



# The Finity Case



A Novel By

**Melissa**

**Swaim**

# The Finity Case

By

MELISSA SWAIM

# The Finity Case

A Novel By

**MELISSA SWAIM**

Copyright 2005 by Melissa Swaim

ISBN: 1-59507-109-1

**ArcheBooks Publishing Incorporated**

[www.archebooks.com](http://www.archebooks.com)

9101 W. Sahara Ave.

Suite 105-112

Las Vegas, NV 89117

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information about this book, please contact ArcheBooks at [publisher@ArcheBooks.com](mailto:publisher@ArcheBooks.com).

This book is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents depicted herein are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.



**ArcheBooks Publishing**

# Dedication

To my big pal, Big Brother, the FBI

# The Finity Case

## Prologue

In the summer of 1976, Darlene Chase found herself in downtown Norfolk being harassed by the federal prosecutor. The humidity was one of many things closing in on her, but she grit her teeth and rolled her eyes. They were at a stalemate. The unrelenting figure in the corner leaned against his desk with his arms folded.

Watching her, trying to scare her, he had her trapped. He laid out pictures of her cavorting with the mob. She swallowed hard, but wasn't about to give in. She could play this game, and she could win. After all, Big Sal was waiting for her.

Maybe he would have champagne waiting for her, she imagined, hoping to convince herself of his kindness, even though her memories said otherwise. After all, he *was* a mob

## The Finity Case

boss. He promised her a life out of poverty. Besides, this meeting was pointless. She might as well go home and get a tan.

As if she wasn't there being interrogated, she casually put her hair into a pony tail and primped, trying to make the best of it. She didn't find much relief from the heat. Sweat beaded on the loose hairs on the back of her long neck, so she fanned herself with her file. It had her name in big letters as if she were important. Who knows what it contained? She wasn't a saint but certainly not a criminal.

Feeling paranoid, she wondered who else was watching her. Maybe a bunch of these scoundrels watched from a secret window. When she turned to look behind her, Ed Giovanni seized the file and deposited it out of her reach as if she were a child. She shrugged. *Keep it cool*, she told herself, reaching for her lighter. She smoked yet another cigarette, taking long, slow puffs to pass the time. He watched, unamused, by her defiance.

"Well?" he loudly asked as if she were deaf, grabbing the table and shaking it. A few things rattled and tumbled over, such as his Styrofoam coffee cup. She watched him take a lengthy breath, probably planning a different approach. Then he asked, "Aren't you thirsty? Can I get you something to drink?"

Offering a drink was a well-known ploy for obtaining fingerprints. That's why police and lawyers always eagerly provided a glass as if being a considerate hostess. *They couldn't care less if I wilted*, she sighed. Darlene shook her head and

filled her mind with the latest antics from a sitcom. She almost laughed. Maybe he thought she was an idiot. But it was useful to occupy her mind, something she was familiar with doing at her dancing job. She had to put up with a lot of perverse men before Big Sal Bonfiglio took a liking to her. But associating with him had landed her here in hot water.

Still studying her, the attorney paced around with a coffee cup, which he refilled twice. She hoped it was decaf. He seemed edgy, maybe because he was getting nowhere in his personal pursuit of one of the more reclusive crime families from New York, who started vacationing at the quiet Virginia beaches to avoid the law and its scrutiny.

It was going to be a long day, she told herself. She checked her manicured nails for chips and pretended to be lost in thought. By keeping her there for hours, the prosecutor had only succeeded in annoying the hell out of her. He thought he was so damn smart. In his dark suit, he lorded over her like a bad ass. He demanded too much. Information was dangerous, and he knew it. Didn't he care that he risked her life?

At least he was good looking, she mused while fixing her bra which was riding up. She repositioned her large breasts into the double-D cups and wiped off the sweat with his notepad. He gawked in disbelief but couldn't speak. His curly hair and dauntless face made him look adorable—except he was the enemy. He oozed authority, but it could mean the end for her if she snitched. She wasn't ready to die. Besides, she captured more dangerous men than him between her legs, and they usually fell to the ground before her, sometimes literally.

## The Finity Case

Not giving in, she sat back in her chair and crossed her extensive legs. Her floral skirt barely fell to mid-thigh, a point he didn't fail to notice. That baby-blue top hugged her plentiful chest, and her bra was slightly visible through the fabric. She knew her sassiness went from her bare-toed shoes to her fiery hair to her upturned nose and chin. She could tell he needed to show his dominance if he wanted to break her.

He got in her face and said, "You must *want* to go to jail."

"My only crime is going on a date with a man in the Bonfiglio crime family. Love is not a felony, honey. You just want to be Mr. Big Deal Prosecutor."

"I'm warning you! Tell me where your husband is!"

"That is your job. I came to you for help! He has been missing for two years. What have you done to find him?"

"I will ask you one more time. Where is Bob Chase?"

"And I will tell you once again, you bastard," she snarled, "Bob had a gambling problem. He owed money. He either ran or got caught by the people he owed. I've been waiting two years for you to do something about it. It's been hard. I barely make it. And, yes, I was asked out on a date, so I went. Big deal."

She shrugged and went back to her cigarette, which he knocked out of her hand. She bent over to snatch it from the tiled floor, but he quickly grabbed her shirt and pulled her to his eye level. She could feel his breath against her lacquered lips, causing her mouth to open in alarm. Without warning, he planted a deep kiss on her, and she responded to his passion with a wave of pent-up feelings and confusion. Her hands slid

## Melissa Swaim

through his dark curls, moving down to caress his peppery scented neck as their tongues entwined. That encouragement made him even more ravenous for this forbidden aspiration. He tugged off her tank top and teeny bra to greedily eye the breasts that had taunted him since she arrived. Every inch of her creamy flesh with its blood-encrusted jewels from mafia crimes made his mind reel, but the sight of her natural breasts and how warm they felt in his hands made him at her mercy. He was intoxicated by her—despite what his ethics warned.

He knelt down, slipped off her shoes and kissed her painted toes before working his way up her inhumanly long legs, which quivered at their core. He quickly sought access and settled between them. She held him tight to her, digging long nails into his back, happily marking him as an adulterer. He fell victim to her charms and she knew he would now remain her ally.

She had won.

However, this man of the law enjoyed the most intimate depths of her just hours after a mob boss did. Maybe their seed met and collided on its way to making her child—something that her missing husband Bob could never give her. Good and evil, morality and immorality, finity and the desire for infinity grappled for conquest. And soon something would become of it, something beautiful.

After he fell exhausted on top of her, she pushed him aside and smiled. She dressed without speaking to him and then strolled out of the interrogation room and into the awaiting limo, keeping her little secret to herself. She reached into her

## The Finity Case

purse, fixed her lipstick, and daydreamed about that lawyer. But who was she kidding? He would never love her. No one ever did. She only allowed herself one moment of sorrow over that. With a shrug of her shoulders, she pulled out her purse again and popped some pills.



Nine months later a girl was born, and Darlene sent a picture to both Big Sal Bonfiglio and federal prosecutor Ed Giovanni. Though this pale child offered little clue as to her origin, Darlene saw her otherworldly eyes and her fiery highlights playing against darker tones. But what did it matter? Both men supported the child financially, and, since Ed Giovanni was married, he didn't let it slip that the child could be his. Big Sal never guessed otherwise.

"My Finity," Darlene said, holding the intense child who hated affection. "You could one day be the end of me or an end to a horrible family that took away my husband."

The child barely noticed her. She sometimes preferred her mobile to human faces, from which she routinely turned away. Darlene struggled to bond with this difficult girl and with the desire to hide her away from a cruel world. She home-schooled her, leaving her in solitude while others went to public school.

As she grew, Finity played in the dandelion fields outside of their apartment, but she was rarely alone as her mother had hoped. Finity would regularly put on her best dress, a navy blue one that made her feel so pretty, and await her usual

guests.

Footsteps sounded nearby.

A large man with a double chin and black hair greeted the girl with a smile. He was dressed casually but held the air of a king. Though of average height, he towered over her, so he sat down beside her and chatted, saying the weather was nice. They had tea and she listened to tales of his boyhood in Italy, rarely speaking in return. In a dangerous world the little girl's silence endeared her to him. Unlike his other kin, he had no fear that she would ever betray him. She was the only good thing he had, despite a marriage to Janine, whom he rarely saw, and a couple of kids busy with teenage lives. She was his treasure, separate from his brutal existence. And he hoped to keep it that way for as long as possible.

Though Darlene thought Finity merely had invisible friends at her tea parties, because Finity often spoke of an unfamiliar character named Emmanuel or "Manny," and someone called Big Daddy, who came to see her, no one knew for sure if these individuals were real. As a high-functioning autistic, Finity lived in her own world half the time playing repetitious games. A tiny child, she often looked up to block the sun from her eyes to see the shadowy form of a man who called her Princess, or to see the emotionless string of men who came after Big Daddy left to get information about him, all of whom brought her little cakes and trinkets like offerings to the doomed.

Finity actually preferred the emotionless men in their pressed suits. They seemed so robotic. Animated people

## The Finity Case

stressed her. These serious men calmed her. They seemed less real. They never even smiled.

Maybe due to the lack of a real father, her arms would curl around Manny's neck when he tried to leave and she would cling to him. He was as non-threatening as sunshine. Though affection usually troubled her, she didn't see this bonding as anything different than embracing her lifeless stuffed animals. Besides, Manny was also bothered by friendliness, but he didn't have the heart to push the child away. The dark-featured man crept back to the shade. He just happened to be one of the many specters that visited the edge of her life.

Ed or Eddie, as Finity knew him, sometimes visited late at night, bringing furs to Darlene or harassing her about "the family," whoever they were. He didn't pay Finity much attention, just stared at her features, as if trying to figure something out. He made her uneasy; especially when he fought with her mother. They had a turbulent love-hate relationship that occasionally left her mother battered and crumpled on the floor crying. Finity covered her ears and rocked back and forth, trying to mentally escape. Sometimes she'd bang on the walls when she wanted him to stop.

When Finity mentioned this to Big Daddy one day, Eddie stopped coming around. Darlene was devastated and stayed in bed for days with the heavy quilt drawn up around her. Her red hair hung in matted clumps and her beautiful face looked haggard. That's when Finity asked what was wrong. Her Mom said that Ed Giovanni probably went to stay with Bob Chase in his underwater home.

“Don’t worry. Maybe one day you will go there too,” Finity innocently replied.

Darlene sobbed.

Since Bob’s body was never found, Darlene was still legally married until Bob was declared legally dead, so she listed him as Finity’s father on her birth certificate. She often talked to Finity about her Dad, whom the child assumed was Bob Chase, a former garbage collector from New York. He was said to be a kind man with a comical streak. He had dark eyes, a crooked nose, and small lips unlike her. She kept his picture by her lace pillow. Finity wanted a real dad so much, so she clung to his image. Darlene never corrected her, so the truth sank away like discarded bones.

With Eddie gone, Darlene became an alcoholic. She stumbled around the spacious apartment feeling sorry for herself. Big Sal had too many girlfriends, and he rarely saw Darlene after the baby was born. Maybe he thought her stripper body changed too much. Sometimes she would stare into the mirror, wondering where her looks had gone. And the poor child was outside more and more waiting for someone, anyone to care for her, especially the shadowy men. They took more and more to the background the older she got, but she could still feel them watching her. Like ominous shapes they were waiting and wondering, just like her, about what fate had in store for this loose end named Finity who didn’t have much of a beginning and was, perhaps, only a harbinger for a violent end.

# The Finity Case

## Part I

## Chapter 1

I was new to the vast city of Virginia Beach with its thirty eight miles of beaches and its maze of riverfront suburbia, wondering what was in store for me. The road was never easy and usually much better forgotten. As a Navy brat, I had a time making friends. But then I saw her...Finity Chase. I'll never forget that day. Perched against the bricks like a frail tree, she watched me. Only her hair moved in the light breeze. Her attention held me firm, and I was awed by her.

Ten years old with skinned knees and a plaid dress hanging on bony shoulders; she held up her hands and made tight fists when I got closer. I nearly laughed. I was taller and broader, and her frizzy hair made her look like a fairy dusted with magical starlight.

"I'm Barrett Fitzsimmons," I told her, only braving one

## The Finity Case

step nearer to her. There was a good five feet between us. If she were too feral, I feared she might bite.

Studying me intensely, she finally shrugged and said, “Why do I want to know that?”

“I could use a friend to show me around.”

“F-friend?” she stuttered. And then her sudden grin revealed pearly teeth with extra large canines that suited her. I tried not to stare, but they looked so pointy.

“So, how about it?”

“I don’t know,” she said, shrugging again. She twisted nervously from side to side and then crossed her arms across her chest. “What do you want to do?”

“Well, what is fun around here?”

Some bored older kids tossed a football nearby. Others wrote on the sidewalk with chalk. The neighborhood seemed quiet, but it had old bottles littering the street and an aura of a disregard. Fields of weeds offered space for play and a marshy lake waited in the background. Crows cawed as if something scared them. Finity glanced toward a grove of trees a little warily but then turned back to me.

A little panicked, she said, “I don’t do much. I like to draw or read or walk by the lake.”

“What about other kids?”

“I’m home-schooled. I don’t get to be around many kids much.”

She seemed depressed about that. She chewed on a fingernail while awaiting my reaction. Her eyes never remained on me long.

## Melissa Swaim

“At least you don’t get detention,” I said, making her laugh in a small, musical way.

After a moment, she said, “No, but you get to be normal.” I didn’t know what to say.

“Barrett,” a voice called from the moving truck parked by the curb. Burley men finished unloading the furniture, and a stout woman waved at me. She was a career homemaker and a loving mom. She kept things stable while Dad was protecting freedom. She stood at the edge of the sidewalk like a beacon leading me home.

“It’s my Mom. I have to go,” I explained, “So, what is your name?”

“Finity Chase.”

“Finity,” I repeated. “Okay, I’ll see you around Finity.”

She shyly watched me go. I don’t know why, but I felt better after meeting her. She had that affect on me. It was as if I knew my destiny was bound to her.



Fitting in at school was rough. I disappeared in the overcrowded halls. None of the faces seemed to notice me. I made one friend named Neil Price who was twelve like me. He was in my English class. He made snide comments under his breath while the teacher planned a birthday party to celebrate Shakespeare. I didn’t think hundreds of candles would fit on a cake. Ms. Foster was crazy, and one and all knew it. Neil raised his hand and suggested a surprise birthday party, mak-

## The Finity Case

ing everyone laugh. It was as if our senile teacher really believed he would show up. Usually she just fell asleep at her desk, leaving us all to clown around. While she drooled, Neil and I traded baseball cards.

Neil made me feel welcome. Freckled and as playful as a pup, Neil Price got along with all the kids, so that gave me an edge as a new kid around town. We hung out sometimes, though I still watched for Finity to appear from the far side of the brick complex. I wanted to see that twined head of dark wheat with red tones like her mother and those sleepy eyes. Her gently sloping nose was narrow and a little too long for her face, but it went well with her small mouth and arched lips. She looked like an intense angel existing on the edge of the world, and that is where I usually found her.

Never a part of a crowd, she wandered alone, perfectly content to commune with life in her own language. It was as if an invisible bubble embraced her, keeping the profane away from her divinity.

Now and again I would join her on her walks along the lake where she looked for tadpoles or flowers. Barefoot and free, she barely noticed that I tagged along. We played in the muck scouring for treasure. Every so often she talked of the shadows that watched her. She said they hovered nearby like shapeless wolves. Though I wondered if she were teasing, it made me scared. I always looked over my shoulder at the trees, and I swore something always rustled to the left of us, but I never saw what it was.

The only game she liked to play was hide-and-seek or

games of pretend. We would sit on a blanket eating a simple lunch she had made for us, such as olives and cheese and crackers, and we would pretend we were in ancient Greece or Italy and we would describe the country side or what went on around us in other time periods. She liked to speak of Socrates sitting on hand-carved steps as he tried to reach the ignorant with his wisdom, but many didn't care or couldn't see the pictures in their heads that his words described. They could never reach the plane where he dwelled, just like her.

When Neil or the other kids saw me with Finity I became embarrassed. They always said that there was something wrong with her. But I didn't see it. She was a little quiet and deep like the dark lake and its murky waters. I knew it struggled and existed as best it could despite the pollution around it, but I didn't think it would stagnate and begin its demise.

"Why do you hang around that weird girl?" Neil asked, while walking home from the bus stop. "She's strange and her Mom is a witch. And her dad got killed by the Mafia. They never found his body."

I laughed. Every town had to have a witch and tall tales.

"I'll ask her to go to church with me. You will see. Neither she nor her mother are witches."

"Yeah, but ask her where her Dad is."

I let that thought sink deep inside. I didn't want to hurt her by believing nasty rumors, but I still had to wonder how they all started. Maybe she would tell me in time.

## The Finity Case

Soon Finity accompanied me to our non-denominational church down the street. She never said much, just listened and smiled. She liked the music and got lost in it.

When I decided to do some missionary work, I asked her to come along as I invited neighbors to our church. While I did the knocking, Finity stayed in the background, staring at the people and at their houses. People intrigued her. Their facial features and their style of dress held endless fascination for her as long as they weren't looking, but she would not engage them unless spoken to and then it would be a short "yes, ma'am" or "no ma'am." Sometimes she barely made eye contact.

Afterwards, she would go on and on about their houses. She loved seeing how they lived, especially clean houses and good smells. She particularly liked one house in a better neighborhood across the highway, off of Witchduck Road. Grand and encased in a wrought-iron paradise, the house near Ducking Point beckoned to her. Legend said that this part of the Lynnhaven River was where the real-life witch of Pungo, Grace Sherwood, was tried as a witch in the 1600's, so we tiptoed warily to the stain glass door. Deep down we thought a woman dressed in black would come to the door, so we held our breath. We were wrong. We were expecting a different sort of monster.

The man who answered was a burly Italian man with a cigar. He wore a causal suit and leather shoes. He seemed surprised at the sight of Finity. Though he said he was a de-

vout Catholic, he said we seemed like good kids so he gave us some money, though we weren't collecting any, and he puffed on his cigar.

“Are you Darlene's kid?” the large man asked, while contemplating her features.

Surprised by his attention, Finity nodded and backed away. She clasped her hands together and directed her attention at her pink sneakers.

The man eyed her with a warm smile and said, “I know your family. You're Catholic too. What are you hanging out with him for?”

“He's my friend.”

The man patted her on her head with his big paw and said, “Okay, Princess. Tell your Mom, Big Sal says ‘hi.’”

With that we headed down the driveway that split in two directions around a gorgeous fountain. Finity stared back at the man. Why did she know him? Was he one of the shadow people who used to visit her when she was very young? Their faces long faded from memory. But their voices echoed to the present day, only her mind kept them in the recesses. She didn't want to know them, because what if they weren't real? Her Mom never believed her.

“Do you know that man?”

“Yeah, but I don't know why,” she said, leading the way down the road. She peeked back, checking to see if he watched from the two story windows. She felt many eyes.

A storm brewed, but we returned to our mission. On and on, we tried to save souls, but I kept wondering about her.

## The Finity Case

She started seeming so lost, so far away. She was like a kite that went too high. I felt like I was holding the string wondering if I should just let go.



As the years past, I spent more and more time with Neil and his friends. I played baseball with them. Sometimes, I'd catch a glimpse of Finity watching me and waiting. I pretended not to notice.

When she was sixteen, I saw how she blossomed and became rounder and less bony. After a break-up with a crazy girl named Sue Tanner who annoyed the hell out of me, I felt lost and unsure about the dating world. Most girls stayed in their cliques like vultures picking at the bones of their discards and waiting to see who dared next to face their sharpness.

That's when I started spending evenings with Finity again. We went to the movies. She liked the theatre because it was dark and quiet, but she hated concerts because of the loud crowds. She couldn't fit in with the boisterous chaos. Worse than a wallflower, she became a wall when people neared her.

"So what do you want to do when you finish school?"

"I like going door to door, like I used to do with you. Maybe I'll sell Avon."

"Don't you want a real career?"

Her lip puckered and she turned away. She never liked criticism.

"Hey," I said, gently pulling her to me. "I didn't mean to

hurt your feelings. I just think you could do anything.”

She shrugged and said, “What do *you* want to do?”

“I’m thinking about college and then law school.”

She gave me a pensive look. She loved to stare at my features, at my deep eyes, my long face, my insecurity. This time she touched my skin and then my lips. Her finger was feather light. It caused me to shiver. I had never really seen her that way. She had always been safe and a friend.

“I better go,” I told her, and it wounded her.

I should have known that being the only male she ever got closed to her that she would have developed a crush on me. But I didn’t want to see her that way. I usually went for the trendy girl with the perfect hair, the endless chatter, and the bad girl appeal. Unfortunately, I was the preppy, smart, good kid that they didn’t usually go for.

Then one day I saw Finity walking hand in hand with Neil. I was floored. They were on a path toward the woods where she and I picked honeysuckles together. The intoxicating scent of the woods beckoned to summertime and to my memories of her. I moved closer, thinking that this couldn’t be happening. But there was Neil, rusty haired and broad with a million dollar grin which I once heard Sue Tanner say about him. He leaned against the tree, and pulled her closer. His hand was on the small of her back. She shyly looked away but he held her chin and turned her toward him.

As they were about to kiss, I shouted, “What in the world is going on?”

Neil just chuckled and Finity scurried away like a fright-

## The Finity Case

ened mouse. She avoided my gaze from behind a cedar tree. Neil purposely got between us.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Neil said. He held his hands up in surrender.

“But you hate her.”

“She’s pretty. I can’t help myself.”

“That’s not cool,” I said. I clenched my fists. I could feel the blood in my face.

Neil grumbled, “Well then, you ask her out.”

“I don’t like her that way. She’s...”

“Then it’s settled. Back off.”

I did. And it was perhaps the worst mistake I ever made. I left Finity to a world where she could never make it. I left her to the wolves and to the shadows where they dwell.

## Chapter 2

After finishing her equivalent of high school, Finity Chase moved to an old apartment at the beach that smelled of soot and rat urine. She didn't seem to mind. She was liberated from her Mom, though she still sent money to her to help her pay the bills. She got by working in a hot kitchen, but she preferred jobs with as little human contact as possible. She labored hard and fast, keeping her mind on the food and away from her co-workers. By exaggerating her busyness she avoided close scrutiny. They figured she had too much to do to share in gossip and camaraderie.

*Even customers pass by me, never seeing me, she thought. I am a hollow ghost of a woman. The only thick thing in my life is my de-*

## The Finity Case

*pression, yet I wish someone would reach my flesh and try to find me, where I am lost within.*

Finity liked washing dishes at the end of her shift. Over and over, she did the same thing. Wash, rinse, sanitize. And she didn't even have to think.

While leaving her job at the Waffle House one afternoon, she was joined by her on-again off-again boyfriend Neil Price. He grew into a rusty haired slacker who still lived at home. But she let him tag along. They sometimes stopped for ice cream before going to her apartment. Usually they watched TV to fill the void. The walk pleased her though. She liked having someone take up some of the emptiness.

Before they rounded the block, Finity stopped to tie her shoe. Tourists nearly ran into her. She jumped to her feet and gave them a dirty look. At that moment, a six foot tall Italian man of thin build invaded her space. Wiry and nervous, he quickly started talking, using his hands in quirky gestures. She looked to Neil for help. He seemed just as baffled.

"Like my Cadillac over there? Cool, huh," he said, shifting his weight from foot to foot. "Like my suit? Armani. Nice, huh?"

Annoyed, Neil shrugged and went to tell him off, but then the slick man opened his tailored jacket slightly to reveal an old Glock handgun. Neil recalled the time when he had tried one at a shooting range with his dad. He was told it was an effortless gun for learning. Used in World War II, a soldier just had to line up the three dots on the gun, and a target was easy to hit. Neil stared impressed, while Finity pulled back in

fear. She couldn't speak. The men shared a smile about the secret in the jacket. Being so sheltered, Neil was easily baited. He never met the boogeyman in the woods. And the boogeyman only came after those who didn't believe.

"How would you like a gun?" the man asked. Overzealous, he made them naturally wary. "I can get you one."

"Who are you?" Neil asked, when his sense came back. "We're on our way home."

"I can get you a better home."

Neil laughed and said, "I don't know what you've been smoking, but..."

"How about some beer? I can get you a case, any kind, my treat. Then we can talk business."

Tempted, Neil went to speak, but Finity pulled on his arm. Her nails dug into him and he winced. Glaring at her, he shook loose as if she were a small nuisance and then stepped closer to the stranger who seemed pleased.

"What's the catch?"

Motioning toward his gaudy blue caddy, the Italian man said, "Take a ride with your pal, Freddy. We'll have some beers, chat, I'll give you my card, and you call if you are interested. If not, no problem."

Neil eagerly nodded and approached the open door. Finity gasped, but Neil whispered, "Come on. It's okay. This guy is nuts, but it's free beer."

Against her better judgment, she slid onto the suede seats of the pimped out car and tried to quell her alarm. Neil sat in the front and she felt like a prisoner in the back. As Freddy

## The Finity Case

got in and started driving, her stomach sank. Every bit of sense in her being lashed out at her, but all she could do was steady her nerves and try not to throw up. *This is real bad*, she kept telling herself, rocking back and forth.

“Look in the glove box,” the big nosed man said, revealing a wide, sleazy grin.

Neil did and he shouted, “Whoa!”

Bundles of money plopped to his feet. Freddy laughed and leaned over, snatching some. He even smelled it as if relishing it. Laughing, they shoved it back inside. Finity stared with her mouth agape. Pandora’s Box already unleashed its evil charms. It could not be stopped.

“I can’t believe you have so much money,” Neil said as the car turned into a sandy parking lot. Finity stared at the back of his head, wishing she could poke it, and maybe awaken some sense in it.

“I’ll stop in here. What kind of beer do you like?”

Neil stared at the convenience store, probably wondering if Freddie intended to rob it, but he obediently sat there and said, “Surprise me.”

“My kind of man,” Freddy said, strolling away with a slight limp. “I’ll be right back. Don’t go anywhere.”

While he was gone, Neil peeked at the money again and noticed a small derringer hiding in the back. Finity begged him to be careful and not get caught, but Neil seemed mesmerized. Temptation beckoned, and he ignored the girl whining in the back seat. Images of power flashed through his mind. He wanted that money, if not the gun.

## Melissa Swaim

Freddie returned with a case of beer in a few minutes and said he had one other quick errand to run. He drove a few blocks away and parallel parked. Then he went to collect money from the owner of a bar on Pacific Avenue, and told them he would be right back. It sounded like robbery or extortion to her. As soon as he disappeared, Finity seized the door handle. She had had enough.

“Let’s make a run for it,” Finity said. “I don’t trust him. He gives me the creeps.”

“Okay. I’ll grab the beer.”

Though relieved they were getting out of there, Finity looked around panicky. What if he caught them sneaking away? He could return any second. Intuition said to get the hell out of there. *Fast!*

“Better not,” she said, “He’ll come back for you. He’s not a nice guy.”

“He said it was his treat, so it’s not stealing. Come on.”

Neil positioned the case of Bud under his arm and ran through the alley after Finity, laughing as if it weren’t as serious as she knew it to be. They stole it, and he had a gun. Nothing good could come of that. Luckily, her apartment was only one block over, and her already sore feet labored at the short distance. They reached the two-story, yellow building with brown trim. It stood out among the souvenir stores and the raw oyster bars. It didn’t belong, although it’s Spanish style gave it character, and it sheltered her from the world and its malice. She kept looking behind her, expecting him to come up after her any second. Her heart pounded.

## The Finity Case

They promptly ran up the stairs and into the apartment, slamming the door shut. Still huffing and puffing, they fell against a worn chair and stared out the living room window. Earlier it was just a small room with a mint green rug and simple furniture, and now it felt like a decaying fortress attempting to stave off evil. Holding their breath, they hid behind the thin curtains, watching and waiting until Freddy appeared on the corner by the drug store. He seemed shocked when he found the empty car. Like they suspected, he looked for them. He threw his hands in the air and walked back and forth searching for any sign of them. Pacing frantically, he occasionally peeked in windows of the first floor restaurants and gift shops. He was angry and suddenly unleashed it by violently kicking a parked car, denting the door. It was a piece of crap anyway.

“We got away! Look at him,” Neil whooped, feeling proud of himself.

He howled with laughter and out of his shirt plopped a few bundles of dirty money onto the faded carpet. She jumped back as if not wanting to be cursed by his deed.

“We’re dead,” Finity whispered.

Neil shrugged and said, “It probably wasn’t even his.”

“Oh, that just makes it so much better,” she spat. “I can’t believe you did that.”

She went to her tiny bedroom, which consisted of a day-bed and a nightstand, and slammed the door. She wanted so much to forget about Freddy. He scared her. Didn’t Neil have any sense? He didn’t care what mess he dragged her into. And

she knew there would come a time to pay.

The front door closed softly, so she figured Neil left. She wished she could tell Barrett what happened. He could help put her mind at ease, but he avoided both her and Neil since they started dating. And her Mom kept to herself. Darlene Chase worked in a department store trying to get her life together. Finity rarely visited her. It was hard work just being in her presence, and not because it was all her mother's fault. Finity's lack of ability to effectively communicate sometimes troubled her. And it left her feeling even more at a distance.

"Lonely people are an eyesore," Finity whispered. "Sometimes when I am alone, I want to cut the flesh from my body so that others can't ever see me."

She lied on her bed, staring at the cracked ceiling. Her attention followed each line like a labyrinth. Distant sounds interested her. She liked to sort them out before falling asleep.

## Chapter 3

Finity lived in fear from that day on, especially returning from work. Neil didn't come around much anymore, and she constantly felt Freddy's wrath would soon fall upon her. Every sound harassed her. Was it him? Every stranger wearing shades at a distance made her pulse quicken. Even footsteps had her checking over her shoulder. The stress was overwhelming her. After a week went by, she started to feel safe. Maybe he lived in another city. The resort was a haven for tourists and bored locals. Maybe he went to recruit someone else for his gopher-job or whatever he wanted to hire them to do. Maybe he wanted them to be low-level dealers of some kind.

She couldn't worry about possible troubles. She had enough on her mind like work and paying bills. Already run-

ning late, Finity forgot her work apron, so she turned around to fetch it from her apartment. She cursed herself for being so absentminded. It was bad enough that her uniform was wrinkled, but she hated ironing. At least, she just had to grab the darn thing from the table by the door. She always put things in the same place.

Angrily plodding along, she didn't notice the creeping shadow. It leapt toward her. Just then she felt a tap on her shoulder, making her cringe. She spun around and saw an elderly man squinting at her. He was short and slightly sunburned. Though he didn't appear to constitute a threat, he startled her. She took a step back.

"Do you have the time?" he asked, looking every part the tourist dressed in long socks and sandals with bright shorts and a Hawaiian tee-shirt.

She just shook her head and walked away from him. She didn't like people. She was already late, so she sprinted. Before she rounded the corner, a figure jumped out from behind a car, almost causing her to trip. She recognized him at once and she froze.

"So there you are. How did you enjoy my money and my beer?" the convulsive man snarled. She wondered if he had a neurological disorder. Maybe too much former drug use, she considered.

Dazed, Finity couldn't move or speak. She forgot how to formulate words. She didn't even budge.

"You're coming with me," he said.

He grabbed her hair, not caring who saw, pulling her

## The Finity Case

closer. She tried to scream, but he forcefully covered her mouth with one hand and gripped her neck with his arm. His large silver ring bruised her upper lip. The pain on those nerves was intense. Freddy could have rendered her unconscious with an upward strike of that area. But he didn't want to lug around a comatose body in broad daylight. He quickly led her over to his Cadillac, threw her inside, and told her she'd pay.

*This couldn't be happening*, she told herself. Shock took over, and she lost her ability to reason. Her eyes darted, trying to find an answer to her dilemma, but all she felt was all encompassing jeopardy. He took off so fast she was nearly thrown against the windshield. When she regained her balance, she tried to open the door, but he snatched her by the arm. She didn't like being touched, and she wrestled with him. She nearly bit him so he jumped back and continued driving. She sighed with relief when he let go. But it wasn't over.

He said, "Sit still or I'll shoot."

She saw a bulge under his long silk shirt, so she didn't doubt him. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she heard a voice relaying old tales along with the warning: "assassins always wear baggy clothes and carry small guns." His shirt was thin and only kind of loose and that gun didn't look that small to her.

"I shoot thieves in the knee caps," he warned. He wiped the corner of his mouth and tilted his head. He then returned his weasel eyes to her. She didn't budge.

"Are you going to kill me?"

“Maybe.”

Just then, two black Lincoln town cars surrounded his. Crotchety old men motioned to him from the windows, and he didn't seem happy. They signaled to him again, so he parked by the curb, cursing under his breath. Scared, he ordered her to be quiet. She squirmed, and eyed the irritable figures. Maybe they were worse than him. She didn't want to find out.

Finity sank in her seat as a man who looked like an undertaker stood near her door, while two large men went to the driver's side. They loomed over the car, and she noticed one huge arm with the tattoo of a shovel along with the initials S.B. She covered her eyes, not wanting to face anymore of the nightmare. She banged her head against the seat, over and over. She hoped they'd be gone when she opened her eyes. They weren't.

“Big Sal,” Freddie said, trying to act casual, “How are you?”

“Cut the BS. Where is my money? Lou and Joey are getting antsy. They don't like it when I have to be called, know what I mean?”

“Well, I'm taking care of that right now, as a matter of fact. This little bitch and her boyfriend stole a hundred, but I'm heading out now to get it back.”

Big Sal leaned in the car, stared at Finity and laughed. His large body shook. He held onto the car for support.

“She scammed you?” and he laughed some more. “Hey, boss, Princess scammed Fast Freddie!”

## The Finity Case

“Princess?” Freddie asked with a look of fear on his face. “Hey, boss, I didn’t know.”

Big Sal shrugged. Memories seemed to put him into a good mood.

“Her Mom and I go way back. Yeah, Darlene was a dynamo. She later married Bob, a lowlife, who met with some concrete workers.” He backed a way a bit, and pulled Freddie hard against him. “Princess had a reaction or something to a vaccine when she was eighteen months, though they say that’s a myth. She’s mildly autistic or something, but still family if you know what I mean. She can learn some of the business, maybe become a Bright Eyes or something. She won’t understand anyway. Good kid, and got spunk too. She scammed you, hah! Must be the genes. She’s a looker too.”

“Yeah, she got me.”

“Don’t get her in no trouble, hear? It would make me proud if the two of you got married one day.”

Freddy said, “Whoa on the marriage. I’ll keep an eye on the kid and let my boys know to lay off. She’s a bird in a cage.”

Big Sal smiled and blew a kiss at Finity before he and his associates backed off. They climbed back into their cars still laughing and sped away just as fast as they had arrived. Finity smelled burned rubber. She closed the window to avoid the smell, which amused him, considering the situation. Then she turned to him, wondering, *What now?* She wasn’t sure if she was free to go.

She stared at Freddy who finally said, “Sorry, kid. Can I

buy you a burger or something? We're cool. Forget about the beer and money. It was a test. You have guts. If you ever want a job, talk to Fast Freddy. If you need protection, I'm your man. Got it?"

Finity nodded and said, "Can I have that burger now?"

Despite her sore lip and her shaken state, she was hungry, and money was tight. And she'd probably be fired from her job. They grabbed some sandwiches at the drive thru down the street and then he escorted her home.

Freddy gazed at the apartment building, known as a drug haven. He figured she probably had no idea what went on late at night. All the street thugs came out, and he therefore had to make his presence known. The Latin and Russian mafia hadn't taken a hold of that particular area yet, so Freddy knew his bosses would be pleased, even though Filipino and Vietnamese gangs were on the rise. However, they seemed to prefer knives and hand-to-hand combat unless they got really mad. Then they pulled out the automatics.

There was a constant war for limited resources, and the Asian Triads always posed a threat, though most organized Tongs were stationed up north or out west. Nevertheless, Sal was strictly old school, a wiseguy who shunned the spotlight, more wary than reckless. He respected the importance of "Omerta," or silence that he vowed. And he preferred simple gambling and extortion as opposed to the illegal nuclear arms trade of the Russians, especially since the FBI was hotly pursuing that area. Yeah, Freddy preferred Sal's style to the flashier families who succumbed to the trap of celebrity.

## The Finity Case

Freddy walked Finity to her apartment. This time he made sure he found her residence in case he needed to know where it was. It was in a cool place, right in the middle of the resort strip along with all its little shops and entertainment, though it had its dark side too.

“Do you really want to live here? I can get you a better place.”

“I want to live on Elm Street.”

“Yeah,” Freddy laughed, wondering if she was joking about his name or if there really was such a place around there. “Well, go tell your dad. I can’t work miracles, but I can find something decent.”

“My dad is dead. He disappeared years ago. I don’t know what happened to him.”

Freddy thought about what she said for a moment and then told her, “Sorry, kid.”

He meant it.

Finity returned to her thoughts. Freddy stared at her. She seemed disconnected from the world. Sirens went by, people argued, and horns honked, but Finity watched the neon lights, barely registering half of what went on. That would come in handy for her survival, especially as a defective and illegitimate pup in a circle of rivalry infested families.

## Chapter 4

I sat at my desk after a grueling day, checking Virginia Codes and blah, blah, blah. That's what it all seemed like at the end of the day. My legal secretary was sloppy with her fact-finding, so I had to waste my time rechecking her work. When she informed me she had to leave early to primp for a date, I slammed my fist on the desk. What is this? Was this my life and all it would ever be? Nothing but stress, endless reading, and deciphering legalese—this summed up my day as an associate attorney. Sometimes I wondered if I was cut out for this. I wanted more excitement.

When ever my existence became overbearing, I liked to daydream about my youth. I tried to discover just where my road turned, and then decide if I really wanted to be on that road in the first place. And after that, I thought about...her. I

## The Finity Case

tried to understand my world through Finity. She was unreachable, but I couldn't stop wanting to find the beginning of her, the starting point of where she can finally recognize me and know what I am about.

Working for Stuart and Lambert in downtown Virginia Beach, I tidy up other people's lives. I usually get the clients no one else wants: the poor, the addicts, and the up to no good. Sometimes I like to be needed. People remember me on the streets. They greet me on my way to court, happy to see me, knowing that someone listened to them and helped them when no one else would.

I started to wonder about fragile Finity who I turned my back on years ago. Did she need me? I missed her. I heard she sold Mary Kay cosmetics and drove around in a pink Cadillac. I wondered if it were true. It made me ache to see her. She was one of a kind and an inspiration of gentleness to all who saw her.

I was now engaged to Madilyn Thornton. How did that happen?

My old buddy Neil Price returned from the war in Iraq, and asked me, "Why are you getting married?"

It made me stop and assess things. Sure, I cared about Madilyn. I met her when another associate at the firm represented her in court. I asked her out for coffee after she won a small settlement from a car accident, and she really needed to unwind after the ordeal. At first, we started out as friends and we met for the theatre or a movie. She seemed in awe of my being a lawyer and viewed me as a knight in shining armor. I

## Melissa Swaim

liked feeling so special, so one day I kissed her and soon after asked her to marry me. I must have been caught up in the moment. Now I have my doubts.

I glanced at Madilyn's picture on my desk. Scrunching up her nose in an adorable pose at the beach, she looked so pretty and tan. Everyone commented on that picture. Marriage might be okay. I wouldn't mind coming home to someone who adored me. She really cared, and I think I did too. Maybe I needed to use my persuasive skills on myself.

I gathered some papers, stuffed them in my briefcase, and then looked around the stifling room. My office was small and at the end of a maze in a high rise building. I think I was put there out of the way and out of mind. Mr. Lambert made me his errand boy, and I really detested him. I knew I had to win bigger cases to get any respect from him.

My suit was getting a little old. I had had it since my college days. My hair was getting a little too long, although no one seemed to notice.

But where else would I go?

While silently complaining about my life, an idea hit. I pulled out my laptop and logged on. I typed Finity's name into the computer to see where she lived.

The last time I saw her she worked at the oceanfront waffle place and dated Neil. That troubled me, so I avoided them until Neil got his act together and joined the army. He never mentioned Finity again, so I allowed him back into my life. But what about her? She had never done anything wrong, and I would have loved to see her again. That sweet smile melted

## The Finity Case

away the darkness of the world.

I had to know. Did she ever get married or find a career? What ever happened to her? I did some internet searching, printed out her address and a map and took a drive to Granby Street, her last known address. No one was home. The white Victorian house was rotting in a tangle of weeds and thorn bushes. The steps were broken and paint peeled from the siding. I feared her life had spiraled into ruin. I decided to get a closer look. When I didn't see anyone lurking around, I peeked through a window with a torn screen. Sagging floors, old furniture, and a pile of tools and buckets of paint in the center of the room was all I could see. It didn't look lived in. I got a bad feeling, so I circled around the neighborhood. Though renovated, a few tough spots are known for crime. I keep on going, hoping she had the sense to avoid blighted areas.

I drove around the next couple of days, trying to think of where she might go such as the mall or our old neighborhood haunts. I even went on my lunch break. I considered places some of clients mentioned to me, places that the unfortunate go. I don't know why I drove out that way. Maybe it was from the guilt of having abandoned a friend and envisioning the worse for her. None of the faces I saw looked familiar.

Relieved, I decided to turn around. But then I spotted a five foot four woman pacing on the corner at the truck stop. I pulled over and watched her. It could have been Finity, though I hoped it wasn't. She looked thin and nervous. And she had that signature hair, wild and glistening in the sun.

Suddenly it occurred to me. Was she soliciting her body? Wearing a pink tank top, tight Capri pants, and high heel shoes, she leaned against the metal fence while scruffy looking men checked her out. Her long hair dangled over tense shoulders and her eyes stared into the distance.

My heart sank. My worst fears were realized and guilt overcame me. I skidded in the direction of the corner, hopped out of my car, and rushed over to her. She winced at the sight of me. She barely held my gaze, but I seized her by the arm. She tried to turn away.

“Hey, I’ve been searching for you.”

“I’ve been right here,” she said with a shrug. Heavy eyes tried to figure me out.

“Come on. Let’s go.”

“I can’t.”

“Don’t make a scene. I want to buy you dinner.”

She glanced at a black car half hidden in the woods. There was something eerie about it the way it was waiting there and watching?

“Please.”

“Okay,” she whimpered and then shrugged, “but don’t say anything. I won’t have you judging me.”

“Come here,” I gently said, opening my arms to her. I held her, though she felt all bones and sharp edges.

She didn’t hug back.

“I always believed in you.” My voice sounded false. I hated myself right then.

“Stop,” she begged. She reacted to my words like jagged

## The Finity Case

glass.

“Let’s just eat. There’s a quiet diner nearby. We’ll just rest a moment and eat, nothing more.”

While angry truckers saw me help my lady friend into my BMW, I swallowed hard and got out of there. A few threw beer cans in my direction. We drove a good ten minutes before we even looked at each other. And I swear a car was following us. It looked like a Crown Victoria. Maybe the cops had been watching her. But I couldn’t see the driver clearly. Forgetting about it, I parked at a dimly lit mom and pop joint. I hate to say it, but I wasn’t about to take her anywhere nice dressed like that.

We picked a booth in the far corner and it seemed fairly clean despite some ketchup stains and some melted ice slowly running toward the edge and dripping off the side. Lost, she sat noticing small details instead of relating to me. She contemplated the vinyl tablecloth, the flower curtains, and the chipped yellow walls.

A big-haired waitress brought us bitter coffee and I ordered two meat loaf specials. The waitress cracked her gum and scratched her head with her pen before heading to the kitchen to get our order. Finity stared at the table until the food came, and she quickly poked at it with her fork and occasionally nibbled on the not so burned chunks. I let her eat in peace.

“Thanks,” she whispered, wiping her mouth with a napkin, after forcing herself to down her meal.

“Where do you stay? I went by the house on Granby

Street. It looked abandoned.”

“My grandma left me that place, even though I only met her once. She and my mom never got along,” she explained, “And I’ve been living at the beach until I can fix up the house. I’ve been staying with a friend. He got a few months in jail, so times are hard till he gets out. I take care of things.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Shaking her head, she said, “I don’t think so.”

“You can stay with me.” That just slipped out.

“Just till he gets out?” she asked, more of a half-question, half-statement.

It was a start. “Sure.”

“I have to get my things.”

“I can take you by your place later if you want.”

I finished what I could of my lumpy potatoes and wiped my mouth. I’d probably order a pizza in a little while. “It’s good to see you. I really wanted to find you.”

Finity drank her coffee and said, “I wondered if I’d ever see you again. I knew you would be a success.”

“Thanks,” I told her, wanting to say the same about her.

She still had a youthful glow about her and a naivety. How had she survived?

“If you are in any trouble I can help. I’ve helped a lot of people.”

“I’m really tired.”

“Okay, let’s go. You can sleep at my place and pick up your things tomorrow.”

We left and I stopped at a nearby drug store and told her

## The Finity Case

to grab some toiletries and whatever she may need, and I gave her my credit card. I waited and kept the car running until she returned with a plastic bag of womanly items. She always loved make-up. I liked seeing her pleased with her purchase. I would have let her keep the card if it would have taken back all of her suffering. She stared at me with an appreciation that melted my heart.

I turned my attention back to the road and we headed to my residence at Indian Lakes Estates. The ride was quiet, just long suburban roads connecting different neighborhoods. I lived in a new development with contemporary houses, most of them over two-thousand square feet. Mine was on the first street and a former model home. When we pulled into the long driveway, I saw her take a double-take at my fairly large house. Gray and professionally maintained, it sat like a spoiled princess with a cold veneer. Gardening was never my forte, but I planned on hiring a landscaper to soften the walkway. But it was home, and I had grown fond of it, especially the deck out back and the huge, neutral colored rooms. Skylights kept me inundated with a view of the heavens, as if allowing me to foolishly believe that my future had no limit.

“We’re here.”

I led her inside and she looked around, taking in the contemporary furnishings with interest. A few modern art pieces added color and Greek columns divided the rooms. I wondered if she compared it to the homes we visited as teenagers. They impressed her. She always dreamed of owning a house like this, but her life seemed so off course. What happened? I

## Melissa Swaim

hoped she'd open up to me if she even knew how.

Before I could suggest anything, she said she was all sweaty and asked to take a shower. I showed her to one of the three bathrooms which amazed her. She walked inside and twirled around on the sand colored tile. She loved the beach décor. Even my thick bath towels impressed her. I had never felt so happy about my things until I saw them through her eyes.

I left her an old pair of sweats that I ended up shrinking before I got wise and hired a maid twice a week. Finity eagerly accepted the navy blue duds and disappeared into my bathroom for half an hour. I went to the den to figure out what I could possibly do about her situation.

I poured myself a Bourbon and paced, staring out my two-story windows, but finding only darkness. It consumed me. I had to pull away and not lose myself in depression. I walked down the long hallway listening to the water falling over her body. I imagined her flawless skin and the gentle way she moved. Thinking of her troubled life marred the picture. I pressed my head against the bathroom door, wanting to cry, but not allowing myself to.

When she appeared, looking so small in my clothes, I wanted to take hold of her and feel her warmth next to me so that I could believe she was really there. But her life has been a mystery. I stayed my distance.

"I hope I didn't use all your hot water."

"Its fine," I said, with a heartfelt laugh. It reminded me of the old Finity, always worried about such things. "You can

## The Finity Case

make yourself at home, watch some TV. If you are hungry, help yourself. I know that wasn't the best dinner. The kitchen is through there."

She nodded and mumbled, "Thanks."

Out of the corner of my eyes I swear I saw a shadow pass by the window. It moved like a fluid feline, and I wasn't quite sure what to make of it. I shuddered, but decided it was stress. I shut the blinds just in case.

"Shadows," she knowingly whispered.

I wasn't in the mood for childhood ghost stories. My grimace told her so.

While Finity plopped down on my oversized couch, I chose the high-backed chair near her. Already uncomfortable, it suited me fine. I gave her my full attention. She looked around with uncertainty. My empty white walls troubled her. What little art I had seemed chaotic to her, with its intense color blobs pretending to be art.

"You can use the phone if you need to. And tomorrow, you can fetch some things."

Just then my cell phone rang, so I peeked at the number and nearly choked.

"Hi," I said, quickly leaving the room. "Madilyn, I wasn't expecting you to call tonight. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, I'm on my way home," she replied. "There is a storm coming. I want to avoid it."

"That's great honey. I've missed you."

"Your voice sounds strained. Have you had a bad day?"

"Just a bit chaotic, you know. I have a few big cases."

“Okay, I’ll let you go. I love you. I promise I’ll call you tomorrow when I get in.”

“Great. I love you too.”

I hung up and returned to the living room, staring in disappointment. Finity was asleep. Her worn body slumped against the pillows and tugged at my heart. I covered her up with a blanket and then sat down beside her, feeling distressed. I held my head. What the hell was I going to do? And what would Madilyn think? I know she wouldn’t like the fact that another woman was staying with her fiancé.

I tried calling Neil, but he wasn’t home. He just rented a new apartment near the naval base. I was wondering if she would mind staying with him. I hadn’t asked if they were on friendly terms. I decided all this could wait one more day.

In the morning Finity was gone.

I wasn’t sure whether to be angry or relieved, so I decided to leave her be for the moment. A hurricane was coming. That was trouble enough. Madilyn and I planned on boarding up the house. She said she’d feel safer staying with me than her townhouse situated in a flood zone. The funny thing was that I had no problem with the thought of living with Finity, but I felt annoyed at the thought of being crowded by my fiancé.

Preoccupied, I wondered about Finity and where she might be. The images that popped into my head terrified me. All alone in the middle of an approaching storm, what if she needed me? But I wasn’t alone. Madilyn arrived. And she didn’t stop talking.

“Where should we go first?” Madilyn asked with her high

## The Finity Case

energy. She had sales brochures in her hands. Her manicured nails were a lavender color.

How the hell should I know, I thought? Madilyn chatted as she climbed into my BMW, but I barely noticed. My thoughts were heavy and I didn't want to bother with this damn hurricane. I kind of wish she gave me some space today, but I would probably just mope around. As she put her seat belt on, I watched her, noting her pleasant round face, brown bob, and wholesome outfit. Honest and sweet, she made a good teacher, and I always thought of her as the future mother of my children. I couldn't throw this relationship away. Could I?

"I'm glad you're helping me," I told her, forcing myself to be civil. "I've been so busy with work. I'd probably be stuck in this storm without any necessities if it weren't you."

Her hand squeezed my leg. That definitely got me thinking about her.

Together we went shopping for supplies, and I made an effort to be attentive. We meandered down the aisles like an old husband and wife couple. I threw in some extra items to give to Finity. I was preoccupied, big deal. Seeing her again opened an old wound. I had to face it.

When we got home, I tracked down her number from a website where she was selling a car. I doubted it was even hers. I Googled her. Most of the website listings were a few months old. I guess her Internet access had been limited lately.

I got a hold of her the next morning.



“Hey, a storm is coming. We should start feeling its effects this afternoon. You okay? I can stop by and bring some candles and batteries.”

“No, I’m fine.”

“I want to see that for myself. Where are you? I’ll come right now.”

She gave me the directions to a seaside condo at Birdneck, an expensive area of the beach, but still a little more affordable than the upscale Northside and its ocean side castles. So I took the interstate and made it there in fifteen minutes by virtue of a few traffic violations. I knew the area pretty well, but it wasn’t what I was expecting. The complex was well maintained but made of so much wood it looked like a fire hazard—or a house made of sticks that the big bad wolf could easily blow down. Still, it gave the impression of being clean and fairly decent, so I climbed the stairs from the marshy courtyard and banged on the door. She answered wearing only a long t-shirt and slippers. Her hair tangled about her engaging face. Those pale pink lips haunted me.

“Here,” I said, handing her a bag of supplies. “I stopped at a store nearby and got some water and crackers and granola bars, besides the candles and stuff.”

She smiled and let me in. The place was small, but reasonably furnished and filled with expensive TV and stereo equipment. Then I noticed medieval style weaponry on the

## The Finity Case

walls. It gave the place an intimidating look. Nothing seemed to be hers, unless she was a single executioner from the past.

"I'm house-sitting till he gets out," she said, reading my mind. She put the items in a bare cabinet and nervously joined me on the oversized couch. She tucked her feet under her.

"You left fast," I told her. "You didn't say goodbye."

"I forgot about the cat. I had to feed him."

Scanning the beige rug and hardwood floors, I looked for sign of a pet, and then returned to study her face.

"So what business is he into? Does he have a name?"

"Import/Export. Freddy."

Her "to the point" answers aggravated me. I wondered if she was trying to be funny, but then again, this was Finity. She sometimes repressed her speaking on purpose. As a child she would say inappropriate things or she could be loud and disruptive, which always resulted in negative attention. She learned to control her outbursts out of fear of unwanted attention. By looking at her, she still had the fresh-faced look of the girl next door. One only noticed her odd behavior the more time was spent with her, and little eccentricities popped out.

"And he's in jail, why?"

"He already has a lawyer."

I rose and said, "Okay, Finity. I can't force you to accept my help."

A creak outside the door got my attention. Even Finity froze.

“Do you have any problems in this neighborhood? Robberies and such?”

“No,” she said, peeking out the window as a pretense, “It’s probably my neighbor. He checks up on me.”

“To see if you are okay? Or because your boyfriend hired him to keep an eye on you?”

“Stop worrying. I appreciate it. But I’m perfectly safe.”

“Are you in trouble, like with the mob or something?” I laughed, knowing how absurd the accusation had to be. She didn’t laugh.

Finity lowered her head. Then she walked away from me and took a seat on a Lazy Boy. Bits of old tales resurfaced in my mind. They gnawed on me.

“Will you ever tell me about those rumors? And about how your Dad died?”

“He wasn’t my real Dad. He just abandoned us, I suppose. He never came home.”

“Here’s my number. You can call me if you need to...about your Dad...or if you need me.”

“Okay,” she said, “Thanks for the supplies.”

I retreated. I had no choice, but my inner voice said that I needed to do some digging after the storm. Maybe the P.I. at my firm could help me out.

## Chapter 5

The winds picked up. The trees shook their leaves in fury. It was only a category two hurricane, but it was headed straight for us. The outer bands already started attacking the southeastern tip of Virginia where we were located. Each storm was different. But from my experience, this meant minor coastal flooding and some wind damage, along with the loss of utilities. Usually a lot of trees were knocked down. I checked the scene from the upstairs bathroom window, the only one not boarded up as I forgot about it when buying plywood. After waiting in a long line and facing jacked-up prices, I was lucky to get what I could before the shelves went bare. I was grateful to be safe at home. I cowered at the sight of the swaying oaks and feared they'd come crashing down.

Madilyn bunkered down in the den as if preparing for a

casual sleepover. She wore a velvet work-out suit and her hair was casually pulled up, but, more than anything, I noticed the way her face lit up when she looked at me. Always thinking of me, she fixed me coffee, though my nerves didn't need it. I was about to join her under a blanket to watch a movie when the phone rang. I pressed it to my ear.

"Barrett," the voice said.

"Finity? Are you all right?"

"Barrett, I'm scared. I hate the storm. Remember when we were kids and there was a hurricane. I slept under your bed. Mom didn't even know I was gone."

I remembered her under my Spiderman bed. She thought I could protect her. I could still envision her in my mind. In her pink jammies and slippers, she curled up with one of my pillows. I talked about Spiderman and superheroes and she listened until she drifted off to sleep. We felt so safe together back then. She was still a big chunk of my heart.

"Do you want me to come get you?"

"No, the roads are flooding at the beach. It is too dangerous. I just wanted to hear your voice."

I heard three clicks on her phone. I think it was three clicks. It caught me by surprise. I tried to hear it again.

"I think your phone is tapped. Why is your phone tapped?"

"I have to go now. I love you, Barrett."

She had never said those words. I couldn't reply. She hung up.

I went back to the couch, Madilyn gave me a questioning

## The Finity Case

look, but I didn't offer any explanation. I put my arm around her and gave her a reassuring squeeze. She smelled so good, like vanilla and cream. We tried to watch the movie without any further interruption, but the lights flickered. We both waited nervously, knowing it wouldn't be long till the power was out. The wind howled more ferociously. I hoped the roof would hold. New constructions were never as durable as older homes, but I wasn't about to show any fear.

"How about some candles, just in case," she suggested and then added, "It would be romantic."

"Sure," I told her, though I didn't really feel like getting up again. I grumbled to myself. This storm wasn't helping my stress level.

I lit a few on the entertainment center and then turned out the lights. The room took on a soft glow. It gave it a faraway feel, and it put a sparkle in her eye. That enticed me. Suddenly, it was just us in that room, no demons from the past. Anyone else had been banished from my mind.

"That's better," she said, holding the blanket open to me.

I climbed in, felt her soft body against mine, and put all my restless energy and frustration to good use. At the same time, a huge tree creaked and then snapped; crashing down in a final thud, but nothing stopped us from entwining our limbs. I moved on top of her, intoxicated with her sweet scent and the silkiness of her skin. Her eyes were closed, so she didn't notice that the power went out. With only the pattering of rain and a howling in the distance to be heard, I teased her nipples and worked my way lower, tugging clothes along

## Melissa Swaim

the way. She succumbed to hands surveying her flesh, eliciting a deeper fervor than our normal lovemaking. It must have been the influence of the storm, radiating through us with all its intensity and uncertainty.

In the candles' flickering luminosity, we breathlessly kissed and explored our heightened passion with enthusiasm. Like opposites of a puzzle, alternating in shadow and light, we entangled and merged without constraint. I shut my eyes too, only wanting to lose myself completely in her. And I did.

Exhausted, we fell dead to the world and the hours ticked by. But it was a restless slumber and it was getting hot. Later, when I went to investigate, I saw the fallen tree's damage. My neighbor's wooden fence was destroyed, but no one was hurt. I hoped we all fared so well. But it wasn't yet over.

If you enjoyed this sample, it can also be purchased in hard-cover or the full eBook. Please visit [www.archebooks.com](http://www.archebooks.com) for more information.

