

I DO?

*Be careful what you wish for,
because you might just get it.*

This was it...that rare, sweet, precious moment when a dream no longer teetered between fantasy and manifestation, but slipped quietly into reality or at least some form of tangible matter. My long awaited wish had finally come true. I was euphoric! Life was suddenly beautiful, charming and magical. For I, Melissa Ann Faraday, would from this day forward live happily ever after.

Well, that was what was supposed to happen. And it sorta...kinda did, strangely enough. I got what I wished for; it just didn't turn out exactly the way I thought it would. Let me explain, I'll start from the beginning.

Once upon a time... while playing hide and seek with my brother, I discovered my mother's wedding veil tucked away in a big, old, dusty trunk in the attic. Putting on that veil was like being swept away to the magical land of happily ever after. Where princes and princesses sealed their love with enchanted kisses and whimsical characters like talking spoons, clocks and trees sang and danced in grand ballrooms.

By my eighth birthday, I'd rehearsed my wedding day thousands of times. I had even solicited the services of my cat, Mr. Cooper, and his subsequent replacements Mr. Cooper II and III to serve as stand-ins for my prince, aka the bridegroom.

I was so committed to my dream that my Wedding Day Barbie doll had thirty-six snow-white wedding gowns, twenty-four pairs of satin covered plastic slippers and twelve bouquets to toss at the Barbie wannabes. You know, like Twist 'N Turn Stacey (Barbie's lookalike friend from England) and Barbie's kid sister, Malibu Skipper, with the bust line that expanded when you pumped her left arm.

Barbie (aka me) married Ken (aka my prince) in 3,642 wedding ceremonies. All attended by Raggedy Ann and Andy, three sets of twin Cabbage Patch Kids; Scooter (Skipper's friend), Christie (the Black Barbie), Doctor Barbie, Astronaut Barbie, Supergirl Barbie, Harley-Davidson Barbie, G.I. Joe with the Kung Fu Grip and an

J.D. Clayton

entire troop of tiny green plastic soldiers which my younger brother, Perry, insisted attend if he had to. There was always a battle (courtesy of my brother, of course) between the soldiers and some wicked witch or an evil dragon, but in the end, my handsome prince saved the day. And we all lived happily ever after...well, at least we did in my fairy tale.

I saved every dollar I earned from babysitting for my wedding. After ten years, I bought my dream dress. An adult version of Barbie's wedding gown designed by Vera Wang. The strapless dress had two handmade white silk roses positioned just above my left breast. Below my knees, the dress resembled a fishtail with rows and rows of fine fabric and lace. I looked like a fresh mermaid. The dress, which perfectly highlighted my hourglass figure, had a lace ribbon that wrapped around my body collecting at my waist then gently falling in the front—giving the impression that I was a gift. My stockings and garters were ivory and my slippers were satin with a hint of silver.

I'd been registered at Tiffany's, Barney's New York, Harrods and Target (you know for the kitchen stuff) since I was twelve. My storage unit was packed to overflowing with wedding bliss, the usual stuff: bridesmaid dresses, groom's tuxedo, plastic happy couple to go on top of the cake, dinnerware, silverware, real crystal toasting glasses, etc. You get the picture. I had everything the perfect wedding required. I even had a playlist on my iPod titled "Wedding Songs" with a duplicate copy on my iPhone and a third copy I burnt on CDs and safely stored at Wells Fargo Bank in my safety deposit box.

I was ready. Everything was in place...except for one small, *sorta* important item...my prince. I needed a prince. After a six-month search and kissing way too many frogs, I finally found him, my prince charming.

In my fantasy, he always popped the question. But, does it really matter when you're dealing with love—who asks who first? Well, at least back then it didn't matter. I had found my prince and nothing was going to stop me from having my perfect wedding. I took a deep breath and asked, "Will you marry me?" Though my words tumbled from my lips, I still managed to sound sexy. He didn't respond. So I took another deep breath and gazed at him seductively, lowering my

I Do?

shoulder, allowing my robe to slip slightly exposing my right breast. That got his attention.

“Sure, baby...whatever,” Shawn replied grinning. “So we gonna make this thing here official, huh.” He caressed my breast, thoughtlessly.

“Wait, wait, we have to put on the rings,” I said, annoyed at being manhandled.

“Ring?” said Shawn. His face pinched like he smelled something foul.

Like a game show hostess, I popped open the little black box which proudly housed two sparking diamond rings. I’d read in *Today’s Bride* that it was the latest trend for men to wear engagement rings. “One for you and one for me,” I said.

“Bling! Bling!” shouted Shawn beaming. “Baby, you shouldn’t have.” He wiggled the ring in place on his finger, and then extended his hand, admiring his new jewelry.

“Shawn! You’re supposed to let me put the ring on your finger and you put this ring on my finger.” I pouted. This was not playing out the way it always did in my dream. Shawn wore that puzzled, smelly face again. “This should be our special moment. We are committing ourselves to one another,” I added.

“Sure...baby, whatever,” replied Shawn, still admiring his ring.

Irritated, I slid the ring on my own finger. There must be something about shiny objects for I, too, found myself hypnotized by the power of the sparkle. In my trance-like state, I moved my hand gracefully observing my 18 carat, emerald cut diamond engagement ring from all angles. In unison, as if well rehearsed, Shawn and I both sat in bed with our hands extended tilting our heads from side-to-side amazed as light bounced various beams of colors off our rings.

Suddenly excited, Shawn scooted closer to me. “So, you gonna let me hit that or what?”

“Shawn, now that we’re engaged, the appropriate thing to do is to save ourselves until we’re married.”

Leaning back, his eyes rushed up and down my body as if he didn’t recognize me. He frowned. “What you talkin’ ‘bout girl. We been kickin’ it since we hooked up last month,” he said with a broad grin. It was something he did when he didn’t know what else to say. On a less attractive person this would look silly, even a bit

J.D. Clayton

psychotic, but he was handsome and I was hypnotized by his gorgeous...*everything*.

Shawn suddenly seized both my breasts and held them like he was hanging from street lamp. Prying his fingers back, I said, "We're engaged now. No more of that until after the wedding."

In some last ditch attempt to seduce me, he stuck out his tongue and rotated it as he moved towards my lips. Okay, Shawn was never good at foreplay. He couldn't seduce a nymphomaniac who's been in solitary confinement for the last ten years. Yes, of course, he was handsome with a fantastic body, and the fact that he was a Seahawk football player made him all the more desirable. But he still had no game. Well, that didn't matter...*game* was for a player, *practicality* was for a prince. And Shawn was certainly husband material...well kinda. Once we got married his roving eye and his late night partying would all change. He'd be at home with me...and the kids.

"Damn, girl," said Shawn. He hurried out of bed and rushed toward the door.

"Where are you going baby?" I asked, puzzled.

"Well, just 'cause you ain't in the mood, don't mean I'm not," he responded casually, and then vanished down the narrow hallway to the bathroom.

"Well, this sucks!" I settled back in my cold, empty bed with my arms folded. "I love you Melissa," I said. "That's what you...Shawn Stanton were supposed to say to me. And we were supposed to hug and kiss and stare lovingly into each other's eyes." I grabbed the pillow from behind me, pounded my fists in the middle of it and screamed, "I want my fairy tale ending...my happily ever after!" When I tired myself out, I buried my teary face in what was left of my pillow.

Shawn managed to stay celibate all of one week. It was clear that if I didn't sleep with him, there were plenty of willing female fans that would...and Shawn had a problem with saying no. Something about not wanting to disappoint his fans especially the ladies.

Okay, this was a small setback, I'll admit, but I was a woman on a mission. I was not about to relinquish my dream of wedding ecstasy just because of a few hundred trashy *witches* willing to do anything to have a piece of an NFL tight end. Besides, he was *my* prince.

I Do?

I needed to demonstrate to Shawn what he would be gaining by marrying me. So I did everything for him that a devoted wife would do. I cooked; I cleaned; I babied him. I dressed sexy for him; I fulfilled all of his fantasies regardless of how unusual they were. I mean who fantasizes about making love to a woman in an elf costume, green makeup and pointy ears in all. Shawn's love didn't come cheap. For his birthday, I bought spinning rims for his silver Aston Martin and his purple and gold Porsche. (Spinners? Who the hell needs spinners?) I stuffed my ears with cotton and pretended to like his off-key singing while closing my eyes to his '80s style dancing. Swallowing what was left of my pride, I hung out with his crazy-ass friends from the league.

Two years later, we still weren't married. But I wasn't deterred. My determination only grew stronger. Next step, work on his parents. It's always a bonus to get your man's mama—especially if he's a mama's boy—on your side. Shawn's mother was a fire-breathing dragon in a floral printed dress. Her primary goal in life was to protect her son's millions from gold-digging hussies and that included me. To prove that my only interest in her baby boy was purely love, I sent Mrs. Stanton and her husband on an all-expense paid cruise around the world for their forty-fifth wedding anniversary. The old biddy thought I had spent a fortune and was truly impressed, so I didn't tell her that since I owned a travel agency I had special *free* deals arranged with several cruise lines. Mrs. Stanton was forever grateful and pushed me to the head of the line of suitable brides for her son.

My plan was working *sorta*. I was treated like part of the Stanton clan. I attended all of Shawn's family events: six weddings, five baptisms, four funerals, three graduations, two exorcisms and one road trip to Biloxi, Mississippi for a family reunion, but I still couldn't get my Prince Charming to marry me.

Finally, when it seemed that I was destined to be forever a lady-in-waiting, I had his baby, Shawn Anthony Stanton, Jr. Now don't get me wrong. I may have had Little Shawn for all the wrong reasons, but I love him dearly. In fact, five years later, I still wasn't Mrs. Shawn Stanton, but my little prince was the best thing in my life.

Now the average woman would have calculated her loses, scooped up her pride and moved on with whatever dignity she had

J.D. Clayton

left. But I wanted my prince, Shawn Stanton. If I just hung in there long enough—by this time eight years and counting—he would come to his senses and see me as his princess. My dream would be fulfilled. Wishful thinking you say? Never underestimate a woman determined to get her man to the altar...by any means necessary. How I managed to persuade Shawn to take that final step towards matrimony is a secret that I will take to my grave.

You're cordially invited to the wedding of Melissa Ann Faraday and Shawn Anthony Stanton was how the invitations read. On June 7th at 10 a.m. my fantasy wedding became a reality...*sorta*.

Everyone said that the butterflies in my stomach were typical for a nervous bride, but I knew it was something else. I stared at my reflection in the looking glass. I was a beautiful bride. My mother's veil was perfectly positioned on my head. My hair neatly pulled in a French twist never looked so regal. I had Scarlett, my transgender, half-sister, do my makeup. And a fine job he...uh *she* did, for I looked like Cinderella at the grand ball. My white Barbie Vera Wang—yes, after eight years of waiting for this day I'd earned the right to wear white—wedding gown hung graciously from my now fifteen pounds lighter body. Okay, I looked fabulous, but I still felt off, strange. Something wasn't right.

I ran a quick checklist in my head. Something old, my mother's veil; something new, my pearl earrings; something borrowed, my best friend's rabbit's foot and something blue, a tiny piece of my son's baby blanket, which occasionally doubled as a shield against goblins lurking underneath his bed. Okay, that wasn't it. And the butterflies were growing. It felt like an evil troll was busy biting holes in my abdomen.

Maybe the butterflies in my stomach were about Shawn, I thought. I hadn't seen him since the rehearsal dinner at White Castle (No, not *that* White Castle. This was a real castle perched on top of Queen Anne Hill that was once owned by a real king and queen. Now the castle had become a landmark, tourist site and trendy restaurant). I was a bit concerned about rumors I'd heard regarding Shawn's bachelor party. Shawn, accompanied by my brother and a few of his army buddies—on leave from the military—had apparently been kicked out of four strip clubs, six Denny's Restaurants and banned from the Seattle Center for all eternity for engaging in lewd and deviant acts which resulted in a significant

I Do?

threat to the integrity of the Space Needle. Worried, I had my father search the church to make sure that Shawn had arrived. Dad returned with news that Shawn, wobbly and hungover, was present and accounted for. What a relief, and yet that feeling that something was still off, not right, continued to bug me. I did my best to ignore it. I rotated my head, wiggled my arms and legs and slowly rocked from side-to-side. I looked like a nervous boxer in drag.

I was determined that nothing was going to interfere with my perfectly planned wedding day. Putting on my best face, I stood erect and seized my father's arm as we awaited the musical cue to walk down the aisle. The smell of white, silver and pink flowers caused my stomach to churn even more than the little troll living inside of me.

Unfortunately, the main source of my misery wasn't the flowers. It was that crazy feeling again...that strange feeling in the pit of my stomach that all was not right in fairy tale land. Impossible! This day was far too important for anything to go wrong. This day, decades in the making, carefully planned and paid for—was one of the most expensive weddings in Seattle. Yet, I couldn't deny that something was amiss. And I'm good at denial.

I did another quick mental checklist. I remembered to get dressed, check. I was at the right church, check. My prince, Shawn Stanton, was waiting at the front of the church for me, check. Did I remember to bring Little Shawn? Yes, he was standing next to his daddy—looking so cute in his little tux, check; eight bridesmaids and eight groomsmen, check. The preacher, with Bible in hand, was ready, check. My parents were present, check. My brother and his soldier buddies—slightly intoxicated, but here none the less, check. Shawn's parents were seated up front, check. Shawn's coach and crazy Seahawks teammates were here, check. The church was full of relatives, friends and business associates, check. The photographer was busy snapping memories, check. The church was beautifully decorated, check. A romantic horse drawn carriage covered in white and silver roses was waiting outside, check. Everything was perfect, but me...something was not right. I tried to smile under my veil of happiness, but I only managed to lift the left side of my mouth.

J.D. Clayton

The music started, *Here Comes the Bride*. For a moment, I forgot how to walk. My dad, seeing that something was wrong, seized me with both hands and helped me step slowly to the music I knew all too well. Behind my veil, all those familiar smiling faces staring at me seemed like fairies, elves and goblins. It didn't help matters that the monster inside my stomach continued to grow. I just knew that any minute now a bloody worm-like alien would burst out of my abdomen, completely ruining my white wedding gown before scurrying away in search of a new host. With each step I took, it was like that little creature was jabbing me with a sword while screaming in a high-pitched, scary, evil voice, "Don't do it! Don't do it!" What? Are you crazy? Get out of my belly, you little wedding crasher! I thought. I spent my entire life dreaming about this day and nothing was going to stop it from happening.

I was a blushing bride. I deserved a beautiful wedding. This was my dream day, my time to finally wear in public my Barbie Vera Wang wedding dress that cost me more money than Little Shawn's future college education will. I was walking down the aisle in \$2,000 white satin slippers...like Barbie. This wedding had to happen. I'd arranged for Shawn's favorite band to fly here from LA just to play at our reception. I had this sexy, red, silk lingerie made by Andre' carefully packed away in my luggage for my honeymoon night just waiting for me to slip into and for Shawn to slip me out of. My Great Grandma Davison left the safety of her home in Tampa to attend my wedding. This woman hasn't left her home in nine years.

To hell with the jitters, I'm getting married! I thought. And I...we were going to live happily ever after. I wasn't about to give all of this up just because I was feeling a little nervous and that I really didn't love Shawn.

There it was, out in the open. It had lingered in the back of my mind for months. Okay, the truth was that I had known this for years. I didn't love my prince. No matter how much I wanted it...him. I wasn't in love with Shawn. He wasn't a bad guy, just not the right guy. I had dreamt about this moment my entire life, yet there it was; I was walking down the aisle to be handed-off to the wrong prince. The tears that flowed softly down my painted face were easily mistaken for tears of joy.

With each step I moved closer to a life that I could never truly commit myself to heart and soul. But what could I do about it now?

I Do?

Besides, a happy marriage was overrated. Most married people don't even like each other *that* much. I was lucky, at least I knew going into this arrangement that it wouldn't be a fairy tale. And just like all the other unhappy, loveless marriages, we'd hide our wretchedness in sleazy affairs, expensive cars and a mansion on Mercer Island. What's love got to do with it when I could be driving a Aston Martin and shopping at Nordstrom and not at The Rack?

As we stopped in front of Shawn, my dad released my hand and handed me over to my future husband. My body sank. I was like an old witch, bent, bitter and looking for someone to cast a spell upon.

Shawn was so handsome, fidgeting and sobering up. His million-dollar smile gave me hope. And Little Shawn's tiny face with his father's grand smile beaming up at me, he was being such a good little boy for not hitting the flower girl and calling her a 'butthole' like he had done all through the wedding rehearsal. How could I disappoint my little prince?

The music stopped. The preacher, also smiling, stepped in front of us. He looked at me, then at Shawn. Pastor Townsend pried open his big, old, heavy Bible and began reading. I knew the words; I just didn't feel them. My heart raced as he spoke. Finally he reached the part I'd wanted to hear for so long. "Do you, Melissa Ann Faraday, take Shawn Anthony Stanton to be your husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, from this day forward until death do you part?"

I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. I tried again, still nothing. Confused whispers could be heard scattered among the pews. Pastor Townsend leaned closer to me and repeated the words, louder and slower as if he didn't think that I understood the question. Again, I opened my mouth to nothing. Shawn looked panicky. His eyes darted over to his mother, who'd leaned forward in her seat stretching her heavy body to capacity like a thick rubber band.

"I do," whispered Little Shawn. "You're supposed to say *I do*, mommy."

"She's just nervous," whispered one of the bridesmaids.

After Pastor Townsend finished reading for the third time, the entire congregation leaned forward awaiting my reply. I could see my mother mouthing the words, *I do*.

J.D. Clayton

“I...I...I uh...” It was as if my mouth was full of glue. I choked on the words.

“I do,” again said Little Shawn, this time joined by his father.

“I...I...I do,” I said, breathless.

The crowd cheered. Everyone sat back in relief—a couple of people high-fived as if at some sporting event and I had just made a difficult play.

Pastor Townsend continued, this time facing Shawn. “Do you Shawn Anthony Stanton take...”

“No...I want to take back my *I do*,” I said hurriedly.

“What?” shouted Shawn, Little Shawn, Shawn’s mother and Pastor Townsend.

“I...I want to...take back...my *I do*. I don’t *I do*. I mean I don’t want to do this... I can’t do *I do*. Not with this guy. Wrong prince,” I mumbled, chewing on the fatal words.

“You can’t take back your *I do!*” yelled Shawn’s mother. Her heavy clawed feet stomped towards me. I felt the full heat of her dragon breath upon me. It was so intense that I thought it would melt my veil to my face.

“You said *I do*. I heard it. God heard it. We all heard it and you can’t take it back!” Mrs. Stanton screamed while shooting fiercely spit at me.

“Baby,” said Shawn, grabbing my hand. “You’re just nervous.”

“No, Shawn. I don’t want to get married. Well, I do want to get marry, just not to you. I’m so sorry,” I told him. I couldn’t believe what I’d just said.

“Well you picked a fine time to decide that you don’t want to get married,” said Shawn’s mother angrily. Her head bobbed and her green eyes narrowed in on me. She wagged a long, fiery, red fingernail in my face.

“I know. I’m sorry,” I said, looking humble. I lifted up my veil to show my sincerity.

“Well, sorry ain’t gonna cut it, missy. I came here to see my son get married and my son’s getting married, *today!* To you. Right here, right now! You ain’t gonna disgrace me and my whole family just ‘cause you got cold feet. You’ve already said *I do*. Now Shawn, you say *I do* and we can get on with this here wedding.”

Shawn looked at the pastor and asked, “Can we start again?”

Pastor Townsend started to read, “Do you Shawn Anthony...”

I Do?

I interrupted him. “He can’t say *I do* if I said I don’t.”

The dragon lady stepped in front of me, looked me squarely in the eyes and said in a low, calm, creepy voice, “You’ve already said *I do*. Your turn is over. Now be quiet.” She continued to stare me down, daring me to say another word or do anything else to disrupt her son’s wedding.

I bravely faced the evil one, but grabbed my dad’s hand just in case. “It’s my wedding...*too* and if I don’t want to get married I won’t.”

“Honey, are you okay?” asked my father, patting my hand.

“You’re just nervous dear,” answered my mother. “You’ll be fine. Somebody get her a glass of wine.”

“Yep, a drink’s all you need, baby girl. I was crazy drunk the first time I got married,” shouted Great Grandma Davison. She adjusted for wigs—don’t ask. “But you gotta be careful with yo’ booze. ‘Cause I woke up three days later and come to find out I’d married me ah big, old, green ogre.”

“Shrek,” laughed Little Shawn, slapping his knee. “Great Grandma Davison married Shrek.” Pointing at her, he continued laughing.

By now my head was spinning. I needed to sit down. I started walking towards the wooden pew.

“Where the hell do you think you’re going?” asked Mrs. Stanton. She grabbed my wrist, jerking me to my knees. “You ain’t going no where until you marry my son, you old heifer.”

“Heifer?” I repeated. “I’m not a heifer and I’m not marrying your son.”

The dragon twisted my wrist, and then screamed in my face. “Marry or die...heifer!”

“Hey, you let go of my sister. If she doesn’t wanna marry yo’ old punk ass son, she don’t have to,” shouted my brother, encouraged by his army buddies and the bottle of Jack Daniel’s they’d drank on the way to and during the wedding.

“Punk!” shouted Shawn, “Who you calling a punk?” Before he could finish his sentence, Perry (followed by a small army) was at the front of the church. Several of Shawn’s family members leaped over pews aligning themselves equal to the soldiers. A battle was inevitable.

J.D. Clayton

I don't remember much after this except that my dad grabbed me, my mom and Little Shawn and pulled us to higher ground, the safety of the choir stand. There were words shouted before the onslaught of fists. Decorative flowers flew this way and that way. Someone seized Pastor Townsend's Bible and used it to slap a hysterical bridesmaid who wasn't smart enough to scatter like the rest of her party when the fight begun. The Bible shut her up...shut her up good.

Great Grandma Davison stood in the pew and slowly punched at an invisible opponent. She'd stop occasionally to adjust her curly brown wigs, then air punch some more. She appeared to be the only person enjoying herself. And it was hard to tell which side she was rooting for.

Shawn's dragon mother spit flames on the army men and then screamed like Godzilla as they pinned the feisty monster to the ground. The battle of good versus evil went on for twenty-five minutes until the police and the SWAT team arrived. Using stun guns and rubber bullets, they secured the area.

Medical personnel rushed to the scene and began bandaging various bruises, cuts and bloody noses. Perry had to have six stitches in his upper lip. One of his soldier buddies, who was treated for a concussion, went AWOL. Two of Shawn's relatives lost seven teeth. Mrs. Stanton needed hip replacement surgery. And Shawn broke his hand in two places and would have to sit out an entire season. The newspapers estimated that this brawl would probably cost him several million dollars in lost pay—not including the loss of a couple of major "family friendly" endorsements.

Pastor Townsend told a TV reporter that it was hard to put a price on his beloved church, but he's suing me for over \$10,000 in damages. In addition to his pain and suffering, the pastor banned my family from his church for all eternity, saying that even if we got to heaven—which he thought was highly unlikely—we still wouldn't be allowed in his paradise in the sky.

Great Grandma Davison said it was the best wedding (well, almost wedding) she had ever attended. She took my wedding bouquet, the wedding cake, a pair of turtledoves and the rest of the Jack Daniel's back with her to Tampa.

My grand day, the one I'd planned for all of my life...gone forever. I was so close. I packed my wedding stuff back into my storage unit

I Do?

with the intention to sell it all when I returned from my around the world honeymoon cruise. Yes, I still went on my honeymoon. Hell, after that nightmare wedding that didn't happen, I needed a break. I took Little Shawn with me. At last, I had my prince after all...*well sorta*.

Life can be funny sometimes. You expect it to go one way. You try to carefully control every aspect of your existence and sometimes it works, but most of the time it doesn't. But when you let go and let life be your guide, the most amazing things can happen.

As I stood on the ship's deck vowing never to pour my heart into another wedding, *ever again*, I ripped up my wedding invitation and threw it in the ocean. I would have tossed my ring in the sea but it cost me \$25,500. I may have sworn off weddings, but I was no fool. This ring was going on eBay as soon as we returned to land. From now on, I would devote my life to my son, to my career and to rebuilding my family's relationship with Pastor Townsend just in case he really did have the right ear of God (like he said). Besides my family needed a house of worship to go to in heaven...we're good people...*sorta*.

Little Shawn—after a day of running in circles and telling the ship's captain and most of the crew that they were of bunch of 'buttholes'—was asleep on the blue cot behind me. The night air was perfect; the stars were out and the ship rocked softly. I was starting my life again...no more fairy tales.

"Hello," said a voice behind me.

I turned to face the most beautiful pair of brown eyes I had ever seen. His face was firm, yet pleasant. He was tall, athletic and WOW! My heart danced with delight. "Hello," I replied, with a thick tongue. Placing my hand under my chin, I pushed up, closing my mouth.

"Beautiful night," he said.

His voice moved inside of me. Instinctively, I stuck out my chest. "Yes, it is," I said, trying not to be taken in by his incredible beauty.

"You mind if I join you?"

Though the sea was behind me, I glanced over my shoulder to make sure that he was talking to me. "No, not at all," I said excitedly. I didn't want to sound too eager, but screw it...this was the handsomest man I'd ever seen. He was like something created in Hollywood or heaven...*or both*.

J.D. Clayton

He extended his hand and said, "I'm Prince Alexander."

"Prince? A real prince?" I said laughing, but really sounded more like a seagull in heat. "Get out of here."

"What's so funny?" he asked, somewhat amused. "And yes, I'm a real prince. My family once ruled a small set of islands near Washington State. As a matter of fact, we...my family used to own a castle in Seattle. It's a big white castle..."

"I know the one," I replied still laughing. "You're really a prince? No joking?"

"I promise you I am a *real* prince. But you can call me Alex."

"Pleased to meet you Alex." When he touched me, my body tingled like someone had tapped me with a magic wand. I heard that strange little voice again, you know, the alien inside my stomach, the one that wrecked my perfect wedding, but this time it was accompanied by beautiful singing in the background. I heard it say, 'He's a prince. Your prince.'

I didn't know if that were true, but sure didn't want to let go of his hand. It was so warm, strong and WOW! "Uh...my name is Melissa Faraday. And that little sleeping prince is my son, Shawn," I said.

"Would you and your son like to join me at my table for dinner...of course we could wait until your little prince wakes up?"

"Well, if he's not up in two minutes, I'll wake him up," I said, but quickly added. "I...wouldn't want him to be up all night."

"No problem, it's my ship. We can have dinner whenever we want to. Let the little one sleep."

"Your ship?" I asked. I was getting excited. I wanted to do that silly dance that the football players did when they scored a touchdown.

"Yes, I own four...and a couple of islands."

I stared at him blankly like the village idiot.

He smiled and said, "My family doesn't govern the islands per se, but we still own them."

"Islands, ships, a handsome prince, my greatest pleasure, oh WOW!" I mumbled to myself. "Jackpot!" Leaning against the railing, we quietly enjoyed the night skies, the gradual swaying of the ship and the sound of Little Shawn snoring like *The Three Stooges*.

My Prince Charming, maybe? But who cares, this man was fine! Besides, I haven't completely given up on finding my prince. But

I Do?

this time around, first comes love, then the wedding. Who knows, maybe happily ever after doesn't just happen in fairy tales.

The End

Think About This...

Deep:

- Should Melissa marry Shawn?
- Do some people (mostly women) place too much importance on their wedding day and less importance on selecting the right spouse?

Deeper:

- Does Prince Charming exist today? (If so, name one)

Truly Deep (To Thine Own Self Be True):

- Is it a good idea for women to believe in Prince Charming? And happily ever after?

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