Chuck said, nodding. He needed to stop his brain. He had no idea if this man was Bryce's ex-girlfriend's father. He knew he had promised Bryce to check on her if he could, but to help with this...this was out of his wheelhouse...out of his comfort zone...out of-

"Hey, there she is," Jack said. Chuck turned around, and wondered who had taken all the oxygen off the planet.

"Hey, Dad, couldn't fix it, but I tried," the woman in the picture Bryce had shown him said, striding toward the two men. The woman Jack had called Sarah Walker. "Is this Chuck?"

“Yep,” Jack replied. “Been showing Charlie around.”

Sarah rolled her eyes as she walked up to the two of them, slowly shaking her head, smiling good-naturedly at her father. “Ignore him, he’s a pest.”

“But a hell of a dancer,” Jack said.

“Sarah Walker,” she said, holding out her hand to Chuck.

“Chuck Bartowski,” Chuck replied, taking her hand in his and knowing his life was never going to be the same again.

The End.

Of the Chapter.

A/N: Next time....I have no idea. I have nothing else written. But I will, just as soon as I can.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

"She's gonna need that hand back," Jack said softly to Chuck, causing Chuck to jerk his hand back.

"Dad," Sarah hissed.

"Sorry," Chuck blurted out. So many things had assailed him in the handshake. The fact that Sarah Walker was right here in front of him AND she was Bryce's ex-girlfriend.

See if she's okay.

Those words had been playing through his mind. Some of the last words Bryce had ever said to him were, See if she's okay. She was...physically. She seemed to be mentally, but two things, one, who was he to judge and understand if someone was, and two, what could you really know about a person within seconds of meeting them. That was like falling in love at first sight, which was nothing but a myth, a chemical reaction if you would, in your body, it was absolutely impossible...OH CRAP! His thoughts were spiraling out of control!

"Sorry," he said again, shaking his head. "I work at the Nerd Herd at the Buy More," he began but saw the confusion on his face, chuckled and grinned. "I fix nerdy things. TVs, computers, phones-"

"VCRs?" Sarah asked hopefully.

"DVRs," Jack said giving her a flat look. The amused look on Sarah's face said she knew it wasn't a VCR but she enjoyed ribbing her dad. Chuck filed that away. That was good. That seemed healthy. That seemed what a father and daughter would do in a healthy relationship. It wasn't like he had one to compare it to since his father....OH CRAP! SPIRALING AGAIN!

"Yes," Chuck said.

“Well, it’s not really a DVR per se,” Sarah said, looking straight at Chuck, but grinning. Chuck wasn’t sure what was going on, but he could see Jack’s face, and the amusement on it told Chuck she was about to mess with him. “She knows how to use the DVR on her app, but she got a new box thing called a Roku?” Chuck nodded. The remote doesn’t have a button that send her to HBO Max, I think she said.” Chuck nodded again. “That where the show is she wants to watch.”

“So basically she needs a shortcut to her ‘stories’,” Jack said, amused.

“Yes...if you call Heated Rivalries a ‘story’,” Sarah replied grinning.

“Uh, how old is Mrs. Lewis?” Chuck asked.

“Can’t be a day over eighty,” Sarah replied, grinning at him.

“I’m missing something,” Jack insisted.

“It’s a love story about two hockey players that face off on the ice,” Sarah explained.

Jack was silent for a second. “Are these professionals?” Jack asked. Sarah nodded, glee on her face. “I’m missing something. What professional league allows women to play with men?”

“Who said anything about women?” Sarah asked.

“Oh?” Jack asked, amused. “Mrs. Lewis?”

“Women love that show,” Chuck told him. “So do a lot of men.”

“Good for her,” Jack said. He looked at Chuck. “Think you could help her Charlie?”

“That’s what I was wondering,” Chuck admitted. “I don’t have my full kit here, but this ‘box thing’,” he said with air quotes.

“Too technical?” Sarah asked.

“No, just the right amount,” Chuck teased, shocked at how easy it was to talk to her.

“Was it about this big?” He used his hands to show a small box.

“Yes!” Sarah said.

"Give me one second," Chuck requested, and headed to his car. He dug in the back for a second. "Ah-ha!" he said holding up a small remote. He dove back into his car and then came back up again. "Ah-ha!" he said holding a sheet of something.

"Are those stickers?" Jack asked, squinting.

"You need glasses," Sarah muttered.

"Respect your elders," Jack muttered back.

"Emphasis on elder," Sarah fired back, grinning at him, as he shook his head smiling.

Bryce had done right getting them back together. Chuck could plainly see it. Now, the method he took was akin to swimming the ocean, crossing Europe by foot, swimming another ocean, and crossing the US by foot to get from Echo Park to the Azusa foothills...but he had done right getting them back together.

"Sarah, do you think she'd be okay me helping her?" Chuck asked.

Sarah frowned for a second. "She's a fiesty one," Sarah admitted. "She might think she owes you something."

Chuck's brain misfired. "Mrs. Lewis?" Jack asked.

Sarah made a face. "You don't even want to know what she's been saying about you," Sarah muttered.

"Mrs. Lewis," Jack said, in a tone of appreciation, while Sarah shook her head in disgust.

}o{

"Thank you," Chuck said softly, about ten minutes later.

"For putting this sticker on the remote for you, or for not leaving you alone with Mrs. Lewis?" Sarah asked, concentrating on putting the sticker for HBO Max on the new remote for Mrs. Lewis perfectly.

"Both," Chuck replied, making her chuckle. "I mean...she said I was cute enough to be in the show." Sarah looked at him. "I'm not as good looking as those two."

"Do you watch Heated Rivalry?" Sarah asked, curious.

"It started out Ellie watched it, and I got drawn in," Chuck admitted. "It's a good story." Sarah went back to the sticker.

"I can never thank you enough," Mrs. Lewis said, handing Chuck the original remote as she returned to the room. "Are you sure you won't get in trouble?"

"No, I'll be fine," Chuck assured her. "I'll just turn this in, and we'll get it repurposed. I've got your signature on the sheet and I'll just fudge the date of the service."

"Thank you," Mrs. Lewis said. "I wasn't about to tell my son my problems, not after he's having to pay extra for me to watch my shows." Chuck gave her a confused look. "He buys the maximum plan, that's two hundred and thirty bucks a year, but then, because I don't live in his house, they charge me an extra eight dollars a month."

Sarah looked at Chuck, and saw him thinking. "That's robbery."

"Yeah," Chuck agreed. "You know, I've heard of some people doing things to get around this." The two women looked at him, as Chuck was looking at the form he had Mrs. Lewis sign, making some notations. "Some guy told me that what he did was make a gmail account that was only for his HBO Max account. He then gave the email address and password to everyone that used the app. That way, when they logged into the service, and it said 'where are you?' you hit, traveling, and it sends you a code to the email address, that everyone is able to access." Chuck was silent for a moment. "Some of the things these big companies do are very unethical, and who am I to judge them." He looked up at Mrs. Lewis who was typing on her phone. "What are you doing?"

"Texting my son," Mrs. Lewis said. Sarah laughed out loud.

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Forty-five minutes later, they were back at the farm, Chuck was cutting the avocados off the trees, the way Sarah had shown him so as not to damage the fruit or the trees.

"How'd it go with Mrs. Lewis?" Jack asked, as Sarah came out of the supply shed, with boxes adorned with the farm's logo.

“Great,” Sarah admitted. “He’s great with people, and he gave her a work-around for her son not to have to pay extra for her to watch TV.”

“Charlie?” Jack replied. “Didn’t see him as the type.”

“He’s about people, Dad,” Sarah said. “At least, that’s what I think after spending a little bit of time with him.”

“I’m not doubting your read on him,” Jack told her. “I’m just...” he shook his head.

“He’s about righting wrongs,” Sarah told Jack.

“You know what, that fits him,” Jack said, nodding. He glanced down at the boxes. “So, giving him the good boxes, huh?”

“Look, we’re producing nothing right now, we’ve paid for them, and who knows, maybe one of Ellie’s doctor friends will see them,” Sarah told him. Jack grinned. “Okay, so maybe he talks...a lot...” Jack laughed. “His sister, is Ellie, a neurosurgeon.”

“Not a bad idea, Darlin’,” Jack admitted. He looked over at Chuck working. “He’s not taking all of them.”

“Said he didn’t need them all,” Ellie told him. “I told him to give them to other people, and he said most of the people he knew didn’t appreciate fresh avocados.”

“I see,” Jack replied.

“What?” Sarah asked. Jack gave her a confused look. “Don’t give me that innocent, confused look, I have known you for a loooong time.”

“Don’t know that the long was necessary,” Jack muttered, making Sarah chuckle. “I just find him...different. In a good way. In a way I probably would have taken advantage of in another life.”

“Don’t,” Sarah said, pointing her finger at her dad. “You’re past all of that, and he’s a good guy.”

“I see,” Jack said, unable to keep the grin off of his face.

“No,” Sarah said, shaking her head. “I don’t need to date anyone.”

"Who said anything about dating?" Jack asked as he took the flat stare she gave him. "I didn't."

"Dad," she said softly, but the way she said it screamed at him. He held his hands up.

"Look, he's a nice guy, a different kind of guy, and a good guy," Jack said. "That's all I'm saying. I like him, and it's nice....being able to see someone good and not think about how to rip them off."

"Okay," Sarah said. "But that is all it had better be."

"I hear you," Jack told her. Sarah nodded, grabbed the boxes and headed toward Chuck. "But have you heard you?" he asked softly, grinning.

}o{

Chuck came home with three boxes of avocados. He insisted it was too many, Sarah insisted he take them, since he had done all the work. His sister only wanted about a quarter of one box, since they would go bad quickly. She said she could take the rest to the hospital, but Chuck found himself saying he would take care of the rest.

That night, found him in front of a computer, watching videos about how to make building repairs. How to install electrical outlets, run wiring, and how to hang lights. "Might be a bit above my ability," he muttered to himself. He was making a note to contact someone he had helped with a computer problem that was an electrician.

He found himself watching a plumbing video, and was pretty sure he could do that work. He sat back in his chair and thought about what Bryce had said.

See if she's okay.

She was. Her and her father were doing well in their relationship. They both seemed happy. He had done what his friend had asked. He had filled Bryce's dying wish. Chuck stood up. He wasn't an electrician, a plumber, and he damn sure wasn't a farmer.

See if she's okay.

She was okay...the farm her and her father were trying to run...

He went to get ready for bed, crawled in, and shut his eyes. Tomorrow he would get rid of the avocados, and everything he was supposed to do for Bryce would be done. He shut his eyes and saw her smile. He thought of how his hand felt when she shook it. He saw her giggle at his joke and push a strand of hair behind her ear.

He thought the night would take forever, and passed in an instant, all at the same time. He opened his eyes to see the sun peaking through the window. It was stupid early. The only people up at this time were... "The chickens," Chuck said softly. What in the hell was he doing? He had the morning off. He was going to have to work the rest of the weekend in the Buy More. He should go back to bed.

He found himself dressed, and carrying the boxes of avocados back out to his car. He got in, and drove, as if on autopilot. He had been to the Farmers Market Jack had told him about before. He found himself parking, getting out of the car, and walking toward the entrance with the boxes.

"Oh my gosh," a man about his age said. "You're actually here." Chuck looked around, wondering who he was talking to. "You guys are actually here. For YEARS I have been setting up your booth. When the name changed I thought, finally, they're coming."

"Are you talking to me?" Chuck asked, confused.

"You are with Just Out of Reach Farm, right?" the man asked, pointing toward the box.

"I am...kinda," Chuck replied.

"Great!" the man said, leading Chuck toward a booth. "Now, Jack said over the phone that if we would create the Venmo account for him and link it to the bank account number he gave me, you would link it to an email address."

"He did, did he?" Chuck said, putting down the boxes. The man sighed. "I can do that."

"Don't forget that you have to access it as well," the man reminded him.

"Okay," Chuck said, pulling out his phone and creating a gmail account. "It's getting around the per person fee on the HBO Max app all over again," he muttered to himself.

“So, how it works is real simple,” the young man told Chuck. “You just put in what the price of your avocados are, they put in how many, scan the code, pay you, we take our cut and Monday morning the money goes to your bank.”

“Any idea how much avocados are going for these days?” Chuck asked. The man gave him a look. “I usually just work on the farm, don’t do a lot of selling.” The man sighed, took the tablet, and typed something in.

“I just put in how much the other vendors sale theirs for,” the man told Chuck.

“Perfect,” Chuck told him. “Thank you, I’m Chuck.”

“Oh, Peter,” the man said, taking Chuck’s hand and shaking it. “And you don’t understand, this farm, it saved this market back in the day, and we are all so glad you’re a part of our little community.” He looked at the amount of avocados Chuck brought. “You won’t be here long.”

“Really?” Chuck asked. The guy grinned, nodded, and headed off. “Yeah, Jack would have scammed the shit out of that dude.” Someone walked up to buy an avocado and he greeted the customer.

}o{

It had taken an hour and a half to sell the avocados, and while it wasn’t a ton of money, Chuck thought it was a significant amount to go toward fixing the farm. Well, the building that would hold the workers. He had seen multiple other buildings that probably needed repairs, but hadn’t had a chance to look them over.

He was sitting at the Nerd Herd desk, contemplating what to do, when he found the phone receiver in his hand, and he had already begun dialing the number.

“Randy, Chuck Bartowski,” he said into the phone. “Look, I know you’re super busy, but there’s this farm that’s trying to fix some of their buildings, and I was wondering if you would do me a favor and give them an estimate of how much it would cost for you to rewire the place for them.” Chuck listened for a second. “No, not asking for a discount, just give them an honest estimate so they can figure out what they can afford.” He listened and grinned. “Great. Thank you.”

He hung up, a smile on his face. He felt himself being stared at, and turned. There stood his bearded friend.

"You were off, all day Friday and didn't work this morning," Morgan began.

"That's right," Chuck replied.

"I never saw you sign on any of your systems," Morgan continued.

"You know that's a little creepy, right?"

"Is it when you care?" Morgan asked. Chuck didn't know how to respond to that.

"You're...you're changing...back into him."

"Morgan, I've always been me," Chuck protested.

"No," Morgan disagreed. "I see it, Anna sees it, Jeff sees it." Chuck tilted his head and gave him a look. "Okay, Jeff doesn't see it, but to be fair I don't think Jeff sees anything in this dimension either."

"That's fair," Chuck agreed.

"Something is going on," Morgan said. He held up his hand before Chuck could speak.

"And it's a good thing." Morgan turned and walked away.

Chuck sat there a second, not sure what to do with all of that. He had done what he was supposed to. He had checked on Sarah...Bryce's girlfriend. He had sold the leftover avocados. He had found them a trusted electrician. Anything more...he'd be overstepping, and, he would be getting involved. And that could get him hurt. That could be dangerous. Sarah and her dad...they weren't normal. He had been a conman. He was going to run a halfway house. Chuck wasn't equipped for that. He wasn't.

He would work his shift today, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. He'd drive out to the farm Wednesday, give them their email account, and then be done with everything. He had filled Bryce's wish. Bryce didn't ask him to fix everything wrong with them. Chuck wished them well, but...this wasn't something Chuck knew how to help with...

Yes, he had watched YouTube videos but...him...build walls, and farm stuff...that wasn't him. Besides, why would they even want his help?

“Wednesday, I’m done,” he said. He didn’t like the way that made him feel, but...it was what was best. He submitted the paperwork for the work he did yesterday on Mrs. Lewis’s Roku

He was going to finish up with Sarah and Jack on Wednesday.

He was sure of it.

The problem was, he didn’t know that Monday morning, Jack got a notification that money had been added to his bank account from the Farmer’s Marker. He didn’t know how Jack had watched Chuck and Sarah.

Even if Chuck had known, he probably couldn’t have factored that into his decision.

No one really knew how to factor in Jack.

A/N: Look, he’s a hell of a dancer....

Chapter 5: Chapter 5

A/N: Now, I know in the past what my having Jack gets involved has meant. This...this will be different. He's still a hell of a dancer, just different

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth. It's a famous quote from Mike Tyson in 1987. He was the heavyweight champion of the world. His punching power was ridiculous. He was winning fights in seconds instead of rounds. And that quote from him was used constantly in the following years. Chuck Bartowski had a plan. What he hadn't counted on was Jack Burton.

Chuck had decided he was going to leave the farm alone. What in the world did he know about anything to do with a farm, or building, or even being outdoors really? He was a nerd. He didn't like his choice...but it was the only choice he thought that made logical sense, hence, his plan.

Jack Burton wouldn't call himself or his daughter Luddites, but....he did prefer things, "old school," and his daughter....well...Friendster wasn't exactly the newest piece of technology in town.

However Jack was also practical, and he knew that how the world worked. He knew he needed to know about online banking, cash apps, and notifications. He had taught himself everything he needed to know. When his phone gave him a notification Monday morning, he was quite sure what it was from. He was pleased with himself as he checked his banking app and saw a deposit by the Farmer's Market. He had been right about Charlie. The young man had taken a shine to not only his daughter, but at what he and his daughter were doing. He didn't know the details of Charlie's story...but that young man was the sort of person that Jack wanted to help. Someone who thought things were out of his reach.

Jack's mind had been working all weekend on what to do. Several times he had to remind himself this wasn't a con. He was gathering information, but not to con Charlie,

but to present the young man with a plan...an offer...one he couldn't refuse.

Not in the "you're gonna find a horse-head in your bed if you don't do what I say," way. But one that spoke to Charlie, and the things Charlie found important...and the fact it was clear Charlie was attracted to Jack's daughter didn't hurt one bit.

Jack told Sarah he had some things to take care of in town, and headed toward the truck. He didn't notice the look on her face, or even think about how he had barely left the farm since they had moved in, and never by himself. He was feeling alive. It wasn't about conning this time, but coming up with a foolproof plan. He loved a foolproof plan. That was the excitement. That was the rush. The money...that was just keeping score. Out thinking everyone, out witting everyone...that was where he felt alive.

A quick search on his phone that weekend had found where Charlie worked, that's how confident Jack was in what the young man was going to do with the avocados. Jack was sitting in the parking lot, an hour before the store open when he saw his target pull up and park his car. Jack watched him get out, look at the Buy More, look over at Large Mart, and then start to walk that direction. Jack got out of his truck and followed.

He watched Charlie go inside Large Mart and take pictures of tools and their costs. Then took pictures of lumber and the cost. Jack grinned. Charlie was trying to figure out how much it would cost to rebuild the buildings...what Sarah had been working on. He wondered if their costs would agree, and if they didn't what the differences were, and how the two would resolve them.

Jack didn't know exactly what had happened to his daughter in the CIA, but from the small things she said, he knew that she didn't think her former partner respected her opinion. In fifteen minutes of meeting Charlie and watching him with Sarah, it was clear Charlie respected Sarah's opinion, Jack's opinion, and anyone who actually made a common sense argument.

Jack could tell Charlie was smart...just not smart, but SMART. But he didn't think he was the know-it-all that most with that level of intellect did. Charlie listened to others, and appreciated where people pointed out flaws in his plans.

Through-out the day that fact was shown over and over. As he worked with what seemed to be the craziest people Jack had ever seen, he watched and listened as Charlie listened to his co-workers about things that could be improved. Now some of those were nuts, and Charlie smiled, and said he would look into it, being polite. But when there was a nugget of brilliance in that insanity, he thanked them, went to his boss about how to do something different, and gave the credit to the worker, and did not take it for himself.

Jack could not get over how kind he was. He watched Charlie listen to a child talk non-stop about his favorite dinosaur while he fixed a phone for a mother. And just when Jack thought the mother was about to die from embarrassment of her child, Charlie asked the child a follow up question about the dinosaur. The look the mother gave him of gratitude...and the fact Charlie didn't take advantage of said look..Jack shook his head and grinned. This was a good kid.

It was clear Charlie had ideas. When there were no customers, Charlie was working on something. And when Charlie was called away from the counter, Jack made his way over, looked at the paper, and turned to leave. He smiled getting in his truck. Charlie was writing out a cost analysis of rebuilding the buildings on the farm. He didn't know who Randy was, but it looked like to Jack he was an electrician. He went home, lost in his own world, coming up with the perfect way to approach Charlie the next day, and missed his daughter studying him.

The next morning, Jack told Sarah he had some business in town, got in the truck, and left. He was caught up in his thoughts, but even if he wasn't, he wouldn't have noticed his CIA trained daughter tailing him. He got to the Buy More, waited for Charlie to get there, for it to open, and went inside. He walked up to the Nerd Herd desk, and waited for Charlie to look up at him. "Take a walk with me," he said to the taller, curly-haired man. Charlie nodded, stood, and followed him. They got away from everyone, standing in front of appliances so it looked like Charlie was talking to a customer.

"I got a notification from the bank Monday," Jack began. He couldn't help but grin as he saw the look on Chuck's face. "It's okay, I knew you would sell those avocados. You see, Charlie," he said, putting a hand on the younger man's shoulder. "I think you feel the

same way my daughter and I do. You think the life you want is out of reach. You think you're stuck and there's nothing you can do."

"Sir," Charlie began.

"Let me finish," Jack insisted. "You and her, you make quite the pair. I talked to Mrs. Lewis. She told me how you two were. A well-oiled unit she said. She's great getting things done, and you," he squeezed Charlie's shoulder. "You think outside the box. You think about getting things done in ways no one ever has, and the two of you working together...the amount of people you could help...come work for us."

"Sir," Charlie began again.

"I know, you think there's no money to hire you, but here's the thing, the way the inheritance worked, there's a separate pool of money to hire people that aren't family," Jack told him. "It was probably to keep me from doing something with it I shouldn't, and we both know...I probably would have." "That's great but-" Chuck tried again.

"You and my daughter...you're perfect partners," Jack said and grinned as the young man's face began to pinken. "Come work for us. We'll pay you fairly, it will be hard work, but I promise you, and I mean this promise. It will be worth it. You and her together...you'll be unstoppable." He watched as Charlie looked...almost defeated, and Jack felt confused. "Okay, now what did you want to say. I'm listening." Charlie had a sorrowful look on his face. He simply pointed behind Jack, and that's when he felt it. The eyes boring in to him.

Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth

"She's behind me, isn't she?" Jack asked, but he was already nodding, knowing the answer. Charlie nodded once. "Yes, Sir." Jack turned, and saw his daughter with a thundercloud on her face.

See, Jack Burton had a plan. What he hadn't counted on was Sarah Walker.

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When Jack had walked in, Chuck had finally put into words into his own head what he had been thinking. The past few days and what he had been dealing with after meeting Sarah and Jack had awoken something in him he thought was broken. He had cared about other people since Stanford. He had tried to do the right thing since Stanford. But what he hadn't done was go out of his comfort zone or safe space.

He could have found any number of jobs with or without his degree, but to do so would have made him venture into the real world. He didn't want that. Out there lay...people...expectations...new relationships...something he didn't know if he were capable of. At the Buy More, it was safe...as long as he ate nothing in the crisper in the fridge.

He was jealous of Jack and Sarah.

Both of them had dealt with things much worse than his issues at Stanford and Jill. Unlike him, they were doing something about it, they were making changes. Trying to make the world better.

He really wanted to be a part of it. He wanted to start over. He wanted to learn to trust people again.

Sarah had been screwed by Bryce. He shook his head trying to keep the double entendre out of his head. Instead of retreating like Chuck had, she went back to her father. Her and her father's relationship were nothing like Chuck and Ellie's. While Chuck and Ellie had done nothing but support each other, Sarah had been taken advantage of by her father. He had done a little digging each night on Jack and his past, and had found Jack had been accompanied by a little blond girl in many of his schemes when Sarah was a child.

And now here she was, back and trying to fix things, and help others. And what was Chuck doing? Hiding.

So when Jack showed up, Chuck thought it was the universe giving him one last shot. Chuck was trying to figure out how to ask Jack to join him and his daughter as Jack began his speech. What Jack hadn't seen was Sarah walk in, and see them. Chuck had

watched her set her jaw and began to stride toward them. Chuck was listening, and somehow heard the words, but walking toward HIM with purpose, was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

She wasn't in some red...or salmon dress. She wasn't in some stupid Wienerlicious costume. She was simply dressed in sensible boots for working on a farm. Blue jeans, a white tee shirt with a flannel shirt over it, probably to protect her arms from the sun, and a baseball hat with her pony tail pulled through the back. He thought it was a Detroit Tigers baseball cap, which also made him wonder did she drive a red Ferrari 308 GTS, but he shoved that thought to the side because he thought his brain would explode if she were also a private eye. He didn't know if he had seen someone more beautiful in his entire life.

She walked up just as Jack was talking about Mrs. Lewis and the money Jack could use to pay Chuck, and Chuck saw her face turn into a thundercloud. He understood. For her father to insinuate the two of them together...he completely understood.

As Jack turned, Chuck wished for the earth to open up and just swallow him whole, because the rejection he was about to get, even though it wasn't his fault, was going to be absolutely humiliating.

"I had *one* condition on coming back here," Sarah began her voice low. Chuck thought the temperature had dropped to negative numbers in the room. He had never been more frightened for a human being in his life than he was for Jack. Sometime later, he would also admit he found the whole thing extremely hot, and would spend many a hour thinking about that.

"No. Cons," she continued. "And here you are, trying to rope him in...another account to pay him." She scoffed. "Dad, I trusted you."

Jack glanced at Chuck who didn't have the ability at that time to form words. He sighed, knowing it was going to be his word, and he knew what his word held in his daughter's world right now.

"Darlin', I can explain," Jack began.

"You don't leave the farm by yourself the entire time, and the first time you do, is to come con him?" Sarah asked. "I'm in charge of the money. I know how much we have. I don't even get how this one works, which is on me. I should have known. God, Dad, I TRUSTED you."

Jack turned to Chuck. "Sorry, Charlie," he said simply. He turned, gestured toward the door, and the two began to walk away.

Chuck knew, right there, the rest of his life hung in the balance. "Sarah," he tried to say, the words freezing in his throat. He cleared it. "Sarah." She stopped and turned toward him. "He didn't con me." He was watching Sarah, but couldn't help notice the pride on Jack's face. Chuck gathered himself. "He...he came to thank me, and said I reminded him of you and your dad. That...that I think my dreams...everything...are just out of reach."

Sarah didn't say anything, she just watched him.

Chuck swallowed and continued. "I...I got kicked out of Stanford for something I didn't do. I almost had my degree...anyway, I got kicked out five years ago, and I've been hiding here." He took a deep breath and continued, on a roll. For the first time in his life he felt like he was telling the story to someone who wasn't family or friend, but also cared. "And my girlfriend...the person who...who I loved. Who I thought I would marry and raise super smart kids and let them wear capes and be superheroes...she didn't believe me. She said she had cheated on me."

He looked around. "So, I came here...and hid. I hid from the world. I hid from real people, real relationships. I hid from getting hurt." He was silent and then continued, his voice much softer. "I hid from life."

He set his jaw, his eyes glassy. "And then...then my sister asked me to go get some avocados, and I meet two people who life...life hasn't been the best to either, has it?" Sarah shook her head in confirmation. "And I see them *trying*. I see them trying something that is clearly out of their wheelhouse...and yet...isn't." Sarah looked over at her dad, and started to say something. He gave her a smile and shook his head. They both turned back to Chuck.

“For the first time since Stanford, I took a chance. I went to the Farmer’s Market on Saturday and sold all the left over avocados, put the money in your farm’s bank account and...and it felt right.” Sarah eyes were studying him, but it wasn’t someone looking for an opportunity to bully him or make fun of him. Chuck knew those looks. This...this was something he wasn’t sure what it was. He had an idea, but that...that wasn’t possible.

“And I found myself making a phone call to an electrician and pricing wood and tools and...and I found myself wanting to be a part of something, and I never have before...at least not since Stanford,” Chuck finished. “I want to...I want to help.”

“Chuck,” Sarah began. She turned to her dad. “There’s another account?”

“Yep,” Jack replied. “And don’t worry, Darlin’, you have every right to think what you did. I should have told you, I just...I got caught up in my plans.” She raised an eyebrow. “I know...I know...old habits.”

“I understand those,” Sarah said. “I may have leapt to a conclusion.”

“May have,” Jack muttered. Sarah gave him a look. “As I said, given my history...fair.”

“I’m sorry,” Chuck blurted out. They both looked at him. “I...I sold those avocados without telling you. I started making phone calls and trying to figure things out...and it wasn’t my place.”

“You should see his spreadsheet,” Jack said to Sarah.

“A spreadsheet?” Sarah asked, raising an eyebrow and turning to Chuck. “What time do you get off work today?”

“Five,” Chuck answered, no idea where this was going.

“Let me go review some paperwork with my dad...not that I don’t trust him,” Sarah began.

“Trust, but verify,” Jack said to Chuck, making him grin. Sarah gave her dad a look and both men sobered quickly.

“And then, why don’t you and I have dinner to talk about it?” Sarah finished.

"Just the two of you?" Jack asked. Sarah turned to him. "Which I think is smart, because, I seem to just muck things up. Will you look at that..." he said, looking at...well, probably nothing, and just walking off to get away from the two.

"Sorry about him," Sarah said to Chuck, shaking her head as Jack walked away. "He's...I don't know what he is now. He's not the same...but he is...but he isn't."

"Prison?" Chuck asked.

"No, not in the way you mean," Sarah said. "He's...I don't know...my mom talked to him while he was inside, and it changed something in him. Which, she tried to talk to him for years but...it didn't do any good."

"Probably because he had to listen and couldn't go do something to tune her out," Chuck said. Sarah looked at him. "Sorry-"

"No," Sarah said, shaking her head. "That's...insightful, and probably true." She shook her head, trying to get her thoughts back that had been through the wringer the past few hours. "So, where's a good place to meet for dinner?" Chuck couldn't help but grin. "So, how do you feel about Mexican?"

A/N: I kinda think she likes Mexican. Just sayin.

Chapter 6: Chapter 6

A/N: Sorry for the delay. Life. It's been awful. Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

Chuck watched the two walk out of the store, his head spinning. "DUDE!" he heard behind him. His eyes went wide. He realized where he had the previous conversation at with Sarah and her father, and who all heard him. He hadn't said the best things about the Buy More. Chuck turned to see the entire crew behind him, including Big Mike, being led by Morgan Grimes. "Uh, look, I'm sorry, I-" "I'm assuming this is your two weeks notice?" Big Mike asked. "You're firing me?" Chuck asked. "I mean, I know what I said wasn't the nicest." "Where was the lie?" Lester asked. "Wasn't one," Big Mike agreed. "No, I'm not firing you, son. Well, not yet." Chuck gulped. "If you turn down that job I will." "She's not offered me anything, yet," Chuck began. "You sly dog," Lester said, grinning. "I knew you had it in you." Everyone turned to Lester, glaring. He swallowed, and the grin fell off of his face. "And by had it in you, I meant you had the ability to do so much more than just work here." "No," Anna said, glaring at him. "You were trying to make a sex joke about not being offered anything yet." Lester started to protest, but the glare intensified from Anna. "You're right." "Look," Chuck said, trying to keep from witnessing a homicide. "I don't know if there is a job for me, but what I do know is there are computers in the back that need fixing unless someone..." he trailed off, because everyone but Big Mike had fled. "That was well done," Big Mike said. "Take off early to make sure you're ready." "Sir," Chuck began. "If you aren't dressed respectably your sister will kill me," Big Mike told him. "She scares me." "Me too," Chuck agreed as Big Mike walked away. }o{ He was in the back, by himself, thinking about the USB that Bryce had sent him that was now attached to his keys. After getting over the shock of Bryce's admission, he had looked deeper into the USB, and had found multiple files and videos. He couldn't help but think of one he had watched a few nights ago at this moment. *"Glad you looked deeper," Bryce said to the camera. "I knew you would." There was a grin on his face, and a look of sadness at the same time. "Man, what a team we would have made." He sighed, the sigh of a man who knew he had made a terrible mistake. "So, I need to tell you about Sarah...that was the name she was using in the*

CIA." He found it interesting she had kept that name. He also wondered how Bryce hadn't found Sarah. He didn't have the skills Chuck did, but he did have skills. "You know how you loved James Bond? Well, that's kinda how her life is." Chuck grinned. "And I'm not saying she had men all the time the way Bond had women. I'm saying, her life was always in danger." The grin had fell from Chuck's face. "You know the song by Johnny Rivers, Secret Agent Man?" Chuck couldn't help but nod, even though he knew Bryce couldn't see him. *Bryce grinned and began to sing There's a woman who leads a life of danger To everyone she meets she stays a stranger With every move she makes another chance she takes Odds are she won't live to see tomorrow He stopped singing. "She was recruited by Graham, and made his personal weapon. She has many names in the agency. She's talked about like someone you both admire, and are scared shitless of."* Chuck was quiet, processing all of this. "She's know as The Ice Queen, and The Wildcard Enforcer." *Bryce paused. "I've seen enemies go to pieces just mentioning that she was on their trail. She's the absolute best, and instead of being used sparingly, Graham used her like a club. He used her constantly. She was constantly on assignments. She never had any downtime, and when she did..."* he trailed off and shook his head. Chuck hit pause, and thought about the woman he had met and spent time with. Joking with him about her eighty plus year old neighbor, and the look of thankfulness on her face as Chuck had helped her. "She didn't deserve that," he muttered, referring to what Graham had done to her. He hit play. *Bryce resumed singing. Secret agent woman, secret agent woman They've given you a number and taken away your name "That's what they did Chuck," Bryce said softly. "Well, not the number, that's a James Bond thing, but they took away her name. First her father had her use different names to protect him and her in their cons, and then the agency made her someone different each mission."* Chuck thought about the remorse in Jack's voice when they had talked the day they met about his past. "She never sees anyone in a mental health capacity," Bryce told him. "She has to get close to people, not sex," he added quickly. "She has this ability to get close to people without needing that. She's...she's the best." It was clear to Chuck that Bryce both respected her as a person and an agent. "Then why the hell did you sleep with all those women?" Chuck muttered, shaking his head at what his friend had done. *Bryce resumed singing. Beware of pretty*

*faces that you find A pretty face can hide an evil mind Ah, be careful what you say or you'll give yourself away Odds are you won't live to see tomorrow "Now to be fair, most of our marks are not pretty," Bryce began. Chuck couldn't help but snort. "But, to get our target to open up, you have to establish a relationship," Bryce said, the smile gone from his face. "You have to promise things...you have to do things to gain trust. You have to give up a small part of you..." "Did you really love your job?" Chuck asked softly. "It's one thing to do this...on a limited basis," Bryce continued, his voice soft, regret on his face. "But, Sarah...Sarah was doing this stuff constantly, and...and she was losing her. Hell, she once said she wasn't even sure who she was." He shook his head. "I'm going to skip to the third verse. He began to sing again. Swingin' on the Riviera one day And then layin' in the Bombay alley next day Oh no, you let the wrong word slip while kissing persuasive lips The odds are you won't live to see tomorrow There was no grin this time, there was no humor. There was only a man who was tired. Who was clearly worn down. "One minute, we're at these ritzy places, having the time of our lives, and then next, we're in the worst place in the world. It makes Mos Eisley look like a kid's playground." Chuck blinked at that. "It's why I have to do this," Bryce said softly. "It's why I have to end him." Bryce looked away and then back to the camera. "I got her out, but how many more are there? How many more have been done like her? Hell, I'm feeling the burnout, and I've not been through half of what she has." He was quiet again. "And, if you're seeing this, I got reckless because this had to end, and...." Bryce shook his head. "Help her, Chuck. You're her only hope." "You're not Leia," Chuck muttered, reaching over and turning off the video, but he understood exactly what Bryce was saying. }o{ Morgan made his way through Westside Medical, on a mission. He felt like he was in the *Blues Brothers*. This wasn't a mission from God...no, this was from Big Mike, who wasn't a God, but did control if Morgan got fired or not. It was also...it was also a mission that he felt Ellie would appreciate. Ellie had to know. She had to have seen it the past few days. Chuck was changing. He was changing and for the better. Back to who he was before....before.... "And I quote," Morgan said softly to himself. "Per Ellie, that *Snollygoster, fopdoodle Zounderkite!*" Morgan shook his head. He had to look those words up and he found Ellie was pretty much right on this...as she often was. "What are you doing here?" He heard the hiss behind him. Morgan winced. He wasn't*

supposed to come to her place of work unless it was an absolute emergency, and sandwich emergencies didn't count...regardless of how much he protested they should. "He's got a date," Morgan blurted out, as he spun toward Ellie. She narrowed her eyes at him. "Morgan, for the last time, Devon loves me, he doesn't have anyone else, and even if he did, I wouldn't date you if you were the last man on earth." "Okay, those words, were hurtful, and unnecessary," Morgan began. "Were they?" Ellie asked. "But I'm not here about Devon," Morgan told her, pressing on, not having time to win her over at that moment. "I respect the rules too much." The look on her face said she did NOT believe him. "HE has a date." Ellie stood there, confusion on her face. Who else would Morgan care about having a date? There was only one person he would, AND would satisfy him being at her place of work, per the rules. "Chuck?" she asked in the most shocked, wishful voice that there ever was. "And she's beautiful," Morgan continued. "Her name is Sarah." "Sarah?" Ellie asked, recognizing the name but not from where. "And apparently her father wants him to work on their farm," Morgan continued. He stepped back as Ellie's eyes went wide. "Wait," Ellie said, reaching out to steady herself with one hand, and her other hand going to her chest. She needed a second. Had he actually...had Chuck actually...met someone while getting avocados? She couldn't help herself. She began to laugh. Morgan watched, puzzlement on his face as his dream woman belly laughed and looked happier than he had seen her look in a long time. }o{ What did you wear to dinner with your potential employer who also was the ex-girlfriend of your college best friend slash nemesis? Chuck looked at himself in the mirror. Button up, nice jeans, and his Chucks. He shook his head. He really wasn't sure what he was doing, but he had to go do this. He had to see if there was more...more to life. What had started as a computer hunt for a woman and her father had turned into flipping his life upside down. Chuck had been thinking all afternoon. IF he were truly offered a job, he'd probably have to live on the farm, and that would be considered part of his pay. He wasn't making that much at the Buy More, so as long as he had a little money, there wasn't anything he owed. His biggest concern moving there...internet...or lack thereof. "Looking good, little brother," Ellie said from the doorway. He turned to her, not expecting her to be there. "Really, you're surprised? Morgan told me." "How did you get out of your shift?" Chuck asked. "I'm the one always taking other people's

shifts," Ellie told him. "When my little brother is finally going on a date after all this time...you call in a few favors." "El, not a date," Chuck told her. "It's literally a business dinner." He watched her for a moment, and he saw her assessing him. She finally nodded, walked over, sat on the bed, patted the spot beside her, and spoke. "Tell me about it," she said softly. "They are trying to change people's lives," Chuck said, sitting down beside his sister. "They are trying to turn the farm into a halfway house for those that get out of prison." "So the farm doesn't necessarily need to turn a profit," Ellie said, nodding. "There's money from the state." Chuck nodded. "I think that's how it works," he admitted. "I've studied it a bit, but without knowing their plans..." he trailed off. "But what we're doing is giving people a second chance in life. A chance to build a resume. Yeah, it's manual labor, and hard work but there's something about growing something and being proud of it." "Yeah, there is," Ellie said. Chuck rolled his eyes and shook his head. "Listen, I know, you're my brother, but I did kinda raise you." "I know," Chuck kidded, with a grin on his face. "God, don't I knooooooooow." She shoulder bumped him. "And..." he sobered as he gathered his thoughts. "Since I got kicked out of Stanford, I've been adjacent to my skills at the Buy More. I mean, I haven't done any work on programs and stuff, but...I've been right there next to it with all the things I do with the Nerd Herd." "And getting away from it completely might not be a bad idea," Ellie said. "For a while at least." "Yeah," Chuck said nodding. "Anything else I should know?" Ellie asked. Chuck gave her a look. "Chuck, something changed that night when you got that package from Bryce." "He's dead, Ellie," Chuck told her. "It was time for me to move on." "Uh-huh," she said, nodding. Chuck started to protest and she held up her hand. "Nope, you don't want to, or don't feel you should share it, and I'm not going to push." He gave her a grateful smile. "Now, do me a favor, don't go charming the pants off of your business dinner date tonight, because that might be an HR violation," she said, getting up, heading to the door grinning. "ELLIE!" he said, a shocked smile on his face. "Chuck...you like her," Ellie said, a soft smile on her face. "That doesn't matter," Chuck replied. He saw the happy look on her face. "What?" "You didn't disagree with me." He groaned. "Just remember, Jill...don't make other people pay for her sins." "I won't," Chuck promised. "But Ellie...this is about changing lives." Her smile grew. "I know," she replied. Chuck shook his head, but couldn't stop the grin on his face. "Be yourself." }o{

Sarah walked out of her room, ready for dinner, and rolled her eyes at the look her father gave her. "You trying to offer the boy a job or give him a heart attack?" Jack asked, grinning. "Is there something wrong with my dress?" Sarah asked. "Darlin' you know damn good and well there is nothing wrong with that dress, and going forward when I ask him what his favorite color is, I'm gonna bet if he doesn't say purple, he's going to think it," Jack replied, grinning at her. "Look, I said we were going to dinner, and I thought I should dress nice and be appropriate," Sarah replied, ignoring what Jack was implying, but filed it away inside, and suppressing a grin. "He's not going to turn you down," Jack said softly. "He does seem to want to work here," Sarah agreed, checking her hair in the mirror. "Wasn't talking about the job," Jack replied. Sarah turned to him, and he held up his hands. "Just sayin' darlin'." "Dad, I'm not trying to date anyone," Sarah insisted. Jack gave her a look. "I'm not." "Did you tell that dress that?" Jack asked. "Okay, fine, I'll change," Sarah huffed, and started back to her room. "I bet your mom wishes she could see you right now, just like this," Jack said softly. She stopped in her tracks and turned toward him. "Her beautiful little girl, trying to act like she doesn't care what some guy thinks about her, wanting him to come work with her, but wanting...more." "Dad," Sarah tried to begin. "He's a good guy," Jack went on. "The kind of guy a father would want his daughter to have in her life." The look on Sarah's face softened. "The kind of guy you know that would make sure she knew she was special. The kind of guy that would put her first." Jack was quiet for a second. "The kind of guy that wouldn't do the stupid stuff I did." "How about, I agree, I wouldn't hate it if he noticed me in this dress," Sarah began. "And YOU try and stay out of whatever love life I do or do not have." "So if you bring him home tonight, I shouldn't be cleaning my shotgun?" Jack asked, grinning. Sarah laughed out loud. "Do you really think he'd like the dress?" Sarah asked. Jack had never seen her like this. "I don't think he cares about what you wear, darlin'," Jack told her. "He's met you, and seen the beautiful woman you are inside." "He doesn't know who I am," Sarah rebutted. "Didn't you tell me my past didn't define me?" Jack asked, reminding her what she had said to him when she found him after his release from prison. "Didn't you tell me it mattered what I was doing now, trying to do?" "Well, that's not fair," Sarah huffed, grinning at him. "You throwing my own words at me." "The joys of parenting," Jack replied. "Come 'ere," he said, holding

out his arms. She hugged him. "Now go on, knock his socks off, get him to take the job, and if you do bring him home, make sure he knows that has nothing to do with his employment." She pushed him away good-naturedly, grinning at him. "I'm not planning on mixing business with....that." "Did you tell that dress that?" Jack asked. She shook her head as she turned and left. Jack stood there. "What the hell does she think is gonna happen when he takes the job and lives here?" He laughed, knowing what was about to happen to the two of them.A/N: How does he know? Does he know I'm writing this?

Chapter 7: Chapter 7

A/N: I know, you're mad at me for making Bryce a good guy. Well...get madder. :)

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck Chuck found himself sitting in the parking lot. He had checked the address twice to make sure this was the place the two had agreed on. He had gotten there thirty minutes early. He normally wasn't like this, but today...today it seemed to matter. He sat in the car for ten minutes, gave up, and went inside. He had watched another video from Bryce before he left and it had left Chuck...bothered. }o{ Bryce was still in the green walled apartment, this time there was a sadness on his face that tore at Chuck's heart. *"She was forced into the CIA," Bryce said. He looked away for a second, and when he turned back his jaw was set. "They made her into a weapon, Chuck. She was an assassin for Graham. She did the jobs that no one should do, alone. She took out terrible people, and lived, when many others didn't." He was quiet for a second. "There was a night...we were lying in bed...after."* "Didn't need to know that," Chuck muttered. *"And she asked me something," Bryce continued.*

"Something...something that broke something inside of me. She asked me why was she the one that survived every mission. She asked me how could anyone love her after the things she had done." "Bryce," Chuck said softly, a wince on his face. *"I loved her...I did...but...I couldn't say it," Bryce admitted. "I should have, but...she knew...she knew we weren't forever."* He blew out a breath. *"She had no one and I was...I won't say convenient but I will say I was a human teether...as well as a CIA agent can be one."* Chuck didn't say anything, but he hurt for both of them. *"She made the world we lived in safer, and she thought she was the bad person?" Bryce said, shaking his head. "So, I tried to make her feel better, and I don't know if I did. I told her, 'It's not fair some of us don't come out of this job alive. All we can do is pay that debt for those that lost their lives by living a well lived life.'"* "That's kinda deep," Chuck muttered to himself. *"I'm pretty sure that's the night I decided to help her. To stop Graham," Bryce explained. "She deserved so much better. I loved her, I did, but...I don't know if she loved me, or if she did, it was the kind of love that was necessary to overcome everything she had been through."* Bryce looked into the camera. *"Chuck...if you find her."* He paused. *"Please,*

make sure she's at least trying to live." "I will, Buddy, I will," Chuck said softly. }o{ She pulled up fifteen minutes early, checked herself in the mirror, got out, and found herself scouting the perimeter. She stopped herself. She was no longer a con-artist. She was no longer a CIA agent. She was a civilian...and she wasn't sure if she was ever going to figure out how to be JUST a civilian, but tonight, tonight was about trying to be one. That's why she was wearing the purple dress. So far, she liked Chuck Bartowski. She had pushed aside the urge to do a deep dive background check on him, but the urge did still remain. She also had to admit to herself putting on the purple dress wasn't just because she liked him. It was something he had said. *And I see them trying. I see them trying something that is clearly out of their wheelhouse...and yet...isn't.* Her and her father were trying and the fact Chuck could see they were trying...that wasn't what most men would have seen. Because they wouldn't have been looking at that. They wouldn't have been looking at two people trying to make something work that they both had previously thought had been unfixable. In the time she spent with Chuck Bartowski it had become clear to Sarah that he was different than just about anyone she had ever met. And if she had met anyone like him, they hadn't affected her the way he had. He was good looking. She had seen many good looking men before. If she were honest, some that were better looking. He was tall. She wasn't aware of how she felt about anyone being tall. Maybe it was him being tall that she noticed. His hair...she was pretty sure she had never seen anyone with hair just doing whatever the hell it had wanted to like that. She felt herself giggle and wondered if she had since that day her father had been arrested. She looked at the front door of the restaurant and knew she was early. Agent Walker was never early. She was either right on time or fashionably late. Sarah Walker, the woman...she was nervous, and she was going through those doors, being early, because she didn't want to wait outside anymore. She wanted to see him walk in. She pushed open the door. }o{ She couldn't help but grin as she walked in and saw him talking to the host. "Right, table for two, but some place private, not romantic private, but private so we can talk. It's about business. A farm." "Okay," the host said, a little wide-eyed. "And I'm guessing she's not here," Chuck continued, oblivious she was behind him. "Why would you say that?" the host asked. "Man, if you saw her...you'd know her," Chuck told him. Sarah couldn't help but smile. The host saw her, looked at

Chuck, and then back at her. "She's...beautiful doesn't begin to describe her." "Do you know what she's wearing?" the host asked, unable to believe the woman behind the man he was talking to was his date. "No idea," Chuck admitted. "When I saw her earlier today she had been dressed to be on the farm." "Well, okay," the host said, nodding. There was no way the woman in purple behind this guy worked on a farm. "Chuck," Sarah said. Chuck spun around and she watch his eyes widen and his jaw go slack. She heard him utter a word, and she don't know if she had felt more complimented in her entire life. "Wow," he muttered. She watched him as he tried to form sentences. "It's her," he said, pointing to her. The host looked impressed. "Wow, Sarah...I'm so sorry," he said, as it appeared his mind finally quit locking up and he found the ability to use his words. "I feel terribly under dressed." "You look perfect," Sarah said with a shrug. She felt her eyes go wide. What in the hell? Agent Walker would never say something like that. Never. Sarah Walker apparently didn't have a filter. Who knew? "If you two will follow me, so you can have your...business dinner," the host said, wondering if these two thought they were fooling anyone. "You ready?" Chuck asked. Sarah nodded, and Chuck offered her his arm. She took it, grinning at him. "Her and her father are running a farm," Chuck told the host as they followed him. "They're trying to help people get back on their feet." "How would a farm do that?" the host asked, not really that curious, but also puzzled how a farm would do that. "It's a halfway house," Sarah told him. The host nearly stopped walking, and stumbled, trying to imagine a woman that looked like her, working in a halfway house. "Okay," the host said, guiding them to their booth. Chuck motioned to the near side for her to sit, and Chuck sat across from her. "Your waiter will be here in a second." He looked as though he wanted to say more but decided that he already knew too much and left. "I'm sorry about earlier," Chuck blurted out. "You look stunning, and I look like-" "No," Sarah cut him off. "We're not going to do that." Chuck's eyes were wide. "We're not going to put ourselves down, Chuck. That's not how you're going to do if you work with dad and I. He and I have worked very hard not to do that anymore." "Sounds like there's a story there," Chuck said softly. "Not that it's any of my business." "We have both done things we're not proud of," Sarah told him. "Carrying all of...that...it doesn't accomplish anything." "Sounds like you don't want to be a baggage handler," Chuck said with a grin. It was at that moment the server showed up with

water, chips, complementary salsa, and menus. Chuck thanked the waiter, opened his menu as Sarah took a chip. "I have no problem be a baggage handler to necessary baggage," Sarah said, pausing before dipping her chip into the salsa. She dipped it as Chuck looked up from the menu and to her. "Life is hard enough without things that don't matter, you know?" "Personal popshots?" Chuck asked, grinning. "Exactly," Sarah told him. "I truly appreciate the compliment about the dress, it seemed genuine." "Well, genuine is something I do," Chuck told her. "Hell, it's all I do." Chuck quickly held his hands up in defense. "And that's not a popshot at me, it's just the absolute truth." "That is something I believe," Sarah told him, grinning. She was quiet for a moment. "Do you know why you want to be a part of the farm?" "I think," Chuck told her. "You two are doing meaningful work." He paused a second. "It's not saving the world, but it's changing someone's life and maybe their family's." "I hope so," Sarah said, nodding. "I lost my family." Chuck sat there, not sure what to say. "What my father did...it cost us everything." "My mom left us," Chuck said softly. Sarah didn't say a word, she just sat there, actively listening. "She left, and dad...dad physically stayed and then...then he left." Sarah's mouth dropped. "My sister, Ellie...she had to raise me in the end." He looked her right in the eye. "Ellie was seventeen, and...." Chuck shook his head. It was then, he thought he saw someone...watching them. He was tall, well built, and if pressed, Chuck would say he had a jaw made of granite. Chuck also found the man...familiar but couldn't place him. "The one I talked to about avocados, right?" Sarah asked. Chuck nodded, looking back at Sarah. Sarah shook her head. "There were times I practically had to raise myself, but a younger sibling on top of it." There was a look on her face that Chuck couldn't place. One of....sorrow? Shame? He started to say something when he again noticed the big man...closer. "That's baggage that is necessary," Sarah said to him. He looked up at her, a grin on his face. "Did you just offer to be my baggage handler?" Chuck asked. She snorted at that, and Chuck found himself wondering did Bryce ever hear her snort. He was again distracted by the large man, and at that point, he remembered what Sarah had done in the past for a living. His mind wondered if maybe this was someone...looking to right a perceived wrong? He had to warn her. "Sarah, do you know a man...six foot twoish? Solidly built, and a chin...some might say is like granite?" "That's oddly specific," Sarah said, confused. "There's a guy

watching us that-" Chuck began, when Sarah suddenly picked up a spoon with her far hand and started messing with her hair with her near hand. "Your hair is perfect," he blurted out. She grinned, and laid down the spoon. "I mean-" "I was using it to see who it was behind us," Sarah said. "Old trick I learned." Her grin grew. "Perfect huh?" She glanced at his hair. "Oh, so, you're going to use what my hair does, against me, to say I can't recognize perfection when I see it?" Chuck teased. "I need you to hold that thought, because I'm pretty sure that guy is on his way over here to talk to me, I'm assuming," Sarah said. "Are you in danger?" Chuck asked. She grinned. "Why do I feel that was a stupid question?" "Not a stupid question, just one that you don't have all the facts on yet," Sarah told him. She turned as the man approached her. "Sarah Walker," the tall man asked, but it wasn't really a question. It was clearly a statement. "I am," she told him. "And you are?" "John Casey, NSA," he said. "May I have a moment of your time?" "I am having dinner," Sarah told him. "I apologize for interrupting your date," Casey began. "Not a date," Chuck rushed out. "It's...a business dinner," he said, faltering a bit as the big man glared at him. Casey made a grunting noise. "Not that it's any of your business." Casey raised an eyebrow. "Sorry, Sarah," he said to her. "Wasn't my place to butt in." She sat there, an amused look on her face. "As I said, I'm having dinner, and when my date and I are through." She didn't dare look at Chuck's eyes bugging out of his head, or she wouldn't be able to finish what she was saying. "We might go elsewhere, so I might have time to see you tomorrow." "I have important business of the United States government to conduct," Casey said. "Why don't you sit down and talk to her," Chuck said, scooting over. "People are beginning to stare." "It's need to know," Casey said, glaring at Chuck. "Well, right now I'm at dinner, so if my date can't know." Again, she refused to look at Chuck as she said that. "Then I guess we are through." "I just wanted pancakes," Casey muttered. Chuck gave him a confused look. "Once I finish this I was going to go have pancakes." "So sit," Chuck said, gesturing again. Casey rolled his eyes and sat down. "This is comfy," Chuck said, the two men sitting beside each other. Casey glared at Chuck and then turned to Sarah. "As you know the CIA director was removed," Casey told Sarah. "I've heard," Sarah said. "You know, this doesn't concern me," Chuck said. "I could leave." "Stay," Sarah said, never taking her eyes off of Casey. Casey raised an eyebrow. He said nothing, but the

eyebrow remained raised. "There were some improprieties found," Casey continued, and slid a folder across the table to her. "Will you be joining the couple?" The waiter said, coming up to the three. Chuck wondered if the waiter lacked the ability to read the room, or knew exactly what chaos he was adding to. "I would like the chicken chimichanga," Sarah said, grinning at the waiter. "Chuck?" she asked, turning to him. "What do you recommend?" Chuck asked. "It's too spicy, you won't like it," the waiter said to him. "He'll probably cry if you make it too spicy," Casey muttered. "Do you have a mild version of it?" Chuck asked. The waiter shook his head and Casey snorted. "Then I'll just have the same as Sarah." The waiter nodded, and headed off. "Doing great on your date," Casey muttered. "Yeah, he is," Sarah said. She wasn't sure who looked more shocked, Chuck or Casey. "He's being completely honest and who he is," she told Casey. "Now, why are you here?" Casey nodded to the folder. Sarah opened it and looked at the contents. Her eyes went wide and she leaned forward, like she was reading something closely for the second time. "Are you serious?" "If you agree to sign some non-disclosure agreements," Casey told her. Sarah looked up at him. "You of course will have to do that with the lawyers." "When?" Sarah asked. "Should I really be here?" Chuck asked Sarah. "Yes, you should," Sarah told him. "Because now, I can hire you with no worries." "To do what?" Casey blurted out. "Fix your computer?" "Help me fix the farm," Sarah told him. "That string bean?" Casey asked, laughing. Sarah leaned forward. "I've heard what you had to say, you can go." Casey looked from Chuck to Sarah. "Go. I'll make contact. I'll sign their stupid papers. No one would believe me if I told the truth anyway." Casey grimaced at that. He stood. "Ethel's Kitchen," Chuck said. Casey looked at Chuck. "They have the best pancakes." He paused and then turned to Sarah. "That's where dad was going. To get pancakes. From Ethel's Kitchen." "And you still recommend them?" Sarah asked. "They're really good pancakes," Chuck told her. Sarah turned to Casey. "I don't think there's a better recommendation you could get," she said. Casey nodded, started to say something. Thought better of it, and walked off. Sarah sat there a second, and that's when he heard her mutter it to herself. "All we can do is pay that debt for those that lost their lives by living a well lived life." It was in that moment, Chuck Bartowski knew what was about to happen. He was going to go work on a farm. He didn't know how. He did have YouTube, and he was sure he was going to have to figure some things

out. What he did know was Sarah had stood up for him when she didn't have to, and she still thought she wasn't worthy of having a happy life. She was still scared by what had happened. He couldn't let her believe she wasn't special. That she wasn't worth it. Chuck was positive she was the best person he knew, and he wasn't going to let her spend another moment thinking she wasn't. A/N: Life is still a mess and this will come out very sporadically. Thank you all for your support.

Chapter 8: Chapter 8

A/N: I bring you more...well, whatever this is.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

She was staring at the folder in front of her. He could see her mind moving a million miles a second. He thought about everything Bryce had told him about her, and he knew she was a planner. He knew she had a plan, a plan b, a plan c, and all the way to the end of the alphabet. Her mind was making plans. Chuck couldn't help but be a little amused. He was getting to watch one of the brightest minds that used to be in the CIA do her thing.

After hearing so much from Bryce, Chuck began to wonder if Bryce hadn't oversold who Sarah was, and not because he was intentionally trying to deceive but because Bryce was in love with Sarah...at least as much as Bryce was able to love. The things Chuck had discovered about both Bryce and Sarah were shocking. Bryce had never talked about his past life, but there was so much in his file that made Chuck understand that Bryce truly thought he was doing the right thing for both Chuck and Sarah. Reading those files made him appreciate Ellie even more.

Bryce had a terrible childhood, and it became apparent that he developed the mindset of, "If I don't watch out for me, no one else will." Bryce was protecting Chuck and Sarah in his mind. But the thing was, it wasn't because Bryce saw the two of them as breathing human beings, but friends of his, partners of his. Possessions. It was obviously a side-effect of his terrible childhood, one Chuck could have experienced as well if it wasn't for Ellie.

Ellie constantly reminded Chuck that people sometimes made choices that didn't make sense, that hurt, but he alone was responsible for the decisions he made about actions toward him. And Ellie practiced that love. When he was bullied, Ellie reminded him it was the jealousy. It was the misunderstanding. It was all other people knew.

In his life he had been called weak, a pushover, and other names, but Chuck did his best to remind himself in every situation his response truly affected one person. Himself. Ellie had taught him that. If he reacted in a revengeful way the person most affected was him, as he lost a little of who he was.

He had been left. He had been forgotten about, and Chuck Bartowski promised himself that he would never let anyone else have to go through that if he could do anything about it. As he looked at Sarah, and her mind spinning, he thought about her and her father, and how she still loved him. He understood that. He loved his parents, even thought...they had left.

She did everything she could in her missions to protect innocents. To minimize collateral damage. As he studied report after report, he became to understand who Sarah Walker was. Bryce had been wrong about her. He had undersold her. Because Bryce could not comprehend why she did the things she did, but Chuck quickly understood.

She was like him in a way. The con was more important to Jack than Sarah was. At least that's what she thought. Chuck figured at the time Jack was conning, he didn't believe that to be true, but now...he thought Jack might have realized it. Chuck also found it strange the timing of Emma's visit to Jack and how it synced up right after Sarah's last mission that was completely redacted.

He didn't know what it all meant, and frankly it wasn't his business, but he found it all strange. He watched her blink, her mind finally happy with all the scenarios she had run in her head, and she turned to him. It was in that moment she realized how quiet she had been.

"I'm really sorry," Sarah said. As she said it, she had placed her hand across the table toward him. He wasn't sure if she did it unconsciously or not, but it seemed like a gesture to go with the apology. To let him know these weren't just words. "This was supposed to be about figuring out if you could work with us." There was something on her face. He didn't know if it was sorrow, sadness, or what, but he needed to comfort her. He would later tell himself what he did next he would have done with anyone in this position. He would tell himself he needed her not to take the blame for something that

was not her fault. He would tell himself so many things...and for a bit, he even tried to believe it.

He didn't even realized he had reached across the table to lay his hand on hers to comfort her. "Hey, this wasn't your fault," he said, locking eyes with her. "I get the feeling that guy doesn't take no for an answer." She shook her head as she smiled, and then, almost as one, they looked down at their hands. Chuck swallowed, and began to pull his away as she flipped hers, locked her hand with his, and squeezed.

"Well, I'm still sorry," Sarah said. "And now..." she glanced at the folder.

"It is none of my business what is in there, but it obviously is a big deal, so why don't we just enjoy dinner, talk, and not worry about the farm right now," Chuck offered. "I don't think waiting a bit on the farm is going to be a big deal in the grand scheme of things."

"No, I supposed not," she agreed softly, the soft smile on her face. She squeezed his hand and pulled it back as the waiter brought their food.

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"So," she began, laughing. "How does one brush their teeth...awesomely?"

Chuck shook his head, grinning. "I mean, you just have to see it to understand it." Sarah snorted. "You know what, since you snorted, I'm now going to have to film it and show it to you."

"And won't he think that's a bit weird?" Sarah asked. "You filming him?"

"I'll just tell him it's YouTube content for the *It's Awesome* channel I keep kidding that I'm going to make one day," Chuck told her. She snorted harder. "And you'd think he'd be ridiculously egotistical, but he's not. He's...he's like a big brother to me in a way."

"I'm glad," Sarah said nodding. "I'm glad you have someone to talk to, in him and your sister."

"You know, earlier, you mentioned being a baggage handler," Chuck began. She shook her head. "I hope you know, that if you need one-"

"Awesome would do it?" she teased.

"You know what, you kid, but yes, yes he would," Chuck told her, setting off another round of laughter. When she sobered a little, he continued in a much softer voice. "But also, I would, if you need someone to talk to." He paused. "And-and I get it. Some things you can't talk about, obviously, but..."

"Thank you," she said, a soft smile on her face. "I just need a quiet place to think," she said, and then she realized what she said, and she looked a bit upset. "I don't mean away from you, just-"

"Hard to think in the middle of a Mexican restaurant?" Chuck offered. Sarah nodded. "I do know a place, if you're interested." The smile on her face told him that she was.

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The two were sitting on a blanket on the beach, some time later. "You know, I now realize getting the blanket out of the car may have looked like a move," Chuck began. Sarah chuckled. "But I promise you, it was all because I did not want you get sand on that dress."

"You like the dress?" She asked.

He gave her a look. "How could anyone not like that dress?" he asked, seemingly stunned she could question it. She loved the way this man complimented her with seemingly his whole soul.

She looked out over the water. "You're very brave," she said softly. He looked over at her, and she continued to stare out at the water. "Wanting to work with an ex-CIA agent and former con man."

"Are you saying I'll be in physical danger of people wanting to get even or something like that?" Chuck asked. She shook her head. "Then how am I brave?"

"How can you trust anything my father and I say?" Sarah asked. She looked over at him. "For all you know we're both conning you, or on a mission."

"Exactly what would be the purpose of the con or mission?" Chuck asked, shrugging. "Getting me to set up your farmer's market stand?" Sarah shut her eyes as she laughed.

"And honestly, what's the difference between being conned by you two or anyone I might meet in a given day?" She looked at him, really looked at him. "I was recruited into the CIA at sixteen," she began.

"Sarah wait, need to know," Chuck began.

"I know," Sarah said, and let the weight of those words hit him right in his chest. "I know exactly who needs to know." She wasn't pulling punches with this. "If you are going to be around the two of us, on that farm, by ourselves as we try to build it, and then bring people in, then there HAS to be trust between the three of us."

"Why do you trust me?" Chuck asked.

"I don't know," Sarah said. "I just do."

"Okay," Chuck replied. He looked out at the water.

Sarah took a deep breath. "That's a lie," she said softly. He turned back to her. "Something, deep inside of me, that I haven't really listened to in years...it tells me to. It tells me that you are a good person and that you are deserving of trust."

"And you believe it?" Chuck asked gently.

"I have to, it's all I have left of being a normal person," Sarah told him.

"Then I guess I best live up to that belief in me," he told her. "Also, normal...overrated."

"So, can I tell you my story?" Sarah asked.

"Anytime, I just didn't want to cause you any problems," Chuck told her.

"Chuck, you are not a problem," she said. But she knew that was a lie. She knew he was a problem. The worst problem and the best problem. He was touching a part of her she thought long past dead. He was worming her way into her heart and she thought she had blocked all roads that led in.

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"So that folder he showed you?" Chuck asked after she told him about her past. "Is everything okay?"

"You don't want to know what it is?" Sarah asked. "You don't want to know what it was he needed to show me?"

"It's none of my business," Chuck told her.

"Come work with us," she blurted out. "And, it's gonna be messy. Dad and I know next to nothing."

"That puts you in better shape than me, because I know nothing," Chuck told her. She shook her head, grinning at him. "But, if you're serious, yes."

"Wait, you don't understand, we'll need you to live on property," Sarah told him.

"Do you have internet?" Chuck asked. She gave him a look. "I mean it's not a deal breaker if you don't." "We do," Sarah said. "But...you'll have to live in the main house with me and dad."

"Okay," Chuck said. "He snores," Sarah said, a look of seriousness on her face. "The first thing I want to do is fix the foreman's house. There's two bedrooms there. We could live there."

"Uh, you want me to live in a house, with just you?"

"Trust me, he snores," Sarah said.

"Sarah," Chuck began.

"Chuck, I have done many things in my life I'm not proud of, but I would do them all again in a heartbeat to be away from that man's snoring," Sarah told him.

"Does he have sleep apnea?" Chuck asked.

"NO!" she said, frustration on her face. "I've had him checked."

"When's the last night you've had a decent night's sleep?" Chuck asked her. She looked away. "Look, my sister and brother-in-law work tonight and won't be home. How about you stay at my apartment and I sleep on the couch." She raised an eyebrow. "You're right, your dad would think-"

"I don't give a damn what my dad thinks," Sarah said. "He can sleep though the night, I cannot." Chuck began to giggle. "But you barely know me, and what you do know...you're asking me to stay with you so I can get a good night's rest?"

"You're wanting me to move into the foreman's house with you so I will get a good night's rest," Chuck countered. Sarah stared at him, and he saw her make a decision.

"That folder was a check for me to keep my mouth shut," Sarah told him. Chuck's eyes widened. "I was going to anyway, keep my mouth shut. But now I can use that money for some good. Please, come work with me."

"Are you sure?" Chuck asked. "As sure as you are that I need to stay at your apartment tonight," Sarah said. "Besides, I need to go sign some papers in the morning."

"That's not a good idea," Chuck said. Sarah looked confused. "You'd be wearing the same dress."

"I have a go bag in my truck," Sarah told him. "Old habit."

"Oh, good," Chuck said. "That's the last thing you need." Sarah tilted her head, wanting to hear this logic train. "If Mr. Pancakes were there, and saw you in that dress, he might think..." he trailed off and shrugged.

"Screw it, I'll wear the dress," she said. She burst out laughing at the shock on Chuck's face.

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He was sitting outside, in the courtyard, on the side of the fountain, looking around. He didn't know how many more days he had here, but...he knew his days were numbered in his sister's and her boyfriend's apartment. Chuck looked up at the sky, and wished he could see the stars.

"You can see them at the farm," the soft voice came from his side. "The stars," she added. He turned and Sarah was standing there, wearing one of his old tee shirts and a pair of his shorts. He had now seen her in work clothes from the farm, a purple dress, and this outfit, and he wasn't sure he had seen a more beautiful person in his entire life.

Chuck scooted over and made room for her to sit down beside him. "Plus we build a bon fire some nights and just sit outside and talk," she told him as she sat down.

"What's it like?" Chuck asked. She looked over at him. "To get back the parent you thought you had lost?"

"Still don't know," Sarah said softly. He looked at her. "My mom...I've seen her a time or two, but...we don't have contact. Can't."

"Oh," Chuck said.

"I...I can't talk about it," Sarah told him.

"I get it," Chuck began.

"No, no you don't because I barely do, but I can't have contact with her," Sarah told him. "And...and I've been thinking...about something you said earlier about old enemies showing up-"

"Hey, I work in a Buy More, and there is more of a chance of someone there losing their mind and shooting the place up than one of your old enemies returning like something out of a James Bond movie," Chuck told her. She chuckled at him. "I know everything I need to know, and yes, I'd like to come work with you. I think you and I can rebuild some of this stuff by ourselves, and as we get people to work with us, they can help us."

"There's things we have to complete before the state will sign off on us, but the money I was offered...it will go a long way to fixing a lot of things," Sarah said. "Also, it will cover your salary."

"I don't need much," Chuck began, but stopped at the amused, but firm look she was giving him. "Okay," he said, holding up his hands in surrender. "Okay." He looked up at the sky, and then back to her. "Thank you."

"For what?" Sarah asked.

"For giving me a chance," Chuck told her. She bumped her shoulder against his and smiled.

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He tried to open his eyes as he heard the front door open. He was trying to figure out why he was hearing the front door open since he was in his bedroom. "Chuck?" he heard his sister say. He started to sit up, and that's when he remembered, he had slept on the couch, and Sarah had slept in his bedroom. "Hi," Ellie said. He saw her looking past him, and turned, and there stood Sarah. "I'm Ellie."

"I'm Sarah," Sarah replied.

"The avocados?" Ellie asked.

"Ellie, it's a long story," Chuck told her.

"Good, I'll make breakfast and you can tell me all about it," Ellie said, beaming. "Bro," Devon said, grinning with a thumbs up. "Awesome!" Chuck groaned and leaned forward, his head in his hands. But what surprised him the most was the sound of Sarah laughing behind him.

A/N: Devon really should have a YouTube channel.

Chapter 9: Chapter 9

A/N: Onward

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

Breakfast had been anti-climatic that morning. While Ellie had tons of questions, she also was on the end of her third straight twelve hour shift that ran from six p.m. to six a.m. Devon guided her to bed and the two fell into a coma, but not before Chuck promising to tell her everything at a later date.

He was now sitting on the fountain ledge, his thoughts on a recording of Bryce that now seemed to be haunting him. Chuck had told Sarah he didn't think her bringing him to see the lawyers was the right move given that he didn't "need to know". Sarah agreed, told him to pack a bag, and she'd be back after the lawyer's visit to pick him up. The video he was thinking about came back into his mind.

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"Sarah Walker is a simple woman, yet complicated," Bryce had said in one of his videos. *"She reciprocates what she receives. Those that are honest, she believes and lets in. Those who are not...."* he looked away from the camera and blew out a breath. He turned back to the camera, a sad smile on his face. *"Well, that's why we're not together any more."*

"You sure it's not because you were sleeping with other women?" Chuck muttered.

"That and the way I chose to run her off," Bryce added sheepishly.

"You're such a dumbass," Chuck muttered.

"If you lie to her she'll never trust you," Bryce said, spreading his hands. With that he shut off the video.

}o{

"The most powerful form of a lie is the omission," Chuck muttered to himself.

“What’s that?” he heard a voice ask, and looked up, shocked to see Sarah standing there.

“Uh, George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* author,” he began. “He said that. That omission is the most powerful lie.”

“Yeah, my dad would agree with that,” Sarah agreed. “That and letting someone assume something and not correcting them. I guess that’s kind of the same.”

“Yeah,” Chuck said, nodding.

“But, why were you saying that out loud?” Sarah asked.

“I was thinking...” Chuck began. He looked up at her and locked eyes with her. He knew in this moment, this was where everything mattered. If he told the truth, she might walk away, and he might have nothing for the rest of his life. But if he didn’t tell her, everything he hoped to ever build, would have been built on a lie. A lie of omission but a lie nonetheless. “You okay?” Sarah asked.

“No,” Chuck said. “There’s something I got to tell you, and-and...it may...Sarah...I knew Bryce Larkin. He was my roommate in college. He...he told me about you, and your dad and...listen...Ellie finding you, that was all accidental, but....I knew. I know. I know who you are.”

Sarah stood there, a stunned look on her face, and he watched as a mask slowly slipped over her. His stomach fell. She sat down. Not right beside him, there was some distance. He couldn’t look at her. He felt awful. She had been used by so many people, and here she was, again, believing that she was being used. He had to make her understand. He wasn’t. He started to speak, when he saw her shoulders moving. Oh, God. She was crying. He looked over to her.

“Sarah,” he began, frustration in his voice. “You have to know, I was...n’t....” He trailed off.

She wasn’t crying.

She was laughing.

"Bryce," she got out through her laughter. "You dumbass."

}o{

Some time ago, in a place that doesn't exist or if it does you'd be shot knowing the location.

"I need you to hold on, Bryce," Sarah said, putting pressure on the wound. They were being extracted, and the medical center was ten minutes away. Sarah wasn't a doctor, but she didn't think the wound was that serious. However, the way Bryce was acting....either he was a bigger Diva than she thought or....

"Sarah, I've got to tell you something," Bryce began.

"Don't you dare say you're dying, or this is some declaration of love," Sarah muttered. "We don't do that."

"You..." he said. "You don't do that."

Well, he wasn't wrong.

"But, there's something I have to tell you," he continued.

"Your married," Sarah said, trying to get him to stop with what sounded like he thought he was dying.

"No," he said, sputtering laughter. "I am not, and let's be honest, probably never will be." She didn't know what to say to that.

"Look, this is important, and there's no one I trust with this more," Bryce told her. She saw the sincerity in his eyes.

"You're not dying," Sarah told him. It wasn't a question.

"Please, humor me," he begged.

"Okay, and when you're better, will ignore this conversation and act like it was because of fear, or adrenaline or.."

"Okay, fine," Bryce agreed. She nodded. "There's someone in my life who I have screwed over and....he was...is my best friend."

Sarah kept pressure on the wound, but the look of sorrow on his face caught her off guard. Bryce never seemed to be sorrowful about anything. Even when he was wrong, he thought he always did what was right, and he never felt bad about it.

"It was in college," Bryce continued. "He was being recruited by the CIA and...and I had to make sure he didn't get brought in."

"What did you do, Bryce?" Sarah asked. She feared the worst.

"I got him expelled from college his senior year," Bryce said. "OW!"

"Sorry," Sarah said, not realizing she had pushed down on the wound after he had told about getting someone expelled. "Wait, didn't you go to Stanford?"

"Yeah," Bryce admitted. "I got someone expelled from Stanford that...Oh, God."

"What?" Sarah asked, concerned.

"I was an ass," Bryce admitted. Sarah was stunned. Maybe he was dying. "His parents left him, his sister helped raise him, and he got in by way of scholarship. OW!"

"Sorry," Sarah said, but she wasn't.

"Get my phone," Bryce told her.

"Why?" Sarah asked.

"His picture is one there," Bryce said. Sarah stared at him. Bryce Larkin...had a picture...of someone not in his cover...a personal photo...in his phone? She reached over to his bag and grabbed it. He messed with it a second and turned it to her. There he was, younger, a beer in his hand, his arm around another man. She noticed his smile before she noticed anything else. She noticed his hair that was....everywhere. Curly, and untamed, and....

"That's Chuck. Chuck Bartowski," Bryce said. Sarah's eyes never left the picture. "It was a party. One of the best times of my life was on that campus with him."

She looked at him, hearing the regret in his voice. Bryce was good at selling stories, but this...this was beyond him. His voice was betraying him.

"You two look so happy," Sarah said softly.

"We had just passed a final," Bryce said. She looked down. His eyes were far away, and he was back there. "He was so happy. I had introduced him to his girlfriend...she broke up with him after he was kicked out. OW!"

"Okay, I'm not sorry for that one," Sarah told him. "How the hell could you, Bryce?"

"I know, I know," Bryce said. "I knew what this life would do to him."

"What is he doing now?" Sarah asked. Bryce wouldn't meet her eyes. "Bryce." She said in a low growl.

"Working at the Buy More," Bryce said. "Living with his sister."

"Did he finish college?" Sarah asked.

"No," Bryce admitted softly. He braced himself, his eyes closed. He opened one, surprised she hadn't pushed into the wound. "Sarah?"

"Bryce, you're an ass," Sarah said, looking straight into his eyes.

"A well intentioned ass?" Bryce asked. Her looked flattened. "Yeah," he said, blowing out a breath. "I told you it was bad. Look, if I don't make it..."

"Why would he want anything to do with me?" Sarah asked. "The girlfriend of his...."

"Nemesis," Bryce offered. "He's a nerd so...he'd like that term."

Before she could respond, the van stopped, and the back door opened, medics getting in.

"Please," Bryce said. "Just...just check on him."

"You're going to make it," Sarah said, as they wheeled him away and she was led to another part of the facility to clean up. That was the last time she saw Bryce Larkin.

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A few days ago

She really began to wonder if her dad was truly out of his former con life. He hadn't noticed her being...not worried. Sarah Walker didn't get worried. She examined threats,

prepared accordingly, and accomplished the goals in front of her. But today...today she had bolted...and her father hadn't even noticed. But, to be honest, he would have been the only one who would have. For two days now, she couldn't help but wonder, Chuck Bartowski...was it him? Was this guy the friend that Bryce had told her about?

She had never seen Bryce after she left him with the medical team. She had no idea what he did after that, but some time thereafter...he was dead. Bryce was the most complicated person she had ever met, and he didn't have to be that complicated. He just...was. He did things...almost for drama's sake.

She didn't understand the big deal about why she was so bothered about Chuck. Yes, Bryce had screwed him. Yes, she had found Chuck's records and she was very bothered by how he seemed to just...exist since then. She had seen the man's work in college, and for him to be a Buy More employee...

And, there was the whole she felt guilty for not finding him before now. But why should she have? Bryce's sins were not hers.

But it ate at her.

There were nights as she started to go to sleep that she found herself thinking about Chuck Bartowski. The man who lived with his sister, Eleanor Bartowski, aka Ellie. This...thing, her and her father were building...Chuck was the perfect symbol for what her and her father were trying to do. A fresh start. A second chance in life.

She knew why she had never reached out. She had looked through his records. She knew all about him and his family, and she was scared. It was one thing to try and rebuild that life with her and her father, but to help out an absolute stranger? No. She wasn't built for that. She did not have that in her. Not like this. Now, if he had needed someone to steal a computer or some spy work, she was his woman, but to be...what?

A friend?

Sarah Walker didn't know how to be anyone's friend.

And that's why, even though she had run through in her mind how today was going to go when she met Chuck, and she had three different plans ready to go, she took the option

to bail.

She was a proud woman. Sarah Walker knew who she was and what she could do, and this...this she had no qualms about. She had bailed, and she wasn't even a little bit sorry.

She was sure Chuck would be gone by now. From what she knew about Chuck her father would think he was a schnook. Jack would give Chuck the avocados, and that would be it. When her and her father had the farm up and running, then....maybe...okay, then, she would go see Chuck.

She didn't owe him or Bryce anything. She didn't. And she knew she didn't.

But why did she keep wondering about him?

She shook her head, and then came to a complete stop in the road. Only for a split second, but come to a stop, she did. She quickly began walking again before either man had seen her, but something her father said danced its way through her mind.

Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.

She had just been punched in the mouth.

Chuck had turned to her, and she saw that he was taken aback. She had used her looks for years to disarm men. It had made her feel...scummy. It had made her feel...icky. But this...this wasn't that. This was a man who was truly taken aback.

She had seen his picture before. Hell, she had studied his picture, and...he was cute...fine, she liked the way he looked, but...in person...it wasn't fair. It really wasn't. She found herself forcing her way to them, acting as if everything was normal. Praying with everything in her, that her father never noticed.

And then, then Chuck took her hand to shake it, and it shook her world.

If THAT had been it, she truly believed she could have gotten past everything. She believed that she could have watched him drive off, and not sit in his courtyard at night and watch him through his window. (Okay, even that sounded a little creepy to her.) But no. Bryce was known to be dramatic, but the ONE time...THE ONE. TIME. He had

downplayed something...it was Chuck Bartowski.

What he had done with Mrs. Lewis...God, it wasn't fair. He truly was a nice, good man. A good-looking, nice, good, good-looking man....it wasn't fair.

She wasn't ready for this.

Not now.

She was trying to rebuild her life with her dad and she did NOT have time for this.

And there was a part of her that tried to convince her that if she never saw him again, it would be okay. She didn't believe it, but she gave that part of her props for trying.

It was in the Buy More...where she thought her father was trying some scam on Chuck. She was so mad. And what...one day she was going to have to sit down and really think about what this meant...made her SO MAD was that she thought Jack was scamming Chuck. Not that Jack was scamming...but scamming Chuck.

But Chuck...he was Chuck...he told the truth, but not just about the situation or her dad. No. If that had been it, then MAYBE...okay, she couldn't have but, she wasn't ready to admit that part yet. Maybe she could have walked away.

And I see them trying. I see them trying something that is clearly out of their wheelhouse...and yet...isn't. For the first time since Stanford, I took a chance. I went to the Farmer's Market on Saturday and sold all the left over avocados, put the money in your farm's bank account and...and it felt right.

In that moment...she was done. Honestly, she was probably done before that, but at that moment, she was tired of trying to pretend that this man...that this man didn't affect her and she wanted to see it out.

And then she found out he had a spreadsheet. So she did what she thought anyone should do. She invited him to dinner. And she might have picked a dress that she thought...might look good on a date. God, she was terrible at this. She didn't even know what this was. And of course, that was the moment Jack saw through her...or maybe he already had and she missed it. Because of Chuck.

And then she walked in to the restaurant and heard Chuck trying to describe her. Yeah, she was going to try and figure this out. She had come to some decision and then John Casey came in like a bull in the figurative fine China shop.

She was sitting there, trying to figure out her next move...not just with the folder that Casey had given her, but with Chuck, when...well....he went full Chuck. He made it all about her.

She had decided on the beach that she had to tell him about Bryce...she just didn't know how. She should have told him on the beach, but...she couldn't, and now...now he knew. Now he knew, and how could he ever believe her? How could he believe everything she thought about him wasn't something Bryce had told her or manipulated?

}o{

Now, after Sarah told him everything...well, not her feelings toward him or what he made her felt...I mean...she is Sarah.

She sat there, defeated. She had finally met someone she could trust, and now...now he couldn't trust her.

"You know, it's weird the person who hurt us the most told us about each other," Chuck said softly. "A person...I wasn't sure if anything he said was true after what he did to me." Sarah looked over at him. "What I said on the beach was true." Chuck looked at her. "Yes, Bryce told me about you, wanted me to meet you and check on you. But Chuck something in me...it said to trust you."

"Yeah, I get it," Chuck said. "I trust you, Sarah Walker." He held out his hand to her.

She scooted over beside him, and gently hip checked him. "I trust you, Chuck Bartowski," she said, looking him straight in his eyes and taking his hand. "And do me a favor, you feel free to listen to anything he said on those videos, and if you have questions, I'll answer them, but don't feel like you owe me anything."

"Sarah," Chuck began.

Sarah shook her head. "No."

"No secrets, no lies, Sarah," Chuck said softly.

She smiled at him. "Okay," she nodded. "No secrets no lies."

}o{

Some time ago, in a place that doesn't exist or if it does you'd be shot knowing the location. After Sarah was hurried away.

"Man, do you bitch and moan," the woman said as she entered Bryce's room.

"Zondra! Did you have to stab me so hard and so deep?" Bryce asked.

"Look, you said you wanted it to look real," Zondra told him. "Now, I held up my end of the bargain."

"You STABBED me!" Bryce reminded her. Zondra spread her hands. "Fine, we have to take this assignment before Graham assigns it to Sarah."

"And why would I care?" Zondra asked. "Cause Graham is sending her to her death, and if we don't stop it, how can you fight her for what happened with the CAT squad?" Bryce asked Zondra.

"Damn it," Zondra grumbled. "Fine." She slapped him where she had stabbed him, making him yell out in pain, as she left the room laughing.

A/N: Hehehehehe.

Chapter 10: Chapter 10

A/N: Y'all seem to be enjoying this one.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

They sat there on the side of the fountain, a silence between them. A good one. Chuck could feel something in the air between them. He didn't know what it was, and he knew she was feeling it too. It was...new...different. He looked over at her, thought about asking her something, and turned away, giving a little head shake and a smile.

"I said you could ask me anything," Sarah reminded him.

"Yeah, but this isn't in the files, and frankly is none of my business," Chuck said, looking back at her.

"Ask anyway," she said with a shoulder bounce. A playful grin crossed her lips. "I mean, I'm not saying I'll answer, but you can ask."

He grinned at her. "I was going to ask, what you were thinking just then." "Hmmm," she hummed. "Yeah, that is none of your business," she said softly, smiling the whole time. He chuckled. "But I'm going to tell you," she added. Chuck sobered up.

She lifted her head, and took a deep breath. "My whole life has been about taking, destroying. My dad and I...we took. We took from people. Be it money, trust..." she trailed off and looked away. She turned back but didn't look at him, she kept looking straight ahead, as if she made eye contact with him, she wouldn't be able to go on. He started to put his hand on hers. To comfort her. That was all, but, he realized he didn't know her like that, and began to pull his hand away. He found he couldn't, because her hand had found his and was holding on tight. He squeezed it. That was what she needed in that moment to continue.

"In the CIA, it was always about...dismantling," she said, a slight disdain in her voice. "A Cartel, a government...a life." There was shame on her face. "I get it, we saved lives but..." she trailed off, not sure what else to add.

"It was always about...well...taking apart," Chuck offered. She nodded, still not looking at him. As though she might break down if she did. "You did good though."

"I know," Sarah said. "Doesn't change what it was." Chuck gave her hand a gentle squeeze. She looked at him, her eyes fighting tears, a soft smile on her face. "And, I want to be totally honest, while Dad and I have every intention of building a life, and helping people with this farm...we don't have the best track record." Chuck couldn't help but laugh.

She locked eyes with him. "And, now...now we've found you," she said softly. Chuck didn't even realized he had swallowed. "We've found you, someone I can trust to build with. It may not be pretty. Neither of us know a thing about this."

"I'm telling you, I've seen a lot of videos, we can," Chuck said softly, a kind smile on his face, giving her hand the gentlest of squeezes.

"Oh, I believe you," Sarah said.

"You believe we can do this?" Chuck asked, a little surprised.

"No idea," Sarah said with a shrug, making him laugh. "But I believe you believe we can, and right now...you have no idea what that mean that someone believes in me that I can do something good. Build something."

"Sarah, I think I do have an idea about someone believing in me," Chuck told her. She tucked her head and looked up at him through her lashes. There was a shyness there that Chuck thought might make his heart explode from happiness. "Thank you."

"When I say it's my pleasure, I hope you believe me."

"I do," Chuck told her, giving her hand the gentlest squeeze. She returned that squeeze. "I do."

}o{

Some time ago, in a place that doesn't exist or if it does you'd be shot knowing the location.

Zondra looked through the files, stopped, looked up at Bryce, looked back at the files, and then back to Bryce. "Gaez...Amy?"

"Yup," Bryce told her. "All done at the behest of Graham to get Sarah out of the CAT Squad."

"But," Zondra said, and looked back down at the file. "The Director of the CIA...."

"Evil," Bryce told her. "And, if we save Sarah like this, all it does is buy her time."

Zondra was quiet for a moment and then finally asked the million dollar question. "Why?"

"She doesn't love me," Bryce said softly. "She...thinks she's supposed to love me." Zondra watched Bryce. "I've already made an enemy of the person I loved most in this world, and now..." he let out a deep breath. "Why not make an enemy of the person I love second most in this world?"

Zondra was quiet for a moment. "When...when you say loved..."

"Yeah," Bryce answered. "Loved...still do. Love like...yeah."

"Oh," Zondra said nodding. "So...what you had him kicked out..."

"He's not like me," Bryce said.

"Bi?" Zondra asked.

Bryce snorted. "No, he's not, but that's not what I meant. I....I know who I am and I've made mistakes, and I thought I was protecting him. I thought...I thought I was doing the right thing. Thing is, I need his help." Bryce was staring off into the distance, Zondra watching him. "Sarah isn't like you, Chuck isn't like me. They both need to heal, and...they're probably the person who could help the other the most."

"And Lindsey?" Zondra asked. Bryce turned to her slowly. "I know about her." Bryce cleared his throat. "I had to make sure I did something where I couldn't back out of this plan."

"So you slept with her?" Zondra asked. "Just to make sure I'm clear, to make sure you didn't back out of your plan, you slept with another woman?"

"I didn't trust myself to do what was necessary...again," Bryce said. "Do you know how much it hurt what I did to Chuck?"

"I bet it hurt Chuck more," Zondra said.

Bryce looked her dead in the eye. "I know," he said softly. "I see his face every time I close my eyes. I see him in the frat house as they walk him out. I know it did."

"Oh," Zondra said. "Okay."

"So you understand?" Bryce asked.

"Oh, God, no," Zondra told him. "What you did is messed up in ways that five years of therapy probably can't straighten out, but we are where we are, and your plan, going forward, is solid. But just so we're clear, if you try and have sex with me, I will stab you and enjoy it."

"Didn't you last time?" Bryce pointed out.

"OK, more than last time," Zondra said. And with that, she left the room.

"Not sure that's possible," Bryce muttered. "We still need to take care of Ryker," he said to himself. He reached over and pulled up a file, and stared at the glare of the face of the man who the folder held the contents of. "I need a sniper." Bryce chuckled. "Chuck would say you have a jaw of granite."

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Chuck stood in front of the Buy More, Sarah by his side. "Do you need to do this alone?" Sarah asked, pulling him out of his thoughts.

"No," Chuck said, shaking his head. "I'm just...conflicted." She gave him a confused look. "Oh, I'm leaving, and going to work with you, but...this place was my home in my darkest hours."

"I understand that," Sarah said. "In fact, if I'm honest..." She trailed off.

“Do not say Bryce did the right thing that got you fired,” Chuck pleaded.

“He didn’t....” She said, but she looked away. “I don’t know...I don’t know if I would have had the strength to just walk away.”

“I get it,” Chuck said, nodding. “That’s why, if it’s okay with you, I’d like you here.” “Emotional support person?” Sarah asked.

“I was going to say baggage handler, but let’s be honest, emotional support Sarah has a better ring to it,” he admitted as they started walking in. She was laughing, and grabbed his nearby arm as support as they walked. Chuck noticed but didn’t flinch. They shared a look and she took her hands away, smiling shyly the whole time. They walked up toward the Nerd Herd desk. No one noticed them. All the white shirts were gathered around, and Big Mike was there as well.

“Why so many viruses?” Big Mike asked as they approached.

“My guess, these losers are broke,” Anna replied, shrugging. Big Mike gave her a look. “Look that girl off of American Pie made a million dollars in an hour on only fans.”

She paused for a second. “If I’m honest, if I could pull my nipples and show my buttohole for an hour for a million dollars, I’d do it too,” Anna added, shrugging her shoulders. A customer walked by, gasped.

“Lady, I’d do it for a hundred grand,” Morgan said, trying to take the heat off of Anna.

“What would God say?” the woman asked, absolutely mortified by Morgan.

“Ma’am, have you seen me?” Morgan asked, gesturing to himself. “If I made a hundred grand doing that, I’d call that a miracle.” The woman’s mouth dropped but no words came out.

“A miracle,” Anna began, reading the definition from her nearby tablet. “Is an extraordinary, often supernatural, event that defies natural laws and is typically interpreted as a sign of divine power. It signifies a wondrous event or accomplishment, often involving divine intervention, healing, or provision. The term also commonly refers to a highly improbable or extremely lucky event.” She gave Morgan an apologetic look.

"I mean..."

"No, that's why I said it," Morgan replied. The woman shook her head in disgust and walked off.

"I'd do it for five dollars," Jeff threw in. Everyone turned to him. "I mean, I'd pay anyone five dollars to watch me."

"Jeffrey," Lester said, trying not to roll his eyes, and pull the half-baked man away from the others. "We've talked about this."

"And this is what you're going to give your two weeks for?" Sarah asked, giggling. She spoke at her normal voice because no one had been paying attention to them. But anything involving time off, or quitting...it was like a beacon for Big Mike.

"Two weeks?" Big Mike said, looking up and seeing Chuck and Sarah. He sized them up and walked over to them. "You're giving your two weeks, Bartowski?"

"I am," Chuck began, but Big Mike looked past him to Sarah.

"You will pay him fairly?" Big Mike asked.

"I will, not as much per hour, but food and lodging is included," Sarah said.

Big Mike made a hmm, noise. "What about insurance?"

"Yes," Sarah said. Chuck looked surprised.

"Dental?" He leaned in. "Vision?"

"Yes to both," Sarah said. Both men look impressed. "I had a government job with good benefits in the past, I get it."

"What about mental health? This boy's got a lot of problems upstairs if you know what I mean," Big Mike continued.

"Hey!" Chuck said.

"Son, your momma and daddy left you, your best friend destroyed your academic career right before you were to graduate from Stanford and you've been hiding here for five years? Come on, I don't need no degree to know you ain't right in the head."

Chuck looked over at the other nerd herders. They all looked away except for Morgan. Morgan had a pained expression on his face. Anna reached over and turned Morgan's head away. "Sorry," he mouthed as he looked away.

"Well," Chuck said, a little stunned.

"His insurance will cover any of that, but," Sarah said, leaning towards Mike, making him lean back. "We have a big bonfire at night. We sit around it, look at the stars, and just talk." Big Mike was nodding. "I'm not saying that will heal all that's right, but sometimes you just need to talk and know someone is listening. Really listening."

"You do," Big Mike said. He stuck out his hand and Sarah shook it.

"What the hell is going on?" Chuck muttered.

"So," Big Mike said after vigorously shaking Sarah's hand. "Someone bring me the schedule!" Morgan brought Big Mike the tablet. Big Mike took it, looked at it, turned it upside down, flipped it over and then flipped it over and looked on it's back.

"Here," Chuck said, flipping it back over and hitting the power button making it light up. "They moved the button in the last update."

"That's why I like you," Big Mike said, looking at the screen. Sarah gave Chuck a smile that Big Mike couldn't see. Chuck grinned at her. "Here," Anna said, handing him the paper schedule while deftly taking the tablet out of Big Mike's hands.

"Thank you," Big Mike said, looking at the schedule.

"Like trying to watch a new born horse walk," Anna mouthed to Sarah. Sarah used all her training not to crack up. Anna began to do things to the screen. Chuck saw she was pulling up the master schedule.

"So, you're giving your two weeks," Big Mike said. He pulled out a pen and marked Chuck off the schedule.

"Big Mike?" Chuck asked.

"We have to use your vacation and sick time," Big Mike said. "What do you have two...three weeks?"

"Well," Chuck began, scratching the back of his head.

"Holy shit," Anna breathed.

"So more than that," Big Mike said. He began to flip the paper forward a month.

"Not even close," Anna said. Big Mike flipped again. "Keep going." He flipped two more months. "Another." Big Mike widened his eyes.

"You did say I could only have vacation if I found someone capable of doing my job," Chuck gently reminded him.

"That's on me," Big Mike said muttering. "So your last day will be here, where I'm going to need you to come in for four hours--"

"Uh, Boss," Anna said as gently as she could, butting in. "He's going to have a lot more accrued sick and vacation time during the time he's on vacation...and sick time."

"Of course," Big Mike said, beginning to look flustered.

"You know what, this is beneath you," Anna said, gently taking the paper away from him. "Why don't I handle this and you go take care of managerial things."

"Son, you know I respect you, but I have to respect the position I have," Big Mike told Chuck.

"Absolutely," Chuck agreed. "Yes."

"Also," Big Mike said, turning to Anna. "You're now in charge of the Herd."

"That is not fair," Anna protested.

"You made yourself indispensable, Bartowski warned you," Big Mike pointed out. "Son, appreciate you," he said to Chuck, shaking his hand. With that, he turned and headed toward his office, whistling.

Anna shook her head, did some more to the tablet. "So, how about this is your last day?" she said, as she switched screens and sent herself a note to clock Chuck in for four hours that day.

"Anna," Chuck began.

"How many times have you worked in the back and not clocked in because we didn't have the hours?" Anna asked, giving him a look.

"It's who he is, isn't it?" Sarah asked. "It is," Anna said, nodding. "You will take care of him."

It wasn't a question. Chuck knew Sarah was a trained CIA agent. He didn't think Anna had any training, and for a second, he SWORE he heard whistling like you hear in an old western just before a gun fight broke out.

"He's one of the good ones, isn't he?" Sarah asked.

"No," Anna said. "He's the best, and I loathe him for it."

"I understand," Sarah said nodding.

"I don't," Chuck cut in.

"This doesn't concern you," Anna told him, never taking her eyes off of Sarah. "And yet it does," Chuck countered. Anna slowly turned toward him and locked eyes with him. "Annnnd, maybe it doesn't," Chuck admitted.

"I'll protect him," Sarah said. Chuck gave her a look, but she was ignoring him. There was...something in her voice...he didn't know what it was...well, he thought he might, but....well, that wasn't possible. At all.

"Gonna need his new address," Anna said, handing the tablet to Sarah.

"Is this how women felt when they were negotiated for back in the day for their dowry?" Chuck muttered.

"Like you've got a dowry," Anna countered.

"You're not wrong," Chuck admitted. Sarah handed the tablet back to Anna. "Uh, my checks will still be direct deposited, right?"

"Yes," Anna said, rolling her eyes, annoyed.

"I don't know why you're mad at me because you got a promotion," Chuck told her.

She gave him a look. "Do you know what kind of kinky fantasies Morgan is going to have now that I have power over him?" "He's a green shirt," Chuck argued. Anna raised an eyebrow. "I'm sorry, I was trying."

"Is he going to be a problem?" Sarah asked, legit worried.

Anna laughed. "A problem? Yes. The kind I like?" She walked off, laughing.

"Trust me, she can handle him," Chuck told her.

"I bet she can," Sarah said. "I bet she can." She looked at him. "So, time to talk to Ellie?"

"Yeah," Chuck said. "And I have to pack. And find a car."

"You can ride with me in the truck and we can put everything in the back of the truck," Sarah told him.

"Okay," Chuck said nodding. "We're doing this." "We're doing this," Sarah said. She winked at him, turned and headed out. He followed. They were doing this. And that totally meant the farm, and nothing more. No siree Bob. Nothing more. Not. A. Thing. "Bryce, what in the hell have you gotten me in to?" He muttered to himself. He shook his head. This wasn't Bryce's fault. This was his choice. He smiled. Best choice he had made in a while. A/N: More soon.

Chapter 11: Chapter 11

A/N: Onward

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

Five months ago, somewhere in California.

"And remember," the woman said, talking into the camera. "Take care of your mental health. Love yourself. Give yourself grace, but also, know who you are, and while the attachment style you learned as a child was to protect you, it could be harming you today. The work you are doing is for you." She smiled. "Now, I hate to say this part, but if you have learned anything and helped yourself, please like, subscribe, and all that stuff. I hate to ask you to, but this channel operates by word of mouth and an algorithm. I never charge anything for what we do here." Her smile turned sad for just an instant. "Please know, there's a good chance I was once where you are in relationships, and that's why I do this work. If I've helped you, and you meet someone that could use these videos, please gently tell them about us." She smiled and nodded. "Good night. Remember, love yourself."

She reached up and turned off the recording. "I'll have to edit that later," she muttered to herself. "I got to rambling again, and not the good kind." She chuckled and leaned back in her chair. Over the last three years, Dr. Lane had slowly begun building a YouTube audience. It wasn't for fame, for notoriety, for dopamine, or anything like that. She truly wanted those who had relationship issues to get help. The help she wished she had earlier in her life.

After her life fell apart, she picked herself up, and decided to continue to get her degree in Psychology. Along the way she had found out about attachment styles in relationships. As she learned more and more, she became fascinated by the information, and all she could think was that she might have a family today if she had known what she knew now.

She chuckled. She had confronted her ex some time back and gently, but lovingly told him everything she had learned...not all at once. She had told him, broad strokes, expected it to be the end of their reunion, and was stunned when he asked to know more. But more importantly, how to heal...how to change. She hadn't seen him in some time, but he had told her that he had another relationship he needed to fix. She understood that. There were other relationships she needed to mend as well.

She looked around the room she recorded in, shook her head and got up. It was then she felt it. She wasn't alone in her home. She knew she should run, but something in her....she headed down the hall, and was surprised to realize that whoever was in the house, was in the room that was reserved for one person. She took a deep breath, hoping it was her. She opened the door, and reached for a light, but stopped, as a voice spoke.

"Please, don't turn on that light," the soft but intense voice said. "Neither of us want that."

It wasn't who she hoped for. Dr. Lane had no idea who this was, but she was certain if she touched that light, bad things were going to happen.

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Now, Echo Park

Chuck looked around his room, not sure what all to pack. Sarah had told him it was fine to bring the computer, and whatever he wanted, but part of him saw this as an opportunity for a fresh start. Ellie walked into his room, a knowing smile on her face.

"I am SOOOO glad I asked you to get avocados for me," she told him, sitting down on his bed. She watched him grin as he packed. "Chuck," she said, and he turned to her, the look on her face, serious. "The deal still stands." He groaned. "El, please," Chuck began.

"We agreed," Ellie reminded him.

"No, you and Devon, who I may remind you, is a heart doctor, as in a cardiothoracic surgeon. Not a doctor of love," Chuck began.

"I disagree," Ellie said, with a grin on his face.

Chuck tried not to throw up in his mouth. "Anyway," Chuck continued, making her giggle. "You two watched those videos and decided they would help me."

"Look, it's science," Ellie told him.

"It's a THEORY," Chuck stressed.

"Tell me Devon's isn't dead on?" Ellie asked him.

"Yes, Devon is secure," Chuck relented. "Good, God, is he secure."

"This is about him trying to teach you how to dance, isn't it?" Ellie asked.

"He was in a towel, and was teaching me the woman's part," Chuck said in as calm of a voice as he could muster.

"Chuck, what our parents did, and me having to raise you," Ellie began.

"Hey, it's not your fault," Chuck cut in.

"Yes it is," Ellie said. "And that's not a negative thing. I know you know I did all I could, but I wasn't your mom. I wasn't your dad. I was your sister and that wasn't normal."

"Why aren't you more messed up?" Chuck asked, honestly.

"I guess because I was older when Dad left?" Ellie replied, shrugging. "I mean, yes, I have some issues--"

"Okay, wait," Chuck said, cutting in. "Maybe I am...fearful avoidant in my relationship style?" Chuck offered. Ellie nodded that he got the term right. "But what happened at Stanford with Jill had nothing to do with that."

"Right," Ellie said. "But what about the next five years, Chuck?" Ellie asked. Chuck looked away. "You hid. You have low self-esteem over what happened with mom and dad. You think people will leave you. You have such high anxiety that you push everyone away that tries to get close to you that isn't already in your circle." She grinned. "At least...you did."

"And what does that mean?" Chuck asked. "Sometimes it takes meeting that certain someone to get you out of the slump, and maybe, you watched and processed enough before you met her that you were ready," Ellie pointed out.

"Are you implying-" Chuck began.

"Hey," Sarah said, sticking her head in the door. "I am not trying to interfere with goodbyes or packing, but...I am a little hungry," Sarah said. "Can I take you two out to lunch? My treat." "We'd love it," Ellie said, smiling at Sarah, turning to Chuck. She didn't have to say anything, the smile Chuck was giving Sarah was all Ellie needed.

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Five months ago, somewhere in California.

"There's no need for violence," Dr. Lane told the woman sitting in the dark.

"Why would you think there would be violence?" the woman asked, sounding genuinely confused.

"If I turn the light on," Dr. Lane answered. "If I see your face, you'll kill me." "What? No," the woman replied. "I just don't want to wake the baby." Dr. Lane blinked. "If you want, turn on the lamp by the bed. The overhead light might wake her." Dr. Lane could just make out the child over the shoulder of the woman sitting in the rocking chair. "I think she's teething. She's just been unhappy."

"So, I should turn on the lamp?" Dr. Lane asked.

"Please." Dr. Lane turned on the lamp, and turned back to the woman who was sitting in the rocker. She was beautiful, and also...she looked like someone you wouldn't mess with. Dark hair, dark complexion...but while she looked like someone who could strike at a moment's notice, there was a softness about her...probably strengthened by the fact she was holding a blond baby in her arms.

Dr. Lane heard a buzzing sound, and there was a look of irritation on the woman's face. "Can you hold her please?" the woman asked, offering the baby to Dr. Lane. Dr. Lane took the child, and the child snuggled against her, making the dark hair woman smile.

"Rizzo, secure," she said into the phone. "Yes, I have made contact." She rolled her eyes. "Listen pretty boy, I said I'd do this my way, so let me do this my way." She shook her head, pointed to the phone, and mouthed, "he's a tool." Dr. Lane found herself chuckling, even though the situation was ridiculous. She also realized she was slighting bouncing, the way she used to comfort her daughter when she was this age. "I got this. Don't call back." With that, she hung up. She looked at Dr. Lane. "You know, I love the technology, but there's something about slamming down the phone I just miss."

"Well, you wouldn't want to wake the baby," Dr. Lane replied. The dark-haired woman smiled at her. "What?"

"I knew you'd be the one," Rizzo answered. "And thanks, by the way," she said, looking extremely uncomfortable.

"For holding the baby?" Dr. Lane asked.

"No, your videos," Rizzo replied. "They helped me with my family." "Oh?"

"We've...we've been doing some work," Rizzo said, uncomfortable.

"Good work is hard work," Dr. Lane said gently, the nurture in her coming out. The reason she was pursuing the work she was. "If it was easy...well...we wouldn't be in these messes we're in, would we?"

"No," Rizzo said smiling. "No, we wouldn't."

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Now

"You know, Ellie, you're always welcome at the farm," Sarah told Ellie as they came back into the apartment." Ellie smiled at her and took Sarah's hand.

"Ellie, not everyone is as touchy as you are," Chuck gently reminded her. "Thank you, Chuck, but I'm okay," Sarah said. She wasn't, but it was part of the healing she was practicing. The allowing of people in. She hadn't been around Chuck long, but there was something about him that told her he was okay. That he looked for the best in people. That he was someone who was safe. And safety...that was key in her world.

And Ellie had raised him. Not completely, but when he was alone, she had cared for him.

"I'm going to go finish packing," Chuck told them. "If she gets to be too much, the safeword is Pineapple." Ellie turned, grabbed a pillow from the couch, and threw it at him as he retreated to his room. Sarah couldn't help but laugh as Ellie went to get the pillow and return it to where it belonged.

"He's a mess," Ellie said, shaking her head and grinning. She sobered. "He really is."

"We're all messes," Sarah said. "Our childhoods...." She trailed off. This was what she struggled with, but she had been learning to open up. Trust. It was so hard. "What happens to us as kids...what our mind does to protect us...it's kinda crazy." "It is," Ellie said, nodding. Listening. Giving her space. "It does the best it can, but in any environment that hurts...it makes the best decision, but, that decision can lead to years of problems." Sarah nodded. "My childhood..." she trailed off. "Well, it's pretty much out there now. Dad going on cons and me going along for cookies." Ellie gave her a sad smile. "I mean, what kid won't do something for cookies."

"Hey, no judgment here," Ellie told her. "I don't know what you've done to unlock whatever has been locked up in Chuck, but...thank you." "He's doing it, Ellie," Sarah told her.

"Listen, he's got his own problems he's been working to overcome," Ellie told her. "He's been working on his attachment style...have you heard of it?" "Some," Sarah said.

"He's been listening to this psychiatrist on YouTube, and she's fully licensed, I checked her out," Ellie told her. Sarah couldn't help but smile. "She has these free workbooks, and strategies."

"That's good," Sarah said. "So, he's working on himself." Ellie nodded, happily. "Yes, and then he met you and your dad, and I just don't want him to stop working on himself. So, please, I don't know how you can do it, and I probably shouldn't ask, but if you can, please encourage him to watch Dr. Lane's videos." "Dr...Lane?" Sarah asked, trying to hide the surprise on her face.

"Have you heard of her?" Ellie asked. Sarah nodded, not trusting herself to speak. "She's incredible." "That she is," Sarah agreed, nodding.

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Four months ago at a certain hospital where a certain love doctor works

His training was paying off in ways the CIA could never imagine. Sometimes the best approach to a target was not approaching the target at all, but approaching someone close to the target. Now, the loss of direct contact did lose some control of the operation, but that loss was acceptable given that the approach was made now by someone who was trusted by the target.

Abraham Johnson. Doctor. Head of the cardiac unit, and mentor to one Dr. Devon Woodcomb. Abraham and his wife were having issues...such issues she was living somewhere he was not. Bryce watched the doctor do his job, a forced smile upon his face.

"This may be the first time I'm about to do something a little sneaky and get a good unintended consequence out of it," Bryce muttered to himself. "Okay, showtime," he said softly, and walked towards the doctor, bumping into him. "I am so sorry," he told Dr. Johnson.

"Quite alright," the doctor said.

"I'm so sorry," Bryce said, the biggest smile on his face. "See, she's texting me again, she's happy to talk to me again. I thought we were done for, and I was just lost in her message."

"That's great," Dr. Johnson told him. He started to move on, but he loved his wife, and wanted things to work, so he took a deep breath and asked the question. "I take it from what you said, things weren't going well?"

"She was close to leaving me, divorcing me," Bryce told the doctor. "We've been together five years."

“What happened?” Dr. Johnson asked, a little too eagerly. He cleared his throat. “What was the thing that changed things for you?”

Bryce smiled. “There’s this psychiatrist online, a Dr. Lane that talks about attachment styles and how they can subconsciously affect how you interact with a loved one, or just anyone.”

“Online?” the doctor asked, skepticism in his voice.

“Yeah, she does it all on YouTube for free,” Bryce told him. “It’s because she lost people earlier in her life. She talks about it, and she wants to help others.” The doctor stood there, looking a little unsure, and Bryce went for the kill. “I mean, I was skeptical as well, but at the point I was at, what did I have to lose?”

“Yeah,” the doctor said, nodding. He pulled out his phone, opened the YouTube app and handed it to Bryce. “Would you-”

“Gladly,” Bryce said, gently taking the phone. He went to her page, subscribed to it, and pulled up the introductory video. “Listen, just watch it, and if you think it’s bunk...don’t watch anymore. But you can look her up, she’s licensed and for real.”

“Thank you,” the doctor said, taking the phone back.

“You know there are so many people whose parents left them, or even siblings had to raise them that are affected by this,” Bryce began. “Or something was going on in the home that was out of the norm that just affected us.”

“I know someone like that,” the doctor said, triggered by what Bryce said. Bryce smiled. “His fiancée and her brother.”

“Probably wouldn’t hurt to tell him,” Bryce suggested. “I mean, if you find it helpful.”

“I will,” the doctor said. “Thanks!”

“Look, don’t give up,” Bryce told the doctor. “I gotta go,” and with that he hurried off.

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Now

“Devon was told by his mentor about her, and we watched the videos,” Ellie said. “I learned a lot about myself.” She rolled her eyes. “Of course, Devon is secure.”

“Of course,” Sarah said, smiling.

“There’s a reason Chuck calls him Captain Awesome,” Ellie said.

“Hey, I’m ready to go,” Chuck said, carrying out the last bag. Both women smiled at him.

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Five months ago, somewhere in California, in a house that MIGHT have a red door and a white picket fence (Come ON! You all know who she is.)

“My name is Zondra Rizzo,” the dark haired lady said to Dr. Lane. “And I know you are Doctor Emma Lane.”

“Emma is fine,” Emma told her. “But I would like to know why you are in my house.”

“Because of her,” Zondra said, nodding toward the little girl in Emma’s arms. “I used to work with your daughter.”

“Sam,” she whispered, shocked. She realized what she had done.

“It’s okay, Emma,” Zondra said. “Your daughter...she never said much, but when she talked about you...it was with regret. Regret of making the wrong choice. And of love. She loves you, and you don’t know how much I hate saying this kinda stuff.”

“Oh, I bet I do,” Emma said with a grin. Her eyes went wide as something dawned on her and she looked down at the girl in her arms.

“It’s not Sarah’s,” Zondra told her. Emma looked up, confused. “That-”

“I knew that,” Emma said, shaking her head. “That her name is Sarah now, it just slipped my mind for a second. I don’t write down the name, but...she’s always Sam.”

“I know,” Zondra told her. “She knows,” Zondra added gently. “This...baby, was a mission.” Emma looked down at the little girl again who was snuggled against her. “Her parents were killed, and I rescued her.”

"Is she in danger?" Emma asked.

"All of those involved with her parents death were dealt with," Zondra said. "With prejudice."

"Good," Emma said.

Zondra couldn't help but chuckle. "There's a big grumpy guy that worked with us that did some snipping. He doesn't like lady feelings, but when he shot the lead member of the people who did this, he smiled." Emma didn't know what to say to that.

"Anyway, we need somewhere to hide this child, somewhere she would be raised, loved, and grow up and be secure," Zondra told her.

"To have a secure attachment?" Emma asked, a smile on her face. "Does my daughter know?"

"No, but if...when she sees the paperwork," Zondra began, giving a smile to the look Zondra had at correcting herself. "She'll know."

"What's her name?" Emma asked.

"Molly," Zondra told her. "And, there is money to help care for her." Emma started to protest. "Raising a kid costs," Zondra reminded her. Emma nodded and looked down at the little one.

"Want to live with me, Molly?" Emma asked. A content sigh and snuggle against Emma was all Molly had to offer.

"I'm going to take that as a yes," Zondra said with a smile. "Thank you," she said sincerely. "For everything. You have no reason to do all of the things you're doing."

"Oh, I have reasons," Emma said, looking down at the little girl and then at the room she had reserved for one person...a reservation that just got changed.

"I guess you do," Zondra agreed.

A/N: Bryce...what are you doing?

Chapter 12: Chapter 12

A/N: There's a whole lot of things going on in this one. For those of you who keep asking, will there be Charah, there is a Charah scene already written and my prereaders all asked the same thing. Is it hot in here or is it me? We gettin there. Hold tight.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

She was driving, and Chuck....well...Chuck was staring out the window, a smile on his face. She honestly was waiting for him to roll down the window, and put his head out of it. She knew that made him sound like the human equivalent of a dog that was just happy to be on a car trip, but that's how it seemed.

She was amazed at how happy she felt just watching him and how conflicted she felt. She was having an internal war and she couldn't help but replay the conversation in her mind, over and over.

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"Darlin', you can talk to her," Jack told her as gently as possible. It was a spring evening, the two outside, the bon fire going, and the two had slowly been dealing with old wounds.

"Dad, I left her," Sarah said softly. "I left her for some damn cookies-"

"That's on me," Jack said forcefully, but gently. "I was the parent."

"But I hurt her," Sarah said. "I hurt my mother so badly...I've done terrible things in the CIA, but I regret nothing more than the pain I caused her."

Jack didn't know what to say. "It's not on you, Darlin'"

"I can't go back until....until I fix me," Sarah told him.

"Darlin'," Jack began. "You know who she is. You know that she understands, that she forgives you. You know-"

"I know, Dad," Sarah said, tears softly falling. "I know. But...I gotta do this right."

“Okay,” Jack said, resigned. He didn’t agree with her, but she was her own woman...however, she was his daughter, and at some point....for now, he’d respect her wishes.

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“Hey, Chuck,” Sarah said, pushing down the part of her that said they did NOT have to have this conversation. He turned to her. “When we get to the farm, me, you and Dad...we need to have a little talk.” She saw his face and cursed herself internally. “Not a bad one.” She took a deep breath. “Ellie told me about Dr. Lane.”

Chuck blew air out his lips making a sound, and look slightly irritated. “She shouldn’t have put that on you,” he said, shaking his head. “I don’t know what you know about her and her work, Dr. Lane that is, but I’m an anxious avoidant, and I would like to thank you for reassuring me this talk is not bad to keep my anxiety down.” Sarah smiled. “But I also should tell you that my anxiety says that is exactly what someone would say that has something bad to tell me.” Sarah couldn’t help but grin and shake her head. “So, Dad and I have both been using her videos and workbooks,” Sarah told him. “And, I would like to table this conversation until we get there, so we only have to have it once.” “Ooooo, I see what you did there,” Chuck said, a smile on his face. She couldn’t stop the grin from seeing the happiness on his face. “Using what you’ve learned. Well done.” She gave a slight head bow at the recognition Chuck gave her. “Weird how we have this as a connection as well.”

They drove a few miles, both of them turning over the innocent off-hand comment Chuck had made. He turned to her and there was no smile on her face. There was a look...one that he didn’t know. “You don’t think...” Chuck began. She turned to him. “But...I learned about him from Awesome....” Sarah turned back to look at the road, the look deepening. Chuck turned to look at the road as well. “Sarah?”

“He’s a damn idiot,” Sarah muttered. Chuck couldn’t help himself. He burst out laughing.

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“Charlie!” Jack said as Chuck got out of the truck. There was a huge smile on his face. “Darlin’,” he said to his daughter. “Have a good time last night?” Chuck turned red and the smirk on Jack’s face grew.

“Dad,” Sarah said with a warning tone, but a grin on her face. “I told you, you snore. Chuck slept on the couch, and I slept in his bed.”

“She’s really overdramatic, this one,” Jack said to Chuck.

“Yeah, I guess that’s what happens when one gets abandoned in her teens,” Sarah retorted. Chuck felt very uncomfortable, and then didn’t as Jack began to laugh, and Sarah joined him.

“Told ya I made some mistakes, Charlie,” Jack told him. “Ready to be our partner in this?”

“Yes,” Chuck said, nodding.

“Dad, we should go inside and talk,” Sarah told Jack. “Chuck is an anxious avoidant.”

Jack turned to Chuck, a bit of surprise on his face. “Oh?”

“Yes, he’s...he’s been watching Dr. Lane’s videos,” Sarah said.

“And what do you think of Dr. Lane?” Jack asked him.

“I really like her,” Chuck admitted. “She’s kind, she’s thoughtful, she seems to have put a lot of her own time into thinking about these personalities and how they affect every part of your life and the best way to heal. She seems to be a wonderful person.” Chuck saw a smile come to Jack’s face. It wasn’t the normal amused smile, or the teasing one, but a true smile.

“She is,” Jack said softly, confusing Chuck. “Come on in.” Jack turned and went inside. Chuck turned to Sarah who had a soft smile on her face.

“What did I say?” Chuck asked.

“Nothing,” Sarah said. “Everything.” She walked up to him, and took his hand without stopping. He fell into step with her as they entered the house.

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"So," Jack said, after they were all seated. He looked over at Sarah. "You or me?"

"I got this," Sarah said. She turned to Chuck who was sitting on the couch beside her. "Dad and I are both dismissive avoidants."

"Angel," Jack said in a low voice, the amused smile back on his face.

She rolled her eyes goodnaturedly. "And, Dr. Lane, is also known as Emma Lane."

"Darlin'."

"I'm getting there," Sarah said, never looking at her dad, her eyes locked on Chuck. He saw the amused smile on her face and wondered if she wasn't doing this on purpose to mess with her dad.

"You avoid better than I do," Jack grouched.

"Emma Lane also is known to me as another name," Sarah continued. She took a deep breath. "Mom." Chuck's mouth dropped. "The people she keeps talking about that she lost...you're sitting in the room with them. We are her family."

"Dr Lane..." Chuck began. "Your mom?" He turned to Jack. "Your wife?"

The amused smile grew on her face as Sarah turned to Jack. "Yeah, dad. Your *wife*?"

Jack leaned forward, as he made a groaning noise. "You know, what is a wife...a marriage?" Sarah looked at Chuck as if to say, "here he goes". "I mean, even the bible says that marriage is what ever law or custom of that land is."

"And we know how you feel about laws," Sarah goaded him.

"Darlin'," Jack said, chuckling. "Look, you're not a bastard." Chuck's eyes widened. "I'm using the actual definition. One born out of wedlock."

"Yes, technically you and mom had a wedding," Sarah agreed. "But is it legal? Did you use your real name?"

"Laws are a funny thing," Jack said, spreading his hands.

Sarah turned to Chuck and amused smile on her face. "This is what you're about to be a part of."

"Are we breaking any laws in what we are doing?" Chuck asked.

"No," Jack answered. "We are following them carefully, or this will never work."

"Then I'm good," Chuck said.

"Welcome," Jack told him. Sarah smiled at him. "Now, if there's nothing else..." he saw the look on Sarah's face. "What else did I do?"

"Oh, you did nothing," Sarah told him. Jack cocked his head to the side, amusement on his face. "It's...Bryce."

"You ex-beau," Jack said, confused.

"His ex-best friend, the guy that got him kicked out of college, and a member of the CIA like me," Sarah said. She turned to Chuck. "No secrets, no lies." "That's what good partners do," Jack said.

"Yeah, but you two are more partners than me," Chuck said. "I literally work for you." Sarah saw the look on Jack's face, and she knew she should deal with this now, but she still wasn't one hundred percent fixed. She still avoided things when it suited her, and so she gave a subtle head shake. She saw the look on her dad's face. It was one of acceptance...for now.

"Bryce told me about Chuck when he thought he was dying and that I should check in on him," Sarah told her dad.

"And Bryce sent me videos about Sarah," Chuck said. "They were...his spy will?" he asked, turning to Sarah. Sarah nodded.

"You two think you were pushed together," Jack said.

The two begin to speak at the same time. "Pushed is strong," Chuck began.

"Check on each other," Sarah explained. They both stopped and looked on each other, missing the amused smile on Jack's face.

He decided to help them out. "And, Chuck knowing of Dr...Emma?" Jack asked.

"He learned about him through his brother-in-law," Sarah said. "So, there's no direct tie."

"I hear the biggest but in the world coming," Jack said, a knowing smile on his face.

Sarah shrugged and grinned. "Feels like an op Bryce would do. Overdramatic, and more than necessary. Going through someone close to Aw...Devon." "He's gonna be so happy you nearly called him Awesome," Chuck said softly. She turned to him to give him a smile and it took everything in Jack not to roll his eyes.

"Anyway," Sarah continued. "It feels...forced."

"So, do you feel like he did it for some nefarious reason?" Jack asked.

"No," Chuck answered. "It's like..." he paused. "It's like he knew he made a huge mistake and wanted it cleaned up."

"And he trusted you to do it?" Jack inquired. Chuck nodded. "And what about you, Darlin'? Do you feel he wanted you to fix what he messed up?"

"I mean...yeah," Sarah admitted.

"Then what's the problem?" Jack asked. Sarah and Chuck both looked confused. "Look sometimes you meet someone and your mind thinks, you know who they would work well with or be great friends with, this other person I know."

Chuck and Sarah looked at each other.

"You two do seem to enjoy each other's company," Jack said. Chuck swallowed. "All kidding aside, you two make a great team. I saw it firsthand, Mrs. Lewis saw it-"

"Have you been talking to Mrs. Lewis?" Sarah asked, a grin on her face.

"I invited her over for coffee last night since I was alone," Jack told her.

"Dad," Sarah said, in a scandalous tone, but grinning from ear to ear.

"She did say I filled out a pair of pants nicely," Jack said, nearly preening. Sarah and Chuck both laughed. "But seriously," he said, sobering up. "If he was the jerk you said

he was.”

“Jerk is strong,” Chuck muttered.

“More like an idiot,” Sarah said.

“I was thinking dumbass,” Chuck admitted.

“Then maybe he wanted to right some wrongs and felt you two would be good together,” Jack concluded.

“He did help me find you,” Sarah admitted. Jack spread his hands as if to say, “There you go.”

“Look, maybe you two met in a contrived way,” Jack said. “Doesn’t mean your friendship isn’t real.”

“He’s right,” Chuck said. Sarah nodded. “I really need to unpack.”

“Yeah, it’s late, we need to get you set up,” Jack began.

“So we need to get your stuff into the foreman’s place,” Sarah began.

“Whoa, Darlin’,” Jack said. “That place isn’t ready for someone to live in. He can have one of the other bedrooms in here.” Sarah didn’t look convinced. “Darlin’, it’s not fit to live in.”

“It will be okay,” Chuck told her. Sarah nodded. Chuck smiled, he felt right. He thought this was going to be absolutely perfect. He didn’t know how wrong he was about to be.

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She handed him a cup of coffee. He turned to her, his eyes bloodshot, his hair an absolute mess. “You okay?” she asked. He shook his head, unable to form words. Jack walked into the room and looked at the two.

“What’s wrong with you two?” Jack asked.

Chuck turned toward him, his expression unchanging. Jack pulled his chin back. “What is wrong?”

"You said she was overdramatic," Chuck said softly. "Not only was she not overdramatic, she might have been underdramatic."

Jack looked over at Sarah who seemed to be agreeing with him.

"I've heard the expression rattle the windows, but never thought it was true," he said in a haunted voice, staring at nothing. He turned back to Jack. "My window panes actually rattled."

"Charlie," Jack began.

"You snore like....I don't want to say freight train, because that is not enough of a description," Chuck said. "My door was closed, the pillow was pressed into my ears and it STILL sounded like you were right beside me." Jack didn't know what to say. "All I could keep thinking was, how was he not shived in prison for this?"

There was a shameful look on Jack's face. "They used to put me in solitary every night," he said softly. Sarah turned to him, shock on her face. "They used to use me to scare prisoners." He stood there, and shook his head. "The warden...the warden told anyone who did anything wrong had to sleep in the cell beside me in solitary." He shook his head. "It wasn't right." Sarah burst out laughing.

"This isn't funny!" Jack insisted.

"You're right, you got to sleep last night and we did not!" Sarah reminded him. "So, I am going to laugh at the absurdity of this entire thing."

"Go fix up the foreman's house," Jack said, waving his hand in that direction. "I have to go to the Farmer's Market with the truck so we can measure and see how many loads I can haul."

Sarah watched her father, started to say something but thought better of it.

"Let's go," Chuck said to Sarah. She looked over at him. "I can't sleep in here again. No offense, Jack."

"All offense, but also, I understand," Jack grouched. Chuck headed out the door, and Sarah looked back at Jack. There was a grin on his face.

"What?" Sarah asked.

"Nothing," Jack said innocently. He watched Sarah leave, and just smiled.

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"Okay, there is only one bed that is usable," Chuck said twenty minutes later, surveying the house.

"I probably should have done a closer inspection," Sarah said, mentally kicking herself. "I was too busy with everything else."

"Hey," Chuck said gently. "You were looking into places for others to live, the people that we are here to help, not worrying about yourself."

"You're right," Sarah said, huffing.

"What bothered you more, admitting I was right or giving yourself grace?" Chuck asked. She backhanded him on the shoulder, and her eyes went wide thinking she had done something wrong, but was pleased to see him laugh. "So, I'll take the couch you take the working bed."

"You mean that couch?" Sarah asked, pointing at the one in the living room.

"Yeah," Chuck replied. Sarah walked over and picked up one of the pillows on the couch and there was a spring sticking through the cushion. He blinked. "Okay, then, it's simple, I'll go disassemble my bed from the main house and we'll rebuild it here."

"Okay," Sarah said. What could go wrong?

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"You have got to be kidding me," Chuck muttered. He was squatted down looking at the bed frame.

"What's wrong?" Sarah asked. "Not know how to use a screwdriver without YouTube?"

"It's YouTube," Chuck said, shaking his head. "And tell me ol' wise one, where do we use the screw driver at."

“What are you talking about?” Sarah asked, squatting down beside him. She stared at the bed. “Oh. My. God.”

He looked at her as if to say, “SEE!”

The bed frame did not have screws. It was completely made of wood and the different joints were held together with what looked to be glue.

“We could take this apart,” Chuck said. Sarah nodded, just staring at it. “But I’m secure enough to say, I have no idea how to get it back together, and I’m not even sure how you’d take it apart without breaking it.”

“Maybe my bed’s not like that,” Sarah said. Chuck just turned and looked at her. “Look, I know the chances are low given how this is going, but you can at least give me a second of hope.”

“It’s like we’re in some stupid fanfic,” Chuck muttered, getting up and heading to her room to look at her bed.

“What does that mean?” Sarah asked.

“Oh for crying out loud, first Bryce is working to get us to meet, then your dad knew about the bed situation-”

“What do you mean my dad knew about the bed situation?” Sarah asked. He gave her a look. “Okay, I was hoping it was just me thinking he was up to....wait, you think he took the truck on purpose so we couldn’t buy a bed frame and get it back here today?”

“Looking that way,” Chuck said, squatting down at the foot of her bed saying a silent prayer. He lifted the covers and then immediately dropped them.

“Exactly the same?”

“Exactly the same,” Chuck said, standing. “And now there’s only one bed for us to sleep on.”

“Chuck, you’re being a bit dramatic,” Sarah said gently.

"Of course I'm being a bit dramatic, I'm a anxious avoider!" Chuck replied. Sarah couldn't help but laugh, and Chuck joined in with her. "I'm not doing it, Sarah," he said gently.

"Doing what, Chuck?" she asked, unable to stop the amused smile from her face. "Sleep in the same bed with me? Control yourself from defiling me?"

"Was the defiling comment necessary?" Chuck muttered.

"We're two grown adults," she told him.

"We are," Chuck said, nodding.

"You don't trust yourself in bed with me?" she asked.

"I don't trust my hand to move in a way it shouldn't," Chuck admitted.

She stared at him, narrowed her eyes, and grinned. "You're a habitual cuddler, aren't you?"

"Probably," Chuck replied, making Sarah laugh. He shrugged. "I mean I have the look."

"You do," Sarah said. "Let's go to the furniture store and see if something can be delivered today or fit in the car."

"Tell me you don't think that's possible," Chuck said to her.

"Oh, I don't, but watching you melt down over it is entertaining," Sarah admitted, shrugging. Chuck laughed. "I trust you. Come on."

She headed out, as he followed behind. "I swear it's like one of those ridiculous tropes," he muttered.

"They only had. One! Bed!" Sarah said dramatically, making him laugh. They got in the car and headed to town.

A/N: Ridiculous fan fic tropes, I tell ya. Who is writing this mess. Oh. More soon. HOPEFULLY!

Chapter 13: Chapter 13

A/N: I know there has been another fic where Sarah and Chuck shop for furniture, this ain't that. Also, if you've NOT read Sarah vs the Super, I give it four gajillion fluffies out of five. Yes. It is beyond DC approved.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

"You're enjoying this," Chuck said, looking over at Sarah as they pulled up to the furniture store.

"Yeah, I am," Sarah admitted, chuckling. She parked the car and turned to him. "Chuck, you're a good guy. You're so good, that Bryce...you affected him." "You affected him," Chuck countered. "Okay, we can talk about that later, but you just avoided what I was saying," Sarah pointed out. "You are your mother's daughter," Chuck groused, but had a warm smile on his face the whole time.

"I appreciate you...well, whatever it is you're doing," she began. "I don't want you to feel uncomfortable or..." he trailed off. "Sarah..."

"I get it," Sarah said gently. "But, you have two choices. You can either sleep in the house with Dad-"

"What if he slept in the foreman house?" Chuck offered.

"I have already suggested that and he said, and I quote, 'Nope, this is my house now, and I'm going to live in it. You're welcome to live here with me, or in the other house, but this is mine,' end quote."

"Okay," Chuck said, slowly accepting what was about to happen. "So sleep in the house with your Dad, or with you," Chuck said.

"I mean am I that hideous? I do shower," Sarah said, amused.

"You know why," Chuck said softly. He looked up at her. "At least, I gotta think you do."

"You think I'm pretty?" She teased.

“No,” Chuck said shaking his head. “Over the past few days I have felt a connection with you that...I’ve never felt, and I’ve been...” he paused, searching for the words as the smile left Sarah’s face and she felt something bloom inside of her that she had been trying to ignore. “And I’ve been more afraid of losing it than I ever dared mention.” He shook his head, trying to clear it so he could focus on finding the correct words, never noticing the look on her face. “You are so funny, and smart, and kind, and just....you’re amazing,” he said looking at her. “And, you are so beautiful. Inside, you are...you are just beautiful. And you have to know that your outer beauty...it’s breathtaking.”

“Thank you,” she managed to get out. “So, please don’t take me being awkward about this or...or seeming to...I don’t know...mentally break because I don’t want to scare you off,” Chuck told her.

She leaned forward. “You know, I kinda like it when you mentally break,” she admitted. He made a bit of a choking sound. “See, that...I like that you’re not some pompous mark that thinks the world shines around you.”

“No, I don’t,” he got out.

“I like that sometimes you’re so unsure what to say, but your eyes...you entire body, says so much that you really don’t have to say anything, but when you do, it’s so genuine and you,” she continued.

“Don’t know how to be anyone else,” Chuck admitted.

“That’s why I want you as a partner in this,” Sarah continued.

“Sounds like I’m a hooker,” Chuck said, grinning. The grin fell off his face as he saw the look on her face. “I...I’m sorry. I only meant that I’m your partner, but you’re paying me.”

“Chuck, I’m only paying you because you need money to live AND you are doing work we need,” Sarah pointed out.

“I know, I know.”

"You're my partner," Sarah told him. She saw the look of uncertainty on his face, but right now she only had time to deal with one thing at a time, and for now, the sleeping arrangements came first. She would deal with the other later. "Chuck-"

"So, to sum, you seem to like me."

"Mmmhmm," she hummed, nodding. "And, you enjoy breaking me," Chuck continued. She nodded quickly. "So...you're totally gonna torture me in there aren't you?"

"Me?" Sarah said, as innocently as possible with a hand to her chest. Chuck didn't see a halo over her head but he felt it was implied.

"Is it bad that I am enjoying this?" Chuck asked her.

"It would be bad if you didn't, because then it would be bullying," Sarah told him.

"And then you'd stop, right?" Chuck asked. Sarah shrugged and got out of the car. "Right?" She shut the door. "Jesus, she's gonna be the death of me," he muttered as he got out of the car.

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"What do you think of this one?" she asked, lying on the bed looking at Chuck. Chuck looked over to the salesman and then back to Sarah. "I find it comfy, but since you'll be sleeping here...too," she added, a grin on her face. Chuck looked over at the salesman to say something, but at that time the salesman looked at Sarah and then over at Chuck and shook his head.

"It's not like that," Chuck began.

"Yeah, I wish I had someone it wasn't like that with," the salesman grumbled. Chuck sighed and looked over at Sarah, who was grinning maniacally. She patted the empty area beside him. "You really should test it out." Chuck gave the salesman a look. "Just keep your clothes on."

"I wasn't," Chuck began, but gave up as the salesman walked away.

"Chuck," Sarah said in a sing song voice, making him turn to his grinning new housemate. "Come try out the bed with me."

He walked over to the empty side of the bed, and spoke in a low tone. "You are saying it like that on purpose," he accused.

"Saying what?" she asked, trying to sound innocent, and laughing the whole time.

He didn't say a word to her, knowing there was nothing he could say that she would use against him. He couldn't help but smile as he laid down beside her. "Okay, it is comfy."

She laid there, looking up at the ceiling, happier than she had ever been. She thought about everything her mom had said in those videos, took a deep breath, and rolled over to her side, to look at him. "Hey, can I tell you something?"

"You can tell me anything, Sarah," Chuck told her. There was honesty in his voice that settled in her core that she knew he meant what he said. "It may make me turn forty-seven shades of red, but you can tell me anything."

She filed that away. "I'm only telling you this, because...you are the one person who'd understand." He rolled on his side to face her, and she saw him listening. Actively listening. "He could never do anything like this. The teasing. Everything had to be serious. He couldn't look like..." she trailed off, searching for the right words.

"Like you had the lead?" Chuck offered. Sarah nodded. "I've been thinking over the past few...years." Sarah couldn't help but snort, knowing he had said it that way on purpose. He had a grin on his face, happy he had made her laugh. "People always talk about relationships being 50/50, but that's ridiculous."

"How so?" she asked.

"If you're *really* with someone, you're going to be with them, when they are thriving, but also, when they are the opposite of that," Chuck began. "So, if someone is putting their all into a relationship, but they're twenty percent of themselves, because life is lifeing all over them, then the other partner *should* pick up the slack."

"So sometimes it 80/20 one way, and then 80/20 the other?" Sarah asked.

"Right," Chuck said. "And, some people are just naturally better at some parts of the relationship than the other. Like...say you go out to a restaurant with your significant

other, and they don't want to cause a scene but they got the wrong food."

"That person isn't going to say anything," Sarah said, seeing where this was going, and nodding. "But I'm going to make sure you get what you ordered." "Yeah," he said softly. "You would." He couldn't help but notice a strand of hair had fallen on her head over her eyes.

"What?" she asked.

"There's a piece of...a lock of your hair?" he asked, not sure of the word, and also getting sidetracked with the look she was giving him. "Uh...it's fallen and I almost moved it back behind your ear, and I'm sorry. That's a very familiar...intimate...I'm not sure the word but I'm sure I shouldn't just reach up and move it for-"

"Move it," she said softly, but intensely. There was a small mysterious smile on her face that Chuck had the inklings of what the mystery actually was, but he was not going to put words to that, because that path...that path led to even more of him being broken. He lifted his hand, and gently redirected the strand of hair to her ear, and gently tucked it behind her ear.

He saw her swallow, and he felt himself do the same thing.

"I really like this bed," Sarah said softly.

"Yup," Chuck agreed, a few octaves higher than he meant to. "Do you want it?"

"Only if you want it," Sarah told him. His eyes widened. He knew she didn't mean it like that...right? "Want me to get the guy?"

"Up to you," she said.

"Kay!" he said, and bounded off the bed. That had been...he let out a breath he had been holding and went to find the salesman. He never looked back, but he swore he felt her eyes following him across the store. Which was crazy. Right?

She lay there, feeling things she wasn't sure of. She had felt attraction before, but this...this was...she sat up, her legs tucked under her, and found herself reaching over to the spot he had laid. She felt the warmth of where he had been with her hand, her eyes

never leaving Chuck, who was looking for the salesman. They were probably going to have to share a bed that evening. She trusted him in that bed. She wasn't sure she trusted herself.

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He was standing at the Farmer's Market, grinning. "I hear the avocados are in season at the Just Out of Reach Farm," came the voice behind him. He turned, and a smile threatened to split his face.

"Hello, beautiful," he said softly. "And your momma is a looker as well."

"Jack," Emma said, grinning at him as he squatted down to get eye level with the little girl grinning in the stroller. He unbuckled her gently, pulled her out of the stroller, and stood. Molly had her arms around his neck as he looked at Emma. "Look at you," she said softly.

"Look at you," he said, grinning. She blushed. "Thought you'd like to know, that kid that's got a thing for our daughter, he's fearful avoidant."

"What?" Emma asked, chuckling.

"Yep, seems he uses your videos," Jack told her.

"Bryce?" Emma asked.

"Probably," Jack said, nodding. "You know, considering how easily I've figured some of this out, part of me wonders if I shouldn't have gone into the spy game." Emma gave him a flat look. "Although I am quite happy with my current role."

"And what role is that?" Emma asked.

Jack gave her a smile. Not the grin, but a smile. "Getting to see you again. Getting to see my daughter...daughters," he corrected himself, making Emma's smile grow. "And having a front row seat to two idiots falling in love so fast and trying to fight it all at the same time." He shook his head. "It's a thing of beauty."

"Wish I could see her," Emma said.

"So, how about Saturday I meet you here?" Jack asked, the grin back.

"Jack," Emma said in a low tone.

"Look, it's me inviting you and shortstuff," Jack said. He then turned, pulled his lips over his teeth, and gently gum the side of Molly's face, making her shriek in delight. He turned back to Emma. "Just a guy and his girls."

"I should ask what girls you mean," Emma told him.

"No, no you shouldn't," Jack replied. Emma couldn't stop the laugh.

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Chuck sat in the car, silent as they drove back. Sarah was fighting laughing with everything she had. "All I asked was if there was any chance it could be there today," he muttered.

"That is all you did," Sarah agreed, her shoulders shaking.

"And then he said it would take two to three weeks," Chuck continued.

"In his defense, the disappointment on your face was palpable," Sarah pointed out.

"Sarah, I just didn't want to have you in the position of having to sleep with me for that long," Chuck said. He blew out a breath. "Dude, thought I was upset because you wouldn't be sleeping with me."

Sarah snorted at that.

"Great, not only do I have to sleep with you for two weeks, but you snort," Chuck continued. She pulled off the road. "You okay?" She couldn't answer. She was too busy laughing. "I have never seen someone look so sorry for something in his life," Chuck muttered, thinking about the look on the salesman's face when he thought Chuck was upset about not getting to sleep with Sarah. He looked over at her and smiled. Tears were streaming down her face, and the joy that radiated from her.

He couldn't help but think, Bryce may have ruined part of his life, but this...that he had set up....it might have made up for it.

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He was sitting in bed, looking at the tablet in front of him. For the most part, the foreman's house was in good shape. Besides the bed and dresser for his bedroom, they had bought a couch and chair. That had gone...okay.

Chuck had no idea what she would do to him when trying to find the right couch. She had gone around looking at different ones, until she found one she liked. She sat on it, asked Chuck to do so, and he told her he liked how it felt. He grinned as he thought about what had happened next.

"Sit over there," she said, pointing to the far side of the couch. He did so, and she sat down on the other end. She then, grinning the entire time, put one foot, and then the other, in his lap.

"Wha-what are you doing?" Chuck asked.

"Sorry," she said, starting to move her foot off of his lap. "You just looked like you're the kind who would give a foot massage." His hand gripped her ankle before she could clear his legs. He slowly brought it back to his lap, his eyes locked on hers. He reached for, and gripped the boat, as if to take it off. "What are you doing?" she asked, a little rocked and suddenly out of her depth.

"Can't give a foot massage if you've got your boots on," Chuck told her.

"To be fair," he muttered. "That could be why the salesman thought I was disappointed in the bed not being here."

"You proud of yourself?" She asked, walking out of the bathroom. Chuck let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. She was wearing a tee shirt and shorts. Not that she wasn't beautiful in it, he was just wondering how far she might go with the teasing. He had no idea why purple negligee had come to mind and thought to himself that was quite specific.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean," Chuck said, trying his best to look innocent. She came around the bed, and got in on her side. They both sat there, their eyes locked, both of them grinning at the other.

"You think you got one up on me with the boot thing earlier?" Sarah asked. "Ma'am, you asked me to rub your feet and that can't happen with boots on," Chuck told her.

"So you were just gonna what...take my boots off right there in the store?" Sarah asked. "And your socks," Chuck added. Her eyes widened. "You can't give a good massage to a person's foot if they have on socks. I mean, it would be adequate but not what someone is looking for."

She was silent a second as she studied him. "That's what you do, for everyone isn't it?" He gave her a confused look. "You just can't be adequate, can you? You have to give it your all."

"If you're going to do it, why wouldn't you give it your all?" Chuck asked.

"That's what hurts the most about Bryce, isn't it?" Sarah asked. Chuck didn't know how to respond. "He did what he thought was best for you and I. Whereas you would stop and think about how things would affect someone else."

"So would you," Chuck said. Sarah shook her head and looked down. She was gobsmacked when his first finger gently cupped her chin and turned her head toward him. "Sarah. So would you." She swallowed, her eyes locked on his. "I've seen reports of stuff you have done." He paused for a second. "Bryce really shouldn't have had some of that stuff in that file."

"No, he shouldn't," Sarah agreed. "But I've also seen you," Chuck added. "Mrs. Lewis. Me, with Anna."

"That's not who I normally am," Sarah said. Chuck moved his finger away from her chin, but Sarah caught his hand. She slid her fingers between hers.

"Or, is it," Chuck pointed out. "And you always ignored it in the past because of the job and who you had to be around. He was silent for a moment. "If I said too much, I'm sorry."

"Chuck, I don't think you'll ever say too much," she told him. "We do have a big day tomorrow." He nodded, knowing they were both avoiding this moment. He was because...he was sleeping in a bed with her, her bed. He nodded, squeezed her hand, let

go of it, and laid down. She did the same. They pulled the covers up together. They glanced at each other, and then both stared at the ceiling. They shut their eyes, sure neither of them would sleep all night. They feel asleep in seconds.

A/N: David...what are you doing? Listen...I'm just doing what they tell me to do.

Chapter 14: Chapter 14

A/N: I hear you...I hear you. David, did you really make them sleep in the same bed? Are you really doing that?

I've written how many stories and you guys are shocked? Really? Commmeeee oooooonnnnn.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

He felt himself waking, which was nothing new. What was new was the weight on his left side. It wasn't heavy, it was...comfortable. It was firm...yet soft. There was a light scent near his nose that he didn't know the name of, but he knew the scent. The scent had only been around for a short time, but his brain had already cataloged it. He didn't know the shampoo name, or perfume name, or body wash name, but he knew who wore it.

Sarah Walker.

The memories of yesterday came crashing back and he involuntarily held his breath.

And that was when he felt it. The slight smile against his chest.

"You should probably know that I know you're awake," Sarah said softly. He realized now what had woken him. It had been her hand gently moving against his chest. "Didn't mean to wake you."

"I...I don't think you did," Chuck answered, his brain running a million miles a minute and not running...all at the same time.

"Yeah, I probably did," Sarah said. She raised up and he opened his eyes to see her. The amused look from the day before was back on her face, and God did he love seeing it. "I apologize. I was comfy and..." she shrugged. "I just felt like rubbing my hand across your shoulder where it was."

"It's totally okay," Chuck replied.

He was soooooooooo out of his depth. He was drowning. And yet....yet he wouldn't have it any other way.

"It's really not," Sarah said, shaking her head, looking back at him through her lashes, that amused look almost becoming a smirk. "I mean, I tortured you all day yesterday and now...now I woke you and I'm sure you hardly slept a wink last night."

"I mean it couldn't have been easy for you to have slept last night," Chuck told her. She didn't say anything, just held his gaze, the almost smirk still on her face. "You have all this training about protecting yourself, and I'm sure you were on alert all night."

"Nope," she replied shaking her head. "Might have been the best I have ever slept in my life."

Chuck's. Brain. Broke.

She watched it happen in real time and the smirk that had been held at bay for this entire conversation showed itself.

"I mean...that takes real trust," Sarah continued.

"Uh," Chuck managed to get out.

"Chuck," she said softly, but in a tone that jerked him out of whatever fog his brain was in because of the dust and smoke of his brain breaking. "I trust you."

"I won't break that trust," Chuck said. He thought for a second. "If I can help it," he added. She gave him a curious look. "Damn it," he muttered. "This is your mom's fault." She couldn't stop the giggle that came out of her if she had wanted to. He shook his head. "I have to know the parameters of said trust, so I don't break it," he continued, unable to stop the grin on his face at her. She made him happy. A happiness was in him that he didn't know he missed. A happiness had returned that made him have real hope.

"I know," Sarah said softly. "And, I'm not sure I know how to do that."

"There's only one way," Chuck told her. "And it's not easy."

"It's not," Sarah agreed. She was silent and then plowed ahead. "We have to be honest. And I know that sounds clique but being honest...is scary as hell."

"It is," Chuck agreed. "Too many..." he swallowed, took a deep breath and continued. "Too many live life giving up little pieces of themselves to make others happy and then they get lost...they don't even know what they need out of life...their partner."

"Yeah," Sarah said. She was silent for a moment. "I'm going to tell you something and please don't laugh at me." She looked at him and he nodded. "When I first got here, dad made me watch a movie." Chuck didn't say a word. "It was *Runaway Bride*."

Chuck thought about that for a moment. "Because she was you," Chuck said. Sarah was a little surprised with that answer. "In the movie, Julia Roberts's character doesn't know how she likes her eggs. She doesn't know herself."

"Yeah," Sarah said, nodding.

"You've been....is conditioned the right word?" Chuck asked.

"Not exactly, but I get what you're saying," Sarah said, nodding. "Everything I did in the CIA was planned out. I was trained how to sleep, how to cook using whatever I had around me. It was never..."

"For joy?" Chuck offered. Sarah nodded. Chuck was silent for a moment. "So...do you know how you like your eggs?"

She grinned. She knew what he was asking. Was she ready? Was she still in her discovery stage? "Maybe," she said. "But here's the thing." Chuck sat there, his heart racing. "While I think you need to know who you are and not get lost in someone else, there is also a place where it's okay to discover who you are with someone else."

Chuck was silent. She could see him mentally doing the math in his head, trying to carry the "one".

"Chuck, people change, people grow," Sarah said. "We are not who we are at five, at twelve, at twenty, at forty. We are always changing."

"But there's a part of us that doesn't," Chuck said softly. "Are you talking about..." he trailed off.

"Soul mates?" Sarah asked. Chuck nodded unable to look at her. "I have no idea," she admitted. "But...here's what I do know. There are some people who I know that I was very close to as a kid or a teen that I wouldn't want to be now, because I changed."

Chuck nodded, thinking about some people he knew and how they had grown apart. And then...then he thought about Morgan. "And then..." he looked at her, trailing off.

"And then, there are those that stay with us through thick and thin, and when we meet them in our lives, we know deep down, that we would have been friends with them if we had met them sooner," Sarah continued.

"Met anyone like that recently?" Chuck asked, his mouth dry.

"Hey!" they heard a voice from outside. "Sun's up!"

"We're on our way!" Sarah bellowed back at Jack. She turned to Chuck. "Yes," she said, and with that, she hopped out of the bed, and headed to the bathroom.

Chuck sat there, just taking in what they had said.

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She left their place and headed over to the main house. She had heard the front door close while she was getting ready and figured Chuck was with Jack. She was trying to calm herself. She had never been this open with someone...of course, she wasn't sure if this was open for most people, or just being normal.

She entered the house, and was assaulted with the smell of eggs and coffee. She headed to the kitchen and saw the two men in her life talking, looking at some papers, and drinking coffee.

She paused and realized what she had thought. The two men in her life.

"So, rebuild the bunkhouse?" Jack asked.

"Most of the wood is rotten," Chuck said, with a shrug. "I don't want to save a few pieces, use them, and find out in a few weeks or months, we have to replace something or it's not structurally sound because we tried to skimp."

"He's right, Dad," she said, as she walked over to get a mug and make her own cup. She stopped short when she saw one there poured. She looked over at her dad, who was grinning. He said nothing as he took a sip of his coffee. She looked over at Chuck who was studying the papers in front of him with an impressive amount of concentration. She glanced at said papers. "You can read upside down?" she asked Chuck.

He looked up at her and then back to the paper. He reddened a bit, turned the paper as she picked up the mug and took a sip. She let herself hum in contentment as the coffee tasted perfect. "Well, that would explain why some of this didn't make sense," Chuck muttered. Jack laughed out loud.

"Charlie is totally right," Jack agreed with Sarah. "So," he said, looking from one to the other. "When is the delivery of your furniture?"

"Two weeks," Sarah said, watching Chuck study a number on the paper like he was trying to see it at a molecular level as the redness continued to climb his neck and head to his ears. She shouldn't be enjoying this as much as she was, but she could not help herself.

"Does he snore?" Jack asked. Chuck's head dropped against the table with a loud thunk making both father and daughter laugh out loud.

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"We can sell those Saturday," Jack said to Sarah as they watched Chuck working on picking the avocados. "Probably do you some good to come down to the market and both of us see how it operates tomorrow."

"What are you doing?" She asked softly.

"I might ask you the same thing," Jack replied. "But, perhaps we shouldn't be doing this while he is up there. We don't want him falling."

"You're right," Sarah said. "We don't want him hurt."

Jack was quiet for a second, watching his daughter watch Chuck. "If he fell you wouldn't let him get hurt," he said, a grin on his face. He then turned and headed toward the

bunkhouse.

She turned as he walked away. "I know what you're implying," she yelled after him. He turned and shrugged as he walked backwards. He pointed up to Chuck as if to say, 'watch him.'

She quickly turned back to watch Chuck. His ears were red again. She couldn't help herself. "Do you need a hat? Are you getting sunburnt?" His ears got redder and her grin grew.

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It was the middle of the afternoon and Sarah and Jack were standing by the tailgate of the truck, having a drink of zero sugar Gatorade from the heavy duty watercooler.

"Darlin'," Jack said, the two of them watching Chuck working, tearing down the bunkhouse. The two of them were taking a break. When they asked Chuck he said he was fine. "You need to talk to him." She gave him a look. "Not about that...I mean, you probably should, but you're enjoying yourself too much." Her eyes widened. He pointed at Chuck. "About...that." "Is he doing something wrong?" Sarah asked.

"Oh, God, you don't see it," Jack said, shaking his head. "He's worked in retail for years," Jack reminded her. She gave Jack a look of confusion. "Nothing against that job, but it uses different muscles."

"You think Chuck is too proud to tell us when he can't do any more?" Sarah asked.

"Proud?" Jack replied. "No," he said shaking his head. "Unable to tell his....what are you two?"

"Hell if I know," she muttered, and then her eyes went wide as she realized what she had said.

"THAT...I believe," Jack replied, chuckling. "And able to tell me, the father of...whatever the hell you two are...."

"Oh, God," Sarah said, groaning.

"Yep," Jack said.

"I wonder what's going to be worse tonight?" she asked, heading over to Chuck. "Your snoring or his complaining about how bad he hurts?"

"Hey!" Jack yelled after her. She waved her hand at him, never turning around. "She's not wrong," he muttered. "She didn't have to say it like that, but she's not wrong."

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He woke the next morning, not smelling the smell he had the previous morning. He wasn't sure if it was because the smell was not around or he had lost the ability to smell with how bad everything hurt. He wanted to open his eyes but his eyelids hurt...but they also hurt from not opening his eyes. He opened them, and slowlllllly turned his head to where he had last saw Sarah the night before. She was lying on her side, already dressed for the day, her hand under her head, propping herself up, grinning.

"Sore?" she asked sweetly.

"My hair hurts," he muttered.

"Okay, there's two ways this plays out," Sarah began.

"Killing me would be a mercy," Chuck told her.

"Nope, not an option," she told him. He groaned. "So, we do nothing and you tough it out."

"Would you think less of me if I didn't do that?" Chuck asked.

"Why would I think less of you?" Sarah asked.

"Don't know, can't think, brain hurts," Chuck replied, making her snort.

"Or, you can take a shower, dry off, and I mean DRY OFF," she emphasized. "And I can put some stuff on you, and it will make you feel better."

"What's the downside?" Chuck asked.

"It's going to burn and smell," Sarah said. "And honestly, depending on which one we use is which one is going to smell the worst."

"Let me guess the better it helps the worse it smells," Chuck said. Sarah nodded. "I feel like I'm missing something."

"I'm going to have to put it on you because some of the muscles that are hurting you, you can't reach," Sarah said. He nodded, his eyes half closed. She waited. She was grinning, just waiting for his brain to catch up. She saw the look on his face when it did. He jerked his head over to her, and then winced from the pain. The grin on her face grew and so did the red on his neck and ears.

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"OH MY GOD!" Jack heard as he walked toward the door of Chuck and Sarah's cabin to tell them they needed to go soon. Jack paused, turned and walked away without saying a word to either of them.

"It's only halfway done," Sarah told Chuck. He was in nothing but his boxers, lying face down on the bed. "And that's only the back, I haven't done the front."

"WHY IS IT BURNING SO MUCH!?!?" he nearly squealed.

She sighed. "You did dry off your back, right?" Sarah asked. He looked over his shoulder at her. "Chuck...did you just..." He closed his eyes. Sarah sighed. "I'm sorry. I don't understand the chemicals in this enough to give you a scientific breakdown, but basically if your body is wet at all...even just a little bit damp...this stuff burns more."

"This is why I could never be a spy," Chuck whimpered. "I'd tell you anything to make the pain go away."

"Anything?" Sarah asked, a grin on her face. "Like, how much you like sleeping with me?"

"You didn't need *Tiger Balm* to find that out," Chuck replied. "See! See! I'm just blurting things out." He groaned as she put the gel on his leg. "But it does feel good also. It's weird. The burn...the burn takes away the pain...but it BURNS!"

"It does," she said softly. "Do me a favor, quit trying to impress me and my dad."

He was silent for a second. "I'm trying to earn my keep, Sarah," Chuck told her.

“Chuck, you’re my partner in this, there is no keep to earn,” Sarah told him. He started to respond. “Now, roll over.”

“I can do the front,” he said quickly.

“You sure?” Sarah asked.

“Yeah,” Chuck said. Sarah nodded, got off the bed and walked over to the door. “Sarah,” he said. She turned back and saw him sitting. “I’m trying to do right by you.” “I know,” Sarah told him. “But you don’t have to try, you do. You just do. You do by being here and believing in us and just...being you.”

“That’s never been enough before,” Chuck said softly. She walked over to him and wrapped her arms around him. “I smell of that stuff.”

“I know, it’s burning the hair out of my nose,” Sarah said, still holding on to him.

Chuck began to laugh. “Don’t make me laugh, it hurts.”

“I was told I wasn’t funny,” Sarah told him.

“They lied,” Chuck replied. He looked up and she was looking him right in the eyes. “Sarah?”

She leaned forward and gently kissed his lips. “Now, do the front or I will.” She watched the red creep up his neck and couldn’t help but grin. She gently lay her forehead on his. “Your here, Chuck. I’m here with you.”

“Sarah,” he began. “I’m here,” she said. “With you.” He nodded. She got up, walked to the door, began to close it, and paused. “Also, prepare yourself, Dad is going to bitch about the smell.”

“It’s pretty gnarly,” Chuck agreed. “If it makes you feel better, you’ve complained less than he did the first time I had to put it on him,” Sarah said.

“He was in prison!” Chuck replied.

“He was in a private cell every night because of his snoring,” Sarah reminded him. “I’m not saying it was Club Fed, but it wasn’t exactly hard time either.”

“Thank you, Sarah,” Chuck said softly. Sarah nodded. “Sarah.” She looked him in the eye, his voice had almost asked her to. “Thank you.”

“Nothing to thank me for,” Sarah told him. “But, I hear you, and you’re welcome. Now, lather yourself up, and come on, we have to get to the Farmer’s Market.”

“Okay,” he replied. She shut the door. He sat there a second, thinking about what had brought him to this moment. Stanford, his birthday party, the Buy More, and now...now avocados.

“When our needs are met we feel feelings,” Chuck said softly, reciting some of the things he had learned from his videos. “Must be why I’m feeling hope.”A/N: Yeah....there’s no shoe that’s gonna drop. Don’t get scared. See you soon.

Chapter 15: Chapter 15

A/N: This was SUPPOSED to be THE chapter...but it wasn't right. Not yet. It's coming. Hang on. Today's lyrics are given to us by The Pretty Reckless, and if you've ever seen How The Grinch Stole Christmas, the young lady who played Cindy Lou Who back then, is the lead vocals of the band.

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

They rode in silence to the Farmer's Market. Jack driving the truck, Sarah sitting in the middle, and Chuck by the passenger door.

As they pulled up into the parking lot, Jack finally spoke. "So, the secret is to use a second towel after you've dried off to make sure there aren't any damp spots on you," he said. Sarah kept looking straight ahead, using all of her training to keep a straight face.

"Thank you," Chuck said, unable to look at Jack.

Jack parked the truck, went to turn off the ignition, paused, and added, "Of course, the real secret is to not work yourself so hard you need it to start with, but, you're a smart guy, you'll figure that out." With that, Jack turned off the truck, opened the door, and got out.

Sarah burst out laughing.

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"You okay with Dad and I helping you to carry these boxes of avocados?" Sarah teased as they walked toward the stall. Chuck shook his head, grinning from the ribbing.

"I mean, I seem to be causing you to do a lot of extra work and giving up your space," Chuck answered.

They sat down the boxes, and both of them turned toward the other.

"Gonna go check the truck, make sure we didn't miss anything," Jack said. Neither one heard him. "Oh, look, there's a thing I should go do," he said, shaking his head, walking

off. "They're both out of their depth," he muttered.

"Sharing," Sarah said. "It's what partners do."

"I'm not sharing a bed with Jack," Chuck pointed out.

She stepped forward, closing the space between them. "If you want to, ask him, but if he says yes, and you go deaf, that's your problem."

"Sarah," Chuck began, and he shook his head. "I feel like I've been forced into your world, and I know, Bryce also told you about me, but come on, this is...weird."

"Do you not like it?" Sarah asked. Chuck didn't know how to answer that. "Take out you being embarrassed by how we're 'forced' together, and answer me honestly, are we doing anything you don't enjoy?"

"The muscle aches aren't fun," Chuck replied.

"That's an avoidant answer," Sarah pointed out. Chuck couldn't help but grin. "From your personal point of view, what is your biggest problem with what we are doing?"

He was silent for a moment. "This feels too good to be true," he said softly.

"What does?" she asked.

"See, here's the thing, you're being avoidant as well the way you're asking those questions," he pointed out.

She held his gaze. "You think you and I are too good to be true?" She asked. "You think, there is no way we can just...click like this. That two people who have been through the shit we've been through can just find each other and be...this good together?"

"Well, that blew up spectacularly in my face," Chuck muttered, making her giggle. He took a deep breath. "Yeah," he said. She reached over and took his hand. "Yeah, I've been happier in the past few days than I have any right to be."

"Who says you don't have the right to be happy?" Sarah asked him. "Society? The lives we lived before we met each other?"

"Sarah," Chuck began.

"Chuck, this is important," she told him.

"I get that, and I'm here, and we will have this conversation, but...I think there's something more important you need to...deal with," Chuck told her. She saw he kept glancing over her shoulder. She turned, frustrated.

"What in the....hell...could be....mom?" Sarah asked.

"Who's the little girl with her?" Chuck asked.

"My kinda-sorta sister," Sarah answered. The two looked at Jack, Emma, and the little girl. She looked up at Chuck, who was doing math in his head. "She's adopted," Sarah told him.

"Okay," Chuck replied. "You...you should go talk to her."

"I'm not ready," Sarah said.

He took her hands. "Someone very wise said to me, 'there is a also a place where it's okay to discover who you are with someone else.'" She gave him a look. "I know, it is totally unfair for me to use your own words against you."

"We're gonna talk about that," she said, trying to look upset, but the amused look on her face giving it away.

"I have a feeling we're going to talk about a lot of things," Chuck replied.

She studied him for a moment. "I should go talk to her."

"You go, have family time, and your favorite employee will take care of selling the avocados," he told her. She started to object to the word "employee".

"Darlin'," Jack called out. She turned to look at the three. She turned back to Chuck.

"Go," he said. She nodded and went to her family. He smiled, he was happy for her. He truly was. She was getting her family back. "Now, to sell avocados." He rubbed his hands together, eager to do his part. To be part of something.

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"I'm sorry," Emma began. "I know you-"

"Mom, no," Sarah said, cutting her off. "I...I kept saying I wasn't ready, but the truth was...I was scared."

"I understand," Emma said. She glanced back at Chuck who was smiling and selling the avocados like he was born to do so. "Your employee seems nice."

"That's Charlie," Jack said before Sarah could say anything. "He's our partner, not an employee." Emma nodded. "Honestly, more like family."

"Dad," Sarah said.

"Fine, fine," Jack replied, grinning. "You two okay?"

"Two avoidant people just being scared," Sarah told him.

Emma chuckled. "What?" Sarah asked.

"I don't need to tell you what to do, dear, you know," Emma told her. Sarah watched Chuck for a moment, and nodded. "Yeah...I do." She turned to Molly and scooped her up, making the little girl giggle. "We need to get you to come to the farm."

"There's probably a good place for a swing set on the property," Jack told Sarah.

"I bet Chuck could find one in a heart beat," Sarah said, holding the little girl who was snuggling against her.

"I-" Emma began.

"Come to dinner tomorrow," Jack said softly. "Please, Em?"

"Okay," Emma agreed. "Will he be okay with it?"

"Yeah, probably nervous as can be, but he'll be fine, Mom," Sarah answered.

"And why would he be nervous?" Emma asked, amused.

"He's meeting the mom of his, and I quote, 'whatever the hell they are'," Jack said. Sarah didn't even bother giving Jack a look. She just shook her head and chuckled as Emma and Jack laughed.

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The week before Chuck's birthday party

He felt the eyes on him and looked up and wished he hadn't. The person made their way to him, their hair wild. "You are her."

Chuck looked from one side to the other and then back at the person talking to him. He couldn't even form words he was so confused. Chuck simply pointed at himself with a questioning look on his face.

The person nodded, and shot their hand forward grabbing Chuck's right breast making Chuck's eyes go wide. "You're her. Your heart is the same."

"That's not," Chuck began, working to remove the firm but gentle grasp from his right breast. "That's not where the heart is," he managed, yanking the hand away. "Where the hell is Lester?"

"Big Mike decided to have the two of them work separately," Anna said, having materialized beside him, obviously enjoying what Chuck was going through.

"Why?" Chuck asked, wondering who would split these two up.

"Technically, he's paying two people when they work together and getting nothing from either," Anna told him. Chuck looked at Jeff, who was just staring at Chuck...almost like he was trying to see into Chuck's soul.

"And what are you doing?" Chuck asked.

"Following Jeff and cleaning up his messes," Anna said.

"So now he's getting no customer service out of you, because you're watching Jeff," Chuck pointed out.

"Exactly," Anna said, grinning proudly. "Oh, Big Mike has already figured out how badly he's screwed up and has it fixed. Today is the last day." "Wait, how long has this been going on?" Chuck asked.

"A week," Anna said. Chuck's eyes went wide, incredulous that he hadn't noticed this chaos. "What can I say, I'm good." Chuck had to agree with that. "But, back to Jeff's gripping of your breast. Two questions. One, why? Two, it seemed gentle."

"The second wasn't a question," Chuck muttered. Anna chuckled. "And it was," he admitted, making her laugh. "As to the first question," he said, both of them looking at Jeff, "HE would have to answer that."

"Why did you molest Chuck?" Anna asked Jeff.

"He didn't molest me," Chuck said softly.

"Chuck, this is a safe space," Anna said. Chuck gave her a look and her amused look grew. "Jeff?"

"He's her," Jeff said.

"Jeff, I need more," Anna told him.

"He's the lead singer of The Pretty Reckless," Jeff answered.

"He actually knows a currant band?" Chuck asked, not hiding the incredulity from his voice.

"That's on me," Anna said. "I've been trying to get him to listen to stuff not from the eighties and nineties."

"And how's that going?" Chuck asked.

"Better than expected," Anna replied. She turned back to Jeff. "Is it because they're both tall and lanky?"

"No," Jeff said, and began to reach again for Chuck's right breast. Chuck flinched, but Anna's hand shot out and caught Jeff's wrist before his hand made contact with Chuck. "They both have pain in their heart." He blinked. "I'm hungry," he said. Anna let go of his hand and Jeff wandered off in the direction of the break room.

Anna looked at Chuck watching Jeff amble off. Chuck looked at her. "What?"

"He sees what you're going through," Anna said. "If Jeff can see it..."

"What's he been listening to?" Chuck asked softly.

"'Love Me,' Anna replied. She studied him a second, turned and followed after Jeff. "NO!" she yelled like she was scolding a dog as he began to approach an attractive

woman. Jeff turned away from the woman and headed on to the break room.

Chuck shook his head, and tried to get the entire exchange out of his head. He couldn't help but rub his right breast where Jeff's hand had been. He shook his head and snorted, pushing it all from his head.

}o{

Now

Jack had taken Molly over to Chuck to help him at the stand. Both women knew that was a lie. They stood there a moment watching. "Can we talk?" Sarah asked softly. She looked over at her mom and saw the grin on her face. "As my mom," she added.

"Here's the thing," Emma said, linking her arm through Sarah's and the two walking away from Jack, Chuck, and Molly. "I try and be mom for all my patients. I know I should be detached..."

"How could you though?" Sarah asked, being honest. "How can you have people be at their darkest...at their most vulnerable and not try and help them?"

"You can't be 'mom'," Emma began.

"But you try and be supportive," Sarah said. Emma nodded. "I don't know what to do about him," she blurted out.

Emma smiled, rubbed her daughter's arm, and didn't say anything as the two walked. She enjoyed giving people quiet and space and tell her in their words what was wrong. She knew her daughter usually wouldn't be affected by this tactic, but her training told her that this was what Sarah needed.

"We've been sharing a bed, nothing happening," she added quickly. "The other one in the house we're staying in broke, and sleeping in the same house as dad with his snoring-"

"The one thing I do NOT miss about that man," Emma muttered, making Sarah laugh. "And you're a grown adult, what you do or do not do..."

"Mom," Sarah said flatly, making Emma cackle. "You're enjoying this," she accused.

"Yes I am," Emma replied, smiling, making Sarah grin. "My baby girl has found a good man."

"You don't know..." Sarah began but trailed off seeing the look on her mom's face. "Dad?" Emma nodded. Sarah sighed but it was more performative than anything.

"There's my pouty little girl," Emma said. Sarah shook her head. "So what's the problem."

"He's stuck," Sarah said. "This morning when he woke up he asked me if I cared if he listened to music while he showered."

"It doesn't have to mean anything," Emma told her. Sarah gave her a look and Emma chuckled. "He kinda wears his feelings on his sleeve doesn't he?"

"These are the lyrics," Sarah said handing Emma the phone. Emma took it and read them.

In my depression I will lie

So I can pretend I'm fine

And in my obsession, I will die

Although I've committed no crime

And in my heart I've been betrayed

My body is all that I'm worth

And in my mind, I've been enslaved

And God, I'm giving it all that I got

So why doesn't anyone

Love me

Love me?

I just need someone to

Want me

Why doesn't anyone care?

Why won't you answer my prayer?

A constant situation I will hide

And bury my head in the dirt

Methods of persuasion I will try

To cover up all of this

Hurt my heart

I've been betrayed

My body is all that I'm worth

And in my mind, I've been enslaved

And God, I'm giving it

All that I got

So why doesn't anyone

Love me

Love me

I just need someone to

Want me

Why doesn't anyone care?

Why won't you answer my prayer?

You took it all away

You took it all away

You took it all away

Leave me here to pray

And God, I'm giving you

All that I got

Love me

Love me

I just need someone to

Want me

Why isn't anyone there?

Why won't you answer my prayers?

Why won't you answer my prayers?

God, are you even there?

Emma handed the phone back to Sarah and patted Sarah's forearm with her left hand, her right still looped through Sarah's left.

"Well?" Sarah asked.

"You already know," Emma said, looking at her. "He's scared."

"Okay, but what do I do?" Sarah said.

"You really want the answer?" Emma asked.

"Yes," Sarah told her. "Listen to your heart," Emma said. "And you know what it's saying."

"I do?" Sarah asked. Emma stopped walking and turned to face her daughter. "You do," Emma said softly. Sarah looked down at the ground. "Love him." Sarah looked up at her mom. "I mean, you already do."

"No," Sarah said. "You don't love anyone that quick."

"You don't?" Emma asked. Sarah didn't say anything. "You love who you love when you love them. There is no set answer, there is no right answer. Some people believe you need to be with someone for four seasons to see how they are during that time."

Others...others have been alone for so long when they finally find that persons....”

“Isn’t that lust...chemical?” Sarah asked.

“CIA teach you that?” Emma asked. “Bryce? Your father? And I don’t ask any of that to be mean, but to ask you who are you listening to? Who’s the ‘expert’ you’re taking this information from?”

“So I should listen to you, because you’re trained,” Sarah said, smiling as she kidded her mother.

“Oh, no,” Emma said. She gently laid her hand on the middle of Sarah’s chest. “You listen to what’s in here. And before you say it’s guided you wrong in the past, it wasn’t wrong about love. Maybe the person you loved didn’t deserve your love. Maybe they took advantage of that love. Maybe they didn’t appreciate that love. But it was love.”

Sarah looked back at Chuck and then back to her mom. “And he wouldn’t do any of that, would he?” Sarah asked softly.

“I don’t know him well enough to answer that,” Emma replied, a smile playing on her lips.

“Yeah you do,” Sarah said softly.

Emma pulled her hand away and pulled Sarah into a hug. “And so do you,” Emma said just as softly.

}o{

“You should know Emma and Molly are probably coming to dinner tomorrow,” Jack told Chuck.

“Okay, I should probably go see my sister and her boyfriend,” Chuck replied. He turned to help a customer and when that was done he turned back to Jack and Molly. “Something wrong?”

“I didn’t tell you that to run you off,” Jack told him. “You’re invited.”

"It's a family thing, Jack, I don't want to intrude," Chuck said simply. "Hey, ladies," Chuck said, waving at the two women walking towards them. Sarah and Emma smiled at him. "Excuse me," he said, and turned to help the customer that had walked up.

"What's wrong?" Sarah asked as she saw the look on Jack's face.

"He's going to see his sister tomorrow," Jack told them.

"Well, he should see his family," Sarah told Jack. "I'm going to go help him."

Jack watched Sarah go work with Chuck. "I know that look," Emma said softly.

"He thinks he's intruding on our family," Jack told her. Emma nodded. "He thinks he's not family."

"You know I could say something about the guy that once thought family was a liability is now being..." she trailed off, grinning.

"He thinks he's our employee," Jack said, almost annoyed.

"The old Jack would have taken advantage of that," Emma teased.

"This is all your fault," he grouched. Emma grinned and pulled him into a hug. "What is this for?"

"Because I love you, you idiot," Emma told him. Jack looked surprised, but then smiled, and pulled her in tight. They both laughed as two tiny arms went around both of them. The three held each other. Jack looked over at Chuck and Sarah. He was determined they were going to have the same thing.

A/N: Sorry for the slowness of updates. Life lifeing. Also, we (Yes me and another writer) have started [ChuckFanfiction . Org](http://ChuckFanfiction.Org) . It is a fanfic website to protect authors. Myself, Steampunk . Chuckster (yes, SC) and watever63 are the mods there. Every review must be okayed by us before it reaches the author. We have the ability to ban people. We've lost too many authors to hate and vitriol by guests on this site. Also, I'm going to post the other completed chapters to Nerds Rewrite over there. There are at least 10, AND SC MIGHT come back. MIGHT. HEAVY ON THE MIGHT. Please don't beg her. She's

thinking about it. Too many scumbag guests ran her off of here. Come join us if you'd like. Thanks for reading and I'll be back as soon as I can.

Chapter 16: Chapter 16

A/N: If you're reading this on ff . net, please consider joining us over at chuckfanfiction . Org It's an author first website created by us to protect authors from some of the hate reviews that have run off what few writers we have. Thank you for reading, and hopefully this story will pick up the pace here soon. Life...you know...

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck

"I need to talk to him for a minute." Sarah turned and saw the grin on her mother's face. Her and Chuck had been taking care of the kiosk for the past little bit, Sarah trying to figure out what to say to Chuck.

"Mom," Sarah began.

"I'm sorry, Sweetie," she said, a grin on her face. Sarah blew out a rough breath, knowing that while everyone thought she got her stubbornness from her father, they were wrong. Her mother would argue with a wall and win. Her mother could make mules think they were pushovers. Long story, short, Emma always won...until that time she didn't, but that...that was a lifetime ago.

Sarah walked off, and Chuck, having heard none of the conversation between the two women, turned, and wondered what was about to happen.

"I had a dream a long time ago," Emma said softly, a tear in her eye that she wasn't going to fight any longer. "My family, running this. My family, together."

Chuck didn't know what to say.

"Because of you...you gave me this chance," Emma continued. "So, you have to know, that you are now, and forever part of my family."

Chuck stood there, stunned. A man...a little boy....who's mother had left, then his father had left.... This woman...this woman said he was family. He barely knew her, but he knew the look on her face...in her eyes. She meant it. She had never meant anything more. "I..." he couldn't form words.

“Whatever happens between you two,” Emma said softly.

“Uh,” Chuck began, unable to put together a coherent thought with everything Emma had said.

She smiled, reached over, and took his hand. “Chuck,” she said simply, and he looked down, a slight blush on his cheeks and his ears beginning to slightly pinken. “You’re good for each other.” He looked up at her. “Now, I have to ask you a favor.”

He stood there, worry crossing his face. He couldn’t help it. It was what his childhood had done to him. People left him, and now, now someone he barely knew had told him he was in their family, but wanted a favor. It felt transactional.

“I would like to run this with my husband for a bit,” she said, a shy look on her face. “Could I get you and Sarah to take Molly and give us some time.” She looked around the kiosk. “It’s been a dream of mine forever.”

“Of course,” he blurted out, ashamed of himself for thinking Emma would want something from him in the way he had been thinking. “Absolutely.” Emma squeezed his hand, and turned and looked at her husband. “Jack,” she said simply. He was a ways away, but he looked up and grinned at her. “Wanna help a girl sell some avocados?”

}o{

Chuck found himself with one small blond nestled in his arms and another much taller one standing right beside him, a smile on her face that he had no idea what it meant...well, he might have had an idea, but he refused to think about it, because that would drive him insane. Because there was no way...he shook his head, and had to stop.

He saw a woman touch the shoulder of the man he was with and point at the three of them. His breath hitched. He didn’t need this, Sarah didn’t need this. He didn’t know what they were, but they weren’t...well...THAT!

“Knock it off,” he heard the voice beside him say. He looked over at her to agree with her, and saw her looking at him, an amused look on her face.

“Me?” he asked, pointing at himself.

“Yes, you,” Sarah said. “Look, we look a certain way, and someone saw us, looking happy, and it made them happy.”

“Okay, but-”

“Chuck,” she said, cutting him off. She took a deep breath. “Come on, let’s go in here,” she said, pointing toward the barn that had been refurbished. The two walked inside, what used to be a barn, but was now a store. There were vendors set up everywhere. “We need apple butter,” she muttered.

“Why do we need apple butter?” Chuck asked. “What is apple butter?”

“The fact you have to ask is why we need it,” Sarah told him. “And it is mana from the Gods.”

“Ma’am those are some lofty standards you just laid out there,” Chuck told her. “And you meet them everytime,” Sarah told him, looking him right in the eye. He quickly realized that she was not having the same conversation about apple butter that he was. “Now, before you do what you do-”

“What does that mean?” Chuck asked.

“Deflect and dodge like the “Whoa guy” in the movie that’s not about killing the dog,” Sarah continued.

Chuck pulled his chin back. “Wait, you think I’m like Neo in the Matrix?” Chuck asked. “You think I dodge and deflect that much?” Sarah stared at him. Chuck sighed. “Neo is played by Keanu Reeves who played John Wick.” Sarah continued to stare at him. “John Wick is the guy who’s wife had cancer, had left him the dog, the dog got killed by bad guys, and he killed all of them for killing his dog.”

“Yes,” Sarah said, satisfied with his explanation. Chuck shook his head grinning at her. “What?”

“I have no idea why I feel for you the way I do with you knowing that little about pop culture,” he said to her. It was then, his brain heard the words that had fallen out of his mouth. “I...uh..”

"Come on," she said, the amused smile growing, gently grabbing his free wrist and pulling him over to the counter. Chuck followed, his mouth still trying to form words. Molly lifted her head up to look at Chuck. "Silly isn't he?" Sarah asked the little girl.

Molly cooed happily. "Can we get two iced ciders and a jar of apple butter?" Sarah asked the vendor.

The vendor poured two cups and handed them to Sarah. He then went over to grab the apple butter. Sarah turned to Chuck and handed him a cup. He took it, still reeling from what he had said. "Drink this. Maybe it will freeze your brain of all the crap in there that's getting in the way."

The vendor came back, gave Sarah her apple butter, and Sarah paid. She turned to see Chuck taking a drink, all while trying to keep the drink away from Molly. "There's no seeds in there," the vendor said.

"It's really cold," Sarah warned Molly. Molly continued to grab at the cup. "Go ahead, and don't say I didn't warn you." Chuck held the cup up to her mouth and gently let her have a drink. Molly was expressionless for a second, and then her eyes went wide. She shook and shrieked in joy. Sarah turned back to the vendor. "Can I have about a quarter of a cup?" She asked. "I'll pay full price."

"On the house," the vendor said, smiling.

They were sitting at the table, Molly asleep in her stroller, Chuck and Sarah splitting an apple fritter, enjoying their frozen apple cider. Sarah tilted her head and looked at him. "Want to talk?"

"Not really," Chuck admitted. "But, according to this therapist I know, I should."

"Just imagine if she was your mother," Sarah countered, backing Chuck giggle. "I need you to quit running away, and I know, that's RICH coming from me."

"I'm not running away," Chuck said. Sarah gave him a flat look. "I'm not." She continued the look. "Strolling, maybe." Sarah twisted her lips so not to smile. "Moseying, possibly." She fought back the chuckle. "Moonwalking-"

"No," Sarah said shaking her head. She reached over and laid her hand on top of Chuck's. "Please, stay with us tomorrow. This is me, asking."

"I feel like you don't ask very often," Chuck said softly.

"I don't," Sarah admitted.

"Well, I am honored to be asked, and grateful," Chuck told her.

"Don't get carried away," Sarah replied, grinning at him.

"No, you don't understand," Chuck said. "My sister and Devon have to work tomorrow, and I...I was probably going to have to find something to do and..." he grinned, watching her trying not to laugh. "You're laughing at me." "Well, you deserve it," Sarah said.

"I do," Chuck said, shrugging. "It's not you, I promise, it's...I..."

"It's a lot," Sarah said. Chuck nodded. "Being pulled into a family," she began.

"I'm not family," Chuck began.

"Chuck," Sarah said, cutting in before he could go on. "You are, you just need to accept it, and that's what's your struggling with. You don't want to get hurt."

"No, I don't," Chuck admitted.

"I won't let you," she said.

"Sarah, you can't promise that, you don't know what might happen," Chuck said softly.

"I work for you and your dad...if something were to go wrong with us...." He took a deep breath. "I don't want to ruin this opportunity. And not for me. For you." She stared at him. "You have your chance to do something that's important to you, and you haven't had that before. Not like this. I will not be the one to mess it up for you." He was silent for a moment. "You're too important to me to mess it up."

"That's how you feel?" Sarah asked.

Chuck nodded. "That's how I feel."

She sat back. "Okay," she said.

"Okay," Chuck replied. The thing was, he thought it was okay, but what he didn't realize, it still wasn't as far as she was concerned.

}o{

"Bonfire?" Jack asked as they pulled up to the house, the sun setting on the gorgeous day. Sarah had been thinking about what Chuck had said all day long, and she had made some decisions. And the decision she came to was that she was about to let Chuck Bartowski into said decisions.

"Absolutely," Chuck replied. "Wait, sorry, that's a you two decision."

"It's fine," Sarah said. Chuck got out of the truck and headed to begin to build the bonfire.

"He still doesn't get it, does he?" Jack asked.

"No," Sarah said softly, watching him walk away.

"Do I need to talk to him?" Jack asked.

"No," Sarah replied, shaking her head getting out of the truck. "I will, it's just been a day."

"Bad?" Jack asked, walking around the truck slinging his arm over his daughter's shoulders, pulling her in for a hug as they walked.

"No, but a lot," Sarah said, leaning her head against him. "Thanks, Dad."

"I probably didn't do that the right way, about your mom meeting us there," Jack began.

"No, totally did, cause you know me," Sarah said.

"Yeaaaahhh," he drawled, making her laugh. They came around the house and saw the fire was going. "That boy enjoys starting fires." He gave Sarah a look, and she narrowed her eyes at him. "Look, I'm not implying he's starting one with you-"

"No, nope, we're not doing this," Sarah said, going over to the cooler getting two beers and handing one to Jack, making him laugh.

"Doing what?" Chuck asked, joining the two.

"Having deep philosophical discussions tonight," Sarah told him. "Tonight is enjoy stars, the peace and quiet, and each other's company."

"Here, here," Jack said, lifting his drink.

They sat there a while, talking about nothing, relaxing, and bonding.

After a few hours, Jack stood. "Time for me to head in."

"Before you go, Sir," Chuck began. Chuck missed the look on Jack's face of being called Sir. "I just want to thank you for letting me be a part of this, and I like to make you two a promise." Sarah knew this was going to be bad. "To being the best employee to help you two meet your dreams," Chuck said, his beer raised. "To giving you and your daughter the dream the chance that you want, and deserve. He went to take a sip, but paused seeing the look on Jack and Sarah's face. "Uh," he began.

Jack stared at Chuck for a second, and then spoke. "You're not an employee, Charlie," he told Chuck. Chuck didn't know what to say. "I'm heading to bed. Night, Charlie." He turned to Sarah.

"I got this," she said. Tonight wasn't the night she had planned to have this conversation, but it seemed that this was where they were now, and she really had no choice.

He smiled, and nodded. "Night, Darlin'," he told her and headed to the main building. He paused, and turned back to the two. "You're our partner, Charlie." With that he left them alone.

Chuck sat there, not sure how to make things right. "Hey, can I borrow your phone? I want to listen to some music."

"Yeah," he said, digging it out of his pocket. "It won't reach the speakers out here," he said, handing it too her.

"That's fine," she said. She messed with it a second, and laid it on table between their chairs. Chuck heard a familiar drum and guitar begin, and looked at Sarah, stunned at what he thought the song was. She stood, walked over to him, and held out her hand.

“Would you join me?”

He stood, not sure what was going on, but sure this was important. There was something in the air. And...and it didn't feel like a bad something, but an important something. He put his hand in hers, and felt that pull...that tug...that connection that they had always had, but now...now it felt like it was pulsating through them so strongly, that he should be able to see it.

She stepped up to him and they began to sway to the music. Not dance...in fact, if someone glanced, they would think they were just holding each other. This was no middle school dance with space between them. There was no “space left for Jesus”. She was molded against him, his hands on her back, both unsure about where to be, and not...all at the same time. The words slowly poured over him and he took them in.

We could leave the Christmas lights up 'til January

This is our place, we make the rules

And there's a dazzling haze, a mysterious way about you, dear

Have I known you twenty seconds or twenty years?

Can I go where you go?

Can we always be this close forever and ever?

And ah, take me out and take me home

You're my, my, my, my

Lover

She pulled away from him just enough to look up at him, but she was still in his embrace. She was holding him loosely, but he also knew he was in her grip. “Chuck, I need to tell you something, and I need you not to speak until I’m done telling you.” Chuck nodded. “Chuck, you’re our partner.” He nodded. “You’re our partner in this as long as you want to be.”

We could let our friends crash in the living room

This is our place, we make the call

And I'm highly suspicious that everyone who sees you wants you

I've loved you three summers now, honey, but I want 'em all

She hadn't loved him three summers, but she wanted them all. She knew that. "And as far as I go," she paused. She was doing this. Right here, right now. She had to. She deserved it. Was there meeting contrived by Bryce? Hell, she didn't know, she didn't care. He wasn't Bryce.

He was Chuck.

"You're my partner in every way you want to be. I'm not scared of being hurt. Not by you." She was silent for a second. "Not by us." His eyes went wide and he started to open his mouth but stopped as an amused smile crossed her lips and she shook her head. "I'm not done." He shut his mouth and swallowed. She laid her head against his chest and felt his mind working. She decided to help him out. She stepped back. "Let's go inside," she said softly. He nodded. She pulled away, grabbed his phone, and paused the song. She took his hand and led him inside their building that was becoming their home. He knew it, she knew it, and it was time they admitted it out loud.

She pressed a few buttons and the song continued over the inside speakers connected by bluetooth. She moved up against him again, but this time, looked him in his eyes, and as the music played, she mouthed the words to him.

Can I go where you go?

Can we always be this close forever and ever?

And ah, take me out and take me home (Forever and ever)

You're my, my, my, my

Lover

She loved the look of shock on his face, and she found she wanted to shock him for the rest of her life. She wanted this kind good man to understand exactly what he meant to her. And right now, she didn't have words, but she had this song, and she had...them.

She continued to mouth the words to the next part.

Ladies and gentlemen, will you please stand?

With every guitar string scar on my hand

I take this magnetic force of a man to be my

Lover

My heart's been borrowed and yours has been blue

All's well that ends well to end up with you

Swear to be over-dramatic and true to my

Lover

And you'll save all your dirtiest jokes for me

And at every table, I'll save you a seat

Lover

He started to speak and she shook her head again, a grin on her face. Her hand made its way behind his head and gently tilted his head down. She watched all the emotions on his face, the conflict. "Trust me," she said softly. He blew out a breath, and nodded. "Chuck? May I?" she asked softly.

"Yes," he said, his voice hoarse.

Their lips met and she heard a moan. She thought it was him, but if it was her, she couldn't blame herself.

Can I go where you go?

Can we always be this close forever and ever?

And ah, take me out and take me home (Forever and ever)

You're my, my, my, my

Oh, you're my, my, my, my

Darling, you're my, my, my, my

Lover

The music continued. She had put the song on repeat. She felt his hands on her back, at first cautious, but becoming less so by the moment. She felt safe, she felt loved, she felt wanted. She felt wanted because he loved her. Not because he was attracted to her. He was, she knew that, but like he did her, there was a need in him for her. Not a sexual, though there was that. No, a deep need. A connection she had never felt with another human in her whole life, and when she was with him, she felt...right. She felt like herself.

Her fingers found his hair with one of her hands. The other was wrapped around him, pulling him in to her. His hand brushed the place on her back where her undershirt was tucked into her bluejeans. She pulled back, getting a breath, and licking her lips. He looked at her, unsure. She nodded, and he pulled her slowly to him.

She felt his hand slip under the undershirt, and make its way up her back. He spread his hand as if trying to feel every inch of her, and if she thought she was burning with a fiery need before, it was now a raging inferno. She winced as they crashed into the bedroom door frame.

"Sorry-sorry!" He blurted out, pulling away.

She cupped his cheeks with both of her hands, and continued to kiss him. "Don't be," she said, between kisses. He still seemed a bit panicked and she pulled back a bit to look him in his eyes.

"I just didn't want you think I thought that we were gonna..." he paused, and looked unsure.

She realized she had crashed into her...their.... bedroom door frame. "I didn't think we would," Sarah told him. She held his face in her hands and looked him right in the eyes. "Unless you have a problem with it, I was sure we were going to."

"NOPE! No problem!" he rushed out.

She smiled at him, and leaned back up to kiss him, but he crashed into her, all panic and worry gone. This time she KNEW it was her that moaned. He moved his mouth off of hers, to her neck as she was trying to get his shirt off. "Sarah," he said into her ear. She lost it. She pulled the shirt, hearing the buttons pop off. She didn't care. She buy him a new one. She buy him as many as he wanted. She would do whatever he wanted to hear him say her name like that again. Hopefully for the rest of her life.

"I'll buy you a new shirt," she said, between attacking his face as she grabbed her shirt to yank it off.

"Didn't even like it," he told her, as they crashed onto the bed together, both shirtless, trying to not let go of the other and removing their jeans.

"It was your favorite," she said, looking him in the eye.

"No," he told her, shaking his head. "You are," he added softly.

She stared at him, and his eyes went wide as he heard his jeans being unzipped. "Chuck me," she said, never breaking eye contact.

"My pleasure," he told her.

A/N: If you're wondering about the song, it's Lover, by Taylor Swift.

Chapter 17: Avocados 17 AKA Hurricane Carina Has Been Spotted

A/N: There's some really HEAVY writing going on. That's not what this is. This is a fic of discovery of two people and what each actually means to the other. Yes, someone thinks they're helping, but...here's the thing. These two....they always find each other. They do. At least that's what I believe.

Someone once asked me why Chuck characters were so complicated. (Great, we've made Ellie's eye twitch) I replied that all Chuck characters were actually quite simple in their thoughts/beliefs. It's what they DID about things that were complicated. (I could write a two hundred page dissertation on THAT!) Did Bryce love Chuck and Sarah? I think yes. Now, did he also think he, and let me borrow Greg's TM and pay him money, Bryce Knows Best TM. He always did what HE thought was best. That part is simple. His belief on WHAT was best.....good Lord.....(Maybe a three hundred page dissertation now that I really think about it) What's that? Shut up about dissertations and do the typity, typity? *Sigh* Finnnneeeeeee

Disclaimer: I don't own Chuck.

Then. Somewhere, highly classified,....I think....

"That seems stalkerish," the voice behind her said. She turned and smiled at the very attractive, very put together, and very deadly woman. (Mark Twain once said to each time you write very to replace it with damn and then throw out all the damns. In Carina's case she wishes you'd leave in the damns. IE damn attractive, damn put together, and damn deadly woman.)

"I told him I'm in charge of security," Zondra replied, swiveling back to the monitor to watch Bryce. She turned up the sound on the feed, and they both heard the music playing.

If I could find assurance

To leave you behind

I know my better half would fade

And all my doubts

Is a staircase for you

Opened out of this maze

The first step is the one you believe in

The second one might be profound

I'll follow you down through the eye of the storm

Don't worry I'll keep you warm

I'll follow you down

While we're passing through space

I don't care if we fall from grace

I'll follow you down

"He okay?" Carina asked, a second of worry crossing her face, and then leaving. But, it was Carina, so Zondra wasn't sure if it was worry about Bryce, or worry that this assignment might affect her plans for the evening.

"I think that fool went and fell in love with two people," Zondra said, handing Carina a file without even looking at her. Carina took it, and glanced at it. "Are we journaling now?" Carina asked, an eyebrow raised, but never looking up from the file, reading.

"It's my therapist," Zondra said, slightly annoyed. Carina lifted her head, an amused smile on her face. "And by therapist it's...it's..."

"You found an internet doctor?" Carina asked.

"It's not like THAT!" Zondra insisted.

"Orrrrr, it's exactly like that," Carina observed going back to the file. Zondra fumed while Carina read. Whatever the reason for the journaling, Carina had to admit this was quite

insightful. Zondra had put down every observation she had on Bryce, and had come to the following conclusions.

Bryce was a mess. Carina nodded, knowing Zondra was right. Zondra also believed he had two people in his life that he had loved, and the fear of what he was a part of had led him to push both of them away to protect them.

"Jesus, the idiot's in love," Carina muttered.

"With two people," Zondra pointed out, never watching Bryce work out, the song he was listening to on repeat.

You can have the money and the world

The angels and the pearls

Even trademark the color blue

Just like the tower we never built

In the shadow of all the guilt

When the other hand was pointed at you

Yeah, the first step is the one you believe in

And the second one might be profound

I'll follow you down through the eye of the storm

Don't worry I'll keep you warm

I'll follow you down while we're passing through space

I don't care if we fall from grace

I'll follow you down to where forever lies

Without a doubt, I'm on your side

There's nowhere else that I would rather be

I'm not about to compromise

Give you up to say goodbye

I'll guide you through the deep

I'll keep you close to me

"He's trying to protect them," Carina continued.

"Page seven, with a diagram in the index," Zondra said. Carina looked at Zondra, flipped to page seven, and then to the index. She looked up to speak. "Not. A. Damn. Word." Zondra said stressing each word. Carina pressed her lips together, blew out her cheeks, lifted her eyebrows, and turned the document sideways to get a better look at the diagram. "I like the color coordination."

"Thanks," Zondra said. "Sarah just feels like a blue and the other guy...he feels like a brown." She blew out a breath. "Obviously Bryce is a bright yellow because he thinks the world orbits around him."

"He's more conceited than I am," Carina muttered. "Wait, what's this 'wildcard' in red?" She looked up. "Sarah's the wildcard." "Page twelve," Zondra said, smiling, never looking back at Carina. She watched Bryce stand, and look right at the camera as he sung the chorus one last time.

I'll follow you down through the eye of the storm

Don't worry I'll keep you warm

I'll follow you down

While we're passing through space

I don't care if we fall from grace

I'll follow you

If I could find assurance

To leave you behind

I know my better half would fade

I'll follow you down

"Why?" Carina asked, looking up at the monitor and Zondra watching it.

"Page sixteen, second half, the bullet points," Zondra replied, still not looking at her.

Carina flipped and read for a second. Concern showed on her face. "Okay, what-"

"Page twenty-three, paragraph four," Zondra said.

"You cannot know what I was going to ask," Carina muttered, flipping to the page. She read silently for a minute. "Well, son-of-a-bitch," she said, looking up at Zondra, as Zondra spun to her slowly in her chair, a knowing smile on her face. "That's my two options."

"Help us clean this up," Zondra began.

"And that would be a lot of actual work," Carina pointed out. "Or," Zondra said, a grin on her face.

A wicked smile began to grow on Carina's face. "Does he know?" Carina asked, nodding toward Bryce.

"The who? No," Zondra said, shaking her head. "But does he know we need someone we can trust? Yes." "And you can trust...me?" Carina asked, shocked.

"God, no," Zondra said, shaking her head.

"I should be hurt by that," Carina began.

"And yet, you're not," Zondra replied.

"I'm really not," Carina agreed, shaking her head, looking back at the file. She pulled the file close, as if to make sure she saw what she thought she saw. "They get paid THAT??? That's....that's almost what I make and I get shot at."

"And you might have more legal authority," Zondra added. "The last section is pictures and mini-dossiers of the male agents and those that are somewhat...lecherous...."

An evil grin crossed Carina's face. "Do they need to be broken?"

"It would probably hurt their ego," Zondra replied, an evil grin on her face.

"How do we know I'd get the job?" Carina asked. Zondra didn't say anything, she turned half-way in the chair, grabbed another file and handed it to her. Carina picked it up and leafed through it. "This is a job offer."

"What can I say, it's snoresville," Zondra replied. "They need a capable agent, and if that someone wasn't a man..."

"Sausage fest over there, huh?" Carina asked. "So, it's boring." "It's safe, which..." Zondra trailed off.

"You worried about me?" Carina asked.

"God, no," Zondra scoffed. Carina didn't say anything. "I mean, I know you, you can handle yourself, but...." Zondra was silent for a moment. "This thing runs deep."

"Yeah," Carina said, nodding, being serious, which made Zondra's blood run cold. "You know I don't mind danger, in fact, some could say I go out of my way to find danger."

"Some," Zondra said, barely stopping herself from rolling her eyes.

"But, it's usually for a good reason, at least one I can justify," Carina continued, reopening the file Zondra gave her.

"You can't justify this," Zondra said, leaving no room for discussion.

Carina shook her head. "No," she said. "In fact," she said, and sighed. "It seems like a witch hunt just because I was associated with her."

"It could be," Zondra agreed.

"Are you safe?" Carina asked. Zondra stared at her. "Z."

"Yes," Zondra replied. "This has you rattled." Carina scoffed. "No," she said. She looked at the monitor of Bryce, but she wasn't looking at him, she was looking into nothingness. "Yes," she said softly.

"Me too," Zondra agreed. Carina locked eyes with her. "And I know you think I'm in more danger because of who I'm working with, but...my eyes are open. We have

information now.”

“We do,” Carina said. “One problem with this whole thing,” she began. She stopped talking when she saw the grin on Zondra’s face. Zondra slowly spun, picked up another folder and handed it to Carina. Carina opened it, read, and began to laugh. “You’re not as thorough as I thought you were.”

“Oh, I’m not?” Zondra asked, slowly spinning again, picking up one last folder, and handing it to Carina.

Carina opened it, and grinned. She picked up a photo and held it out, admiring it. “Johnny, Johnny, Johnny,” she said. Zondra shuddered.

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Now

He was sitting outside, the bonfire having burnt down to nothing, a slight warmth coming off of it. There had been what looked like the remains of a porch near where the bonfire pit had been built, and he was sitting there, his legs dangling off the side, looking up at the sky, and trying to put together everything that had happened. His brain wasn’t working right. He couldn’t help but grin about why his brain wasn’t working right.

It wasn’t the sex. That had been....wow. It was...the connection. The connection with someone else that...that cared. He and Jill.....they had never had...that. The touches...the trust....Sarah Walker....a woman who....Chuck shook his head. The trust he had of hers....he couldn’t ruin it.

He should have been surprised as two hands slid over his shoulders and clasped to each other over his chest. He should have been surprised as the two legs....two...BARE...legs...slid by each of his and he felt her press her chest against his back, and her lips stopped right by his ear. “You okay?” he heard her ask quietly. He couldn’t stop the grin as she gently planted a kiss near his ear, and just stayed there. He didn’t want to be that guy, but in that moment....God, he couldn’t help how content he felt. How...loved. How....connected to her he was.

“Yeah,” he said, putting his right hand over her hand. “Just...my mind....it’s been blown.”

“Yeah?” she replied. He heard the smugness in her voice, and he found he loved her more for it.

He was going to have to get used to that word. Maybe not use it. Probably shouldn’t. It was too soon. Everything said it was too soon. You couldn’t know.

But he did.

God, did he.

And he knew somewhere, someone would say, it was the sex.

It wasn’t.

That...that was fantastic and amazing. It was her.

Sarah. Freaking. Walker. It was her and the person she was. It was the looks she gave, the joy on her face as she teased him. And god, last night had she teased him....and then she DIDN’T tease him. It had been the lead up with the beds. The jokes. The...belonging. He belonged to her. He was willing to get “property of Sarah Walker” stamped on his head and he wasn’t even ashamed of how that sounded.

“So, not to change the subject, but that looks like my shirt,” Chuck said.

“Yeah, guess you lost two shirts tonight,” she said softly. He felt the grin in her voice.

“First you destroy one, and then you take one?” he asked her, his hand running back and forth on her arm. “Destroy is strong,” Sarah told him.

“I guess I could try and sew the buttons back on,” Chuck admitted.

“Well, I may have ripped one of the sleeves as well,” Sarah told him.

“Again, worth it,” Chuck told her.

“And, it’s not like you can’t get this one back,” Sarah informed him.

“I can’t even see any of it on you but the sleeve, but I’m sure it looks better on you than me,” he told her. “Oh, well, I guess there goes that plan.” He couldn’t help but turn to

her, a questioning look on his face. She started to speak when they both heard it. A snore. From the main house. "Jesus," she said shaking her head.

"Yeah, but you know what, I'm not gonna complain," he told her.

"Yeah?" she asked, a shy smile on her face.

"Yeah," he said. "In fact, I'm going to be a little sad when my bed gets here."

"Why?" Sarah asked. In that moment, it was almost like a halo formed over her head.

"It is ridiculous that you look angelic right now, because what happened earlier...." He trailed off, shaking his head.

"Well, I thought the devil was a fallen angel," she replied.

His mouth dropped, and she couldn't stop the giggle if she tried. She kissed his cheek softly again. "Woman," he said in a low voice, and the giggles began again.

"You're gonna be all you about all of this, aren't you?"

"I like that you framed it in the form of a question, but it was really a statement of fact," he admitted.

"I was trying to give you an out," she said.

"Why, we both know if I said no, it would be a lie," he told her. She squeezed him and pressed his arm against hers. "Sarah-"

"Okay, I'm going to get this out there, because....because someone once told me I wasn't good at this part and I need to prove them wrong...for me."

"You don't have to," Chuck told her. "I don't need you to."

"I know you don't," Sarah said. "I do."

"Okay," Chuck replied.

"You can sleep in whatever bed you want, just know, I'm going to be there with you," she began.

"God, that's hot," he muttered.

She grinned. "We're together, Chuck." She took a deep breath. "Exclusive."

"Yes, absolutely exclusive," he said, trying not to let out a sigh of relief.

"You totally were wondering."

"I was," he admitted. She shook her head and rolled her eyes, but he could tell she wasn't trying to be mean. It was...it was almost like, "God, he's an idiot, but he's my idiot." If Chuck had to admit to himself, it was almost like the look Zendaya gave Tom Holland during their Lip Sync Battle when he preformed Umbrella.

"Now, for the part you need to really hear," she began.

"I kinda really needed to hear the other part," he argued. She gave him a look. "Right, shutting up."

"I love you."

Something in him broke. Not in a bad way. But a wall, or something in him that he had tried to seal up his heart with broke in half. In fact, broke was the wrong word. Something in him was obliterated. It was dust. Everything that had been held back, and he was quite surprised that there was anything because of the way he constantly was, was now free.

"I thought at first it was the idea of you when Bryce told me," she continued. "I thought it was just because I felt sorry for you and what he did to you."

"How do you know it wasn't?" Chuck asked softly.

"Because what I felt before I met you...it had nothing on what I felt afterwards," she told him. "You stood in front of your coworkers and you said, 'I met two people who life...life hasn't been the best to either, has it?' And I see them *trying*. I see them trying something that is clearly out of their wheelhouse...and yet...isn't."

"I did say that, didn't I," Chuck admitted.

"Chuck...you saw me," Sarah said, tears in her eyes. "You saw...me. Not Agent Sarah Walker. Not the girl who helped her dad con people. But you saw the scared woman, TRYING, and God, that's the best we're doing, trying...and it...it's a mess...." She trailed

off, and moved her hand, cupping his cheek. "And you wanted to be a part of it," she said softly.

"Because...because you inspired me," Chuck told her. "I already told you I loved you, what more do you want?" she asked, a grin on her face.

"You need to know something," he began.

"Don't say something because you think you're supposed to."

"Sarah, I've been sitting out here telling myself to be cool because I'm not supposed to be able to fall in love this fast," Chuck told her. A shy smile crossed her face with that.

"Sarah Walker," he said softly. "I love you."

She smiled as she stared into his eyes. "Say it again. Please."

"Sarah Walker," he said, the smile consuming his whole face. "I love you."

"You know, it's not fair," Sarah told him. "I had this whole plan of coming out here wearing your tee shirt, telling you that you should take it back and then just have on..."

"Oh God," he croaked out.

"But then, you, you sexy nerd, you had to go and say that you love me, and now I'm the one who feels like I've been swept off my feet," she finished.

"I think you need to know that if that's all it takes, you might be swept often by me," Chuck told her.

"Sweep away, Chuck," she told him.

They sat there, eyes locked. "I trust you, don't blow this," she said softly.

"I'm going to make mistakes," he told her.

"We both are, but as long as we're honest and don't cheat-"

"I've been cheated on and cheating sucks, and that's not who I am, and-"

She kissed him to shut him up. When she pulled away she looked him straight in the eye.

"I have too you know."

"Yeah, I know, and...I won't," he promised.

"Good," she told him. She looked up at the sky. "Look up there." He turned his head. "You shouldn't have done that," she told him softly. He started to look back at her, when he felt her lips against his neck. "You made yourself vulnerable to me."

"Jokes on you," he said, trying to keep his thoughts coherent, as she trailed kisses on his neck. "I've been vulnerable to you since I met you."

She moved so quickly he was startled, but suddenly she was on his lap his face cupped in her hands. "I promise you, Chuck, I'll do everything not to let you be hurt again."

"I know," he said softly. She stared into his eyes and he got lost. "You don't have to protect me."

"It's who I am," she said, shrugging.

"Hot," he somehow managed to get out. She grinned at him. "And I also see you have been vulnerable with me."

The look on her face changed to one of...was it shame? "I know I haven't been like-"

"Stop," he said gently. "It's not a contest, and here's the thing, you let me in. You let me in, here," he said as he gently laid his hand where her heart actually was and not where Jeff thought it was. "That's all anyone can ask."

"So, I might need you to do something," she said to him, a grin on her face.

"Yeah?"

"I might need you to, say....a few days after the bed gets delivered from the store, to go back, and shake the salesman hand," she told him, and then she laughed.

"Oh, I'm going in and hugging him," Chuck told her. She held onto his shoulders as she laughed.

"Let's go to bed," she said softly, looking up at him after the laughter had ceased. "I need to be snuggled."

"Yes, ma'am," he told her. "And if you do a good job I'll give you back your tee shirt," she continued.

"Is that directly from where it..." he stopped. The smile on her face told him the answer. "I gotta say, he was the biggest dumbass in the world, but I might owe him."

"Maybe," Sarah said. "Or maybe we'd find each other anyway."

"I like that," Chuck admitted. She stood, and Chuck found himself staring at her bare legs, his brain frying in real time.

"I would apologize for doing things like that to you, but I really enjoy it," she told him.

"It's fine," he got out in a hoarse voice. She laughed, helped him up, and the two headed inside.

A/N: Today's music was provided by Shinedown. The song is called I'll Follow You. What's that? What about Carina and Casey? Guess we'll find out soon. Next time, family dinner, Burton/Walker/whateverthefhellnameJackisusingthistime. Come on back.