

## Little Girl Lost

by Lo-Arna Collins

The wind was warm and fresh, bringing with it delicious smells and a general content feeling. The birds were singing and the sunshine was shining brilliantly. Today is Carmella Boyd's wedding day. The happiest day of her life, only one thing was missing to make her day less than perfect. The same thing that had been missing since she was 7 years old. Her father.

Ever since Carmella was a little girl all she wanted and all she'd wished for, was her Daddy's love. It was the only thing she had been desperate for her whole life, and it seemed to be a hopeless battle. She had come to accept the fact that there was no place in her father's life for her long ago, and although it still stung and cut her deeper than she cared to let on, she had also come to a closure of sorts but this was her wedding day, where he should be giving her away. Instead she was walking herself down to greet her adorable fiancé.

Carmella fortunately had an unconditional love and deep connection with Andrew, but never had the pleasure of Father/Daughter bonding. It had always been absent from her life, not even a stepfather to fill the void. She had spent the better part of her teenage years insanely envy of her friends relationships with their Dad's, although she would never admit it. That was one of the things she was looking forward to with marrying into Andrew's family. His mother and father were still together and going strong after 25 years and she loved the family bonding that went on between the Bentley's during family gatherings.

Underneath it all, Carmella Boyd was just a little girl lost, looking for a way to her Daddy. And a way for her Daddy to love her, treat her as his princess.

"Are you ready to go to the hairdressers yet?" Carmella's mother's voice brought her out of her daydream.

"Sorry Mum, I was zoning out!" Carmella smiled, shaking her head.

"That's ok. You're the bride so I suppose that's allowed, but we better get going now" Leanne smiled proudly at her daughter. She had grown into such a beautiful, caring young woman.

Carmella sat silently staring out of the window in the car, watching the trees hurry past.

Leanne glanced nervously over at Carmella. Must be nerves, she thought.

"It's a magnificent day today, not a cloud in the sky!" Leanne beamed, looking through the windshield.

Carmella turned to look at her mother and smiled shyly.

"Melly" Her mother said and then paused.

"Yessy?" Carmella asked, avoiding her mother's eyes.

"What's the matter is it nerves?"

"No, I'm not really nervous. I've been waiting for this day for so long it's a relief to have it here" Carmella laughed a silent laugh.

"Well then, what's wrong?" Leanne asked awkwardly.

Carmella took a deep breath. "It's Dad"

Leanne looked winded for a moment.

"Oh" she finally managed to mutter.

"Yeah" Carmella returned in the same tone, returning to the scenery outside the window.

"What are you thinking about him for?" Leanne asked after a few moments silence.

"Why not Mum? It's my wedding day!" Carmella said, exasperated.

"But....he hasn't bothered with you for 20 years! Why would you even give him a second thought?"

"Oh geez, I don't know maybe the fact that he is my father! No matter how hard he tries to pretend he isn't, he still is!" Carmella exclaimed.

"I'm sorry honey. I guess I just didn't realise all this still bothered you so much. I mean, you never talk about it" Leanne was fighting to get that foot out of her mouth.

"Well it doesn't always" Carmella said after a long moment.

Leanne looked at her daughter, curiously and patiently.

"Every now and again, he comes back into my head and I get sad or angry. And a day like today I just can't get him or his rejection of me out of my head!" Carmella said, honestly.

"Oh Melly, I don't use the word hate often but I do so hate that man for what he has done to you!" Leanne's hands gripped the steering wheel.

"I know, I do too. But let's just forget it. We're about to get our hair and makeup done and in a few short ours I will be Mrs. Andrew Bentley and that is the most important part about today and all we should focus on" Carmella said, smiling widely.

"Ok Carmella. I love you so much and I am so proud of you. It's his loss honey" Leanne reached out and squeezed her daughter's hand.

For the next two and a half hours, Carmella, Leanne and Carmella's three bridesmaids were pampered and fluffed over. Not one bit of skin left unattended. Carmella even felt beautiful when they were through with her.

"Oh! Andy's going to have a heart attack as you walk up to him!" Sarah teased, gulping

down the rest of her champagne.

“Andy and Melly are all grown up, they are getting married!” One of her other bridesmaids, Kate said with a twinkle in her eye and happy colour in her cheeks.

“Feeling the effects of the champagne there girls?” Carmella quizzed, raising an eyebrow.

“Oh shit. Better stop, don’t want to fall over in those heels!” Kate said, putting her glass down and slopping a little on the hairdresser’s station.

Carmella went off with the girls to get ready and said she would see her mother at the ceremony; Leanne had some last minute things to attend to. The girls helped Carmella into her dress, ensuring not a hair on her head moved out of place and helped her touch up her make up at the last minute. Carmella got into the spirit with the girls; this is what she had been waiting for, a long time. She and Andrew had been dating since high school, over ten years! They hadn’t rushed into the marriage idea; they had travelled first and partied hard, purchased an investment property and now their own home. Next on the list would most likely be a baby and Carmella knew that Andrew would love their future children in the way her own father always should have. Carmella knew she would never get those years back with her father, in fact she didn’t even know if she would even personally like the man. But, she knew she could create the kind of family with Andrew that she had always dreamed of and make sure her children never suffered. That would help her find the ultimate peace with the situation with her father.

“Ready Mrs Bentley to be?” Sarah asked with a big goofy grin from ear to ear.

“Ready as I’ll ever be” Carmella was sure she was wearing the same goofy grin.

At the gardens, all the guests in place, Carmella felt some small nerves creeping in and was taking some deep breaths. The girls started walking out and Carmella knew she was next. Why didn’t I ask my mother to walk me down to Andrew? She scolded herself. She was the one always there for you, dummy. Playing the role of mother and father.

Carmella shook her tension free. Stop worrying, everyone out there loves you and Andrew and won’t think anything strange about you walking on your own. It shows you have a strong character. Well, that’s what Andrew had told her the other night when she was having a mini panic attack about giving herself away. It shows independence, he’d also said.

Carmella took another deep breath and forced her right foot forward. This is the first day of the rest of your life as Mrs. Andrew Bentley, she thought. A big grin breaking out, she almost giggled she felt that giddy.

“Carmella!”

Someone calling out her name urgently stopped her dead in her tracks and she turned.

The man was running towards her, flustered.

Her Daddy.

Her Daddy had come to see his little girl become a married woman.

“Dad?!” Carmella called out, shell shocked.

He was standing in front of her now.

“Oh thank goodness, I thought I was going to be too late” He said, trying to catch his breath.

“How did you...? Never mind, what is it? I am kind of going to be late to my own wedding” Carmella said, stealing a quick peek at her bridal party and the wedding waiting for her. Everyone was in place, some guests were looking around, maybe wondering if she had a done a runner.

“Melly, I’ve come to give you away if you’ll have me” He said, nervously.

Her eyes widened at him in surprise, but she didn’t say anything.

“I know I am about 20 years too late” He countered.

“Got that right!” Carmella snapped.

“But I want to make it up to you. Starting today”

Silence from Carmella. She didn’t know what to make of this, and damn what timing he had! What a moment to discuss his 20 year absence and repeated rejection of her, right when her wedding was waiting on her arrival!

“I realise it will be a slow process Carmella. But let’s just do this now; let me do this for you. And for me, it’s such an important moment I don’t want to miss it. I know I don’t deserve to be a part of your day or your life, but you deserve to have your father give you away” He was pleading with her. Puppy dog eyes and all.

“Well come on then. My fiancé is probably wondering if I am having second thoughts about getting married. It’s not like the wedding can go on without the bride” Carmella said, nonchalantly. But secretly, she was thrilled with his speech.

“Or her father” she added, after he looped his arm through hers.

As they made their way down to Andrew, she noticed a few peoples shocked and surprised faces, and a few murmurs among the crowd. Andrew had a cautious and concerned look but soon broke into a delighted grin when he caught his bride to be’s expression.

Their vows were their own, and deeply moving most guests breaking out the tissues.

When they were pronounced husband and wife, Carmella thought she might burst with

the pride of becoming Andrew's wife.

"Can you believe my Dad came?" She whispered to Andrew as they posed for photos as newlyweds.

"No, but I am glad he did. About time he did something for you" Andrew said, kissing her hand tenderly.

Carmella sighed, contently. She felt this day could not get more perfect. She knew it was going to be a tough and slow process getting to know her Dad and building a relationship with him, trust would have to be built on both sides and twenty years was a lot to catch up and maybe they would never get around to having a close relationship but at least she had the option now, she felt as if the ball was in her court for once and even if it did never amount to anything past today, she could always look back on the one perfect day, when all her family were together and as the day her and Andrew started their own family.

Carmella caught her mother's eye and Leanne winked at her. She knew then, her mother understood her more than she ever thought. And that Leanne knew she needed her father, today of all days and that if today was all she had with her father, then that was okay because, this contented feeling was her closure.

Carmella was no longer a little girl lost, but a grown woman who was loved and exactly where she wanted to be in life.

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