

Tuesday, Jan. 22, after dinner . . .

"I know you miss him, and at some point you're going to want pictures of him to remember him by."

It seemed like such a long time ago since Jordan had said those words. In reality it was only about four months ago. She had known then that he was right, she just hadn't seen that time coming any time soon.

Now she was sitting on the couch looking at the small photo album that her brother had put Nathan's pictures in.

She glanced up from the photo album, to the entertainment center in front of her. On top, the baby shoe she had taken before leaving the city now sat next to the signed fire helmet. She wasn't sure what had possessed her to suddenly dig the things out of the bottom drawer of the vanity but she had. Her unfinished dinner still sat on the table.

Cassie thought about the email she had sent to Dr. Lindon the other day, telling the psychiatrist about how she had been feeling lately. About how her thoughts revolving around Nathan had gone from what she was missing with him to wondering what he would've done had he had a chance. It didn't seem like much but somehow, she thought it was significant. She also recalled what she had written about Josh.

My one neighbor has a little boy who is about the same age that Nathan would have been. When I first met them, it was hard being around the boy and his father. It just reminded me of my little boy and what I was missing. I can't say everything is better as my neighbor and I still have some awkward moments from time to time but there is a difference. I don't think about how I could avoid them. In fact, I actually enjoying spending time with both of them. The little boy has even taken to calling me 'Auntie Cass' and I've got to admit, I like the being called that.

She had ended that email with the line, 'perhaps its time I stopped dwelling on what I've lost and remember what I gained in the short time I had with Nathan'. Still, now that she had the photo album out and in front of her, finding the courage to open it was proving to be difficult.

Taking a deep breath, and letting it out slowly, the dark-haired woman tried to calm herself. While she had been digging the photo album out, she had been so sure this was what she wanted to do. I think I'm already past having second thoughts about this. Maybe fourth or fifth thoughts.

She picked the dark blue book up in both hands, held it a few minutes, and then placed it back on the coffee table. Getting to her feet, she walked into the kitchen and stood staring at the unfinished dinner still there. Eating was the last thing on her mind so instead she picked the plate up and went to the trash can.

Just as Cassie was finishing cleaning up her abandoned dinner, the door chime sounded. She

headed for the door and opened it. "Scott?" she said, unable to keep the surprise of seeing him there completely out of her voice. Though he had been to her apartment before, he had never stopped by unexpectedly. "Is everything okay?"

"Yes. Sorry, I didn't think me showing up would be such a surprise."

"It's just that I wasn't expecting anyone. Please, come in," she added, stepping aside so he could come into the apartment. "Can I get you something to drink -- ice tea, water, milk, soda?"

"Soda would be fine," Scott replied stepping into the apartment.

"Please, have a seat," Cassie told him, waving a hand toward the couch as she headed for the refrigerator. "What brought you up here anyway?"

"Wanted to get away from my siblings for awhile."

Cassie nodded despite the fact that Scott couldn't see the gesture. "What flavor? I've got grape, cola, ginger ale, and orange."

"Cola will be fine."

Cassie grabbed a can of cola and ginger ale, filled two glasses with ice, and headed for the living room. She placed the items on the coffee table and took a seat on the couch.

"Did I interrupt something?"

Scott nodded toward the photo album still sitting out, as he opened the can of soda and poured it into the glass.

"Not really. Haven't been able to get the courage to actually open it. I thought I was ready but I'm having second thoughts now."

"Second thoughts about what?" Scott asked

"Before I left New York, my brother went with me to gather photos from my old apartment. Jordan went through the album containing pictures of Nathan and picked out ones for me. He even bought and put the pictures in that album. When I moved in I packed the album and other things that belonged to my son away. I dug them out tonight but now I can't seem to find the courage to open that book," she said waving a hand toward the book. "Guess it sounds kind of silly," she said, feeling her cheeks grow warm as she glanced down at the floor.

"Not at all. I can't say I know what you've gone through with losing your son but I know it couldn't have been easy. Maybe looking through the album wasn't something you were supposed to do alone."

"Yeah, I thought of dropping in on someone but the two I would feel comfortable going to are dealing with their own issues right now."

Scott nodded, knowing who she was talking about without her saying names. "Well I'm here. That is, if you don't mind sharing the pictures with me."

Cassie paused. It seemed like she had been spending more and more time with the Thunderbird 1 pilot lately, but looking through a photo album with him had never crossed her mind. It just hadn't seemed like something that would interest him. Now, that he had made the offer though, something about it seemed right.

Cassie leaned forward and pulled the album closer to the edge of the coffee table. Taking a deep breath once again, she reached out and grasped the cover of the album. Slowly, she opened it, revealing pictures that had been taken at the hospital shortly after Nathan had been born, one of which showed her holding the little boy and all four of her brothers gathered around her.

Cassie slowly flipped through the pages, finding herself telling stories that went along with the pictures occasionally. At times, she'd stop in mid-sentence as the emotion would overcome her voice. In appropriate places, Scott made comments while other times he remained silent. He did notice that her one brother seemed to be in more pictures than the others. As it wasn't one of the triplets, Scott knew it was her younger brother without asking. If he hadn't already known it, looking through the album would have told him how close the two siblings were.

Turning the page again, pictures of Nathan's first birthday came up. Cassie scanned over the photos, memories that went along with that day surfacing. On one of the pictures, a date caught her eye -- 02-22-2067.

Nathan would have turned three next month, Cassie realized. Reaching up, she wiped away a couple of threatening tears.

"Cass, you okay?"

"Yeah. Fine," she replied, reaching out to close the book. "I think I've seen all the pictures I can stand tonight." Spotting his empty glass she decided to try changing the subject. "Can I get you anything else?" she asked, waving a hand toward the glass.

"No, thank-you."

Cassie picked up both his glass and her own and got to her feet. "I'm just going to set these in the kitchen."

Not saying anything, Scott got to his feet and followed her. Cassie went over to the sink, and took longer than necessary rinsing out the glasses. Watching her, Scott leaned against the end of the counter, thinking over what to say.

"His birthday is coming up soon isn't it?" Scott finally asked. He saw Cassie nod, but she didn't turn to face him. "Perhaps you should go home for it. Maybe visit his grave." Scott paused for a moment. When she didn't turn to face him or say anything he continued. "When we lose someone unexpectedly it takes awhile before we're really ready to say good-bye. Even then, it's good to have a place to feel close to them."

"Are you a psychologist along with everything else?" Cassie asked finally breaking her silence.

"No. Just someone who's lost someone unexpectedly, and an older brother to seven siblings now. Not to mention, going to my mother's grave and talking to her, reminds me of how much she is still a part of my life. Part of who I am. Just like your son will always be a part of you."

Cassie finally turned away from the sink. Scott noticed the thoughtful expression on her face and chose to remain silent for the moment.

"I think I'll talk the idea over with Dr. Lindon. Thanks for the suggestion and for listening."

"Anytime."

Scott glanced at his watch and frowned.

"Shoot. I've got to get going," he said. "I'm meeting Virg for a chess match in five."

Cassie nodded and stepped forward, to lead him to the door. Scott smiled at her, and then reached out to draw her into a hug. Cassie stilled for a moment, before she relaxed into the embrace. Scott gave her a squeeze and drew back.

"I'm here for you any time you need, Cass," he said.

"Thank you, Scott," Cassie said.

Scott gave her a warm smile before crossing the threshold and out of the apartment.

"I'll catch you later," he said.

"Goodbye, Scott."

Scott waited until the apartment door closed before making his way back down to the monorail. He rode across to the Villa with his hands in his pockets, leaning his back against the glass. This has got to be tough for her, he thought. I can't imagine what it would be like to lose a child. And what's worse, his birthday is coming up. I wish I could do something. I guess I can just be there for her.. The monorail came to a stop, and Scott walked towards the lounge. He couldn't help feeling gratified that Cassie had opened up to him. He resolved to be there for her as much as she would allow, and smiled.

Thanks to ArtisticRainey for her help writing the ending of this!