

4th EDITION 2010



Romance Divas

E-BOOK CHALLENGE

As Time Goes By

copyright 2010 by Adelle Laudan

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Alexa skimmed the menu. The far too loud music piped into the restaurant changed tempo. Her breath hitched upon recognizing the song that meant so much to her...to them.

Why is this song playing here? Its worlds apart from the new age stuff they usually play. Suspicious, she peeked over her menu to find her daughter rifling through her purse, seemingly oblivious to the song or its significance to her.

“Did I ever tell you this is mine and your father’s special song?”

“You and Dad have a song?”

Alexa chuckled at the surprise she saw in Janet’s face.

“I think it came out in 1973. Jim Croce sang it and Time in a Bottle quickly rose to number one on the charts.” Alexa toyed with the corners of a cloth napkin. “I worked at a dry cleaner when I first met your father. Even back then he wasn’t one for Valentine’s Day.”

“I don’t remember you and Dad ever celebrating Valentine’s Day.”

“This was the first and last time. Anyhow, I liked to listen to the radio during the afternoons in the store. Honestly, I didn’t think he paid attention to things like that.”

If I could save time in a bottle...

Alexa blinked back the tears, very surprised at how emotional the song made her.

“You’re not going to cry, are you?” Janet leaned across the table to look directly into her mother’s eyes

“Do you want to hear this or not.” Alexa drove her back with a wave of her napkin. She could count on one hand the number of times she’d seen her cry. “It was during a slow period at work when this song came on. I think I might have hummed along. Once the song ended the DJ came on and said, ‘That one was for Alexa from Jayce. Happy Valentine’s Day’.

“Awww, that’s so romantic.” Janet flicked her long blonde hair back over her shoulder and laid a hand over her heart. Her soft blue eyes filled with moisture.

Alexa sniffled and tossed the napkin on her plate. She sighed.

“When will Dad be back from his trip to France?”

A pang of missing him hurt her heart and she shrugged. After thirty-five years together she should be used to it. He travelled abroad at least three times a year on business.

“Probably another week or so, remember it’s his last trip before he retires. He has to make sure everything is tied up and in order.”

“Oh my God, Mom, I can’t believe Dad is retiring.” Janet slathered a thick slice of bread with whipped butter.

“No one is more surprised than me.”

They fell into a comfortable silence. As always, the food was superb. She’d ordered linguine chicken tetrazzini. That and the complimentary garlic bread and Caesar salad had her pants feeling a bit snug.

Despite the fact they were both stuffed, they ordered the decadent Chocolate Eruption. One serving to share was more than enough of the sinfully delicious dessert. Alexa had the remains of her tetrazzini put in a container to take home, more than enough for dinner the next day.

They left the restaurant just as the sun began its’ descent, casting a warm glow on the snow covered lot across the street. The air was fresh and cool. Alexa turned up the collar of her coat.

“I think I’m going to walk home. It’s a beautiful night and I’d like to burn off some of these calories.”

“Are you sure?”

Alexa nod and stepped into her daughter's warm embrace. She closed her eyes and breathed in the scent of soap and floral shampoo she washed her hair with, filing her essence to her memory.

Alexa walked at a leisurely pace down the street toward home. *Why is this Valentine's Day any different than the rest?* She loved that her and Jayce didn't conform to the norm and opted to celebrate their love on any given day through the seasons. Quite often this day passed without either of them even remembering the day.

A snowman up ahead brought a smile to her lips. Whoever built it had gone to a lot of trouble, and added a bright red scarf and matching toque. It wasn't until she stood directly in front of it that she saw. She turned in a complete circle and didn't see one person out. Her gaze settled on the heart pattern etched in the snow where the snowman's heart would be.

It had been a day not unlike this one and she sat home nursing the flu when the phone rang. Jayce didn't say hello, he simply told her to look out the kitchen window.

She parted the curtain and stepped back. On the other side of the glass a snowman stared back at her and a heart had been etched in the snow, just like this one.

Her brow furrowed and she turned from the memory and the snowman, quickening her pace home. Funny, she woke up that morning feeling a little nostalgic, a little melancholy, and it had nothing to do with what day it was.

She'd been so shocked when Jayce announced his retirement.

"But why? You've always loved your work."

He gathered her in his arms and pressed his cheek to hers. "I don't want to spend another day apart from you."

First the song, and now the snowman...coincidence?

She half expected Jayce to pop out from behind a tree. On a couple of instances she caught herself looking back over her shoulder.

Alexa took the stack of mail from the mailbox and went inside. She tossed the mail down on the side table and shed her winter attire. Her pulse quickened as she pulled a travel brochure from amongst the white envelopes.

The Virgin Islands. What the hell is going on?

They spent their honeymoon in the Virgin Islands. Even more convinced Jayce was behind it all, she narrowed her gaze and scanned the living room, a few steps forward and she peeked around the corner into an empty kitchen and set the take-out container on the counter.

You're the one I want to go through time with. She hummed.

Alexa laughed at herself as she walked down the hall to their bedroom. She quickly changed into yoga pants and tshirt before going downstairs to their gym as she always did every evening after supper. Being so full left her a little lazy so she just did a few stretches and spent twenty minutes on the treadmill. She glanced in the mirror before turning off the light, she was proud of her firm body. At fifty seven years of age, she looked pretty good. She wasn't crazy about the silver highlights in her otherwise blonde hair, but that's life.

At the top of the stairs she followed a trail of rose petals to the bathroom where she found the tub filled with warm water and bubbles. Her pulse quickened.

"Jayce? Jayce, are you out there?"

Silence.

Slowly she undressed and stepped into the tub, not wanting to spoil her husband's surprise he'd obviously gone to a lot of trouble orchestrating.

She lay in the tub until the water turned cold. Growing more and more anxious, she called out his name. Something touched her thigh and she reached down to find a stunning red glass bottle with a heart shaped topper. She held it up to the light to see a scrolled paper of some kind.

Her heart swelled with love for this man who went to such great lengths feel special and loved. She slipped out of the tub and into her floor length plush robe. With bottle in hand, she padded to the kitchen to pour herself a glass of wine.

She opened the fridge door to find yet another surprise. A bottle of Yattarna Chardonnay, a wine they only ordered on special occasions. Jayce had been adamant they needed a wine to be their special wine. He'd searched wine stores and online until he found the perfect fit. Yattarna Chardonnay 1996. Yattarna meant 'little by little'. It reflected patience and commitment in creating this icon wine.

He poured her first glass and passed it to her across the dinner table. "Subtle and seductively elegant, the wine and you, my love."

Alexa shook her head and pulled her thoughts back to the present. She closed the fridge door and poured herself a glass of wine before picking up the special red bottle and head to the living room.

She turned on the fire place and clicked the remote for the stereo. It shouldn't have surprised her to hear 'their song', but it did. Her hand flitted to her chest and she smiled. Still, he kept his presence hidden from her.

Alexa eased back in the corner of the couch and drew her feet up under the warmth of her housecoat. She took a sip of wine and proceeded to open the small red vessel.

Time in a bottle...

Her hands trembled in anticipation as she took out the stopper and turned the bottle upside down. The small scrolled paper slid out landed on her lap.

What have you done now?

She carefully unrolled the paper and let out a long breath before reading the note.

'The one thing I know, more and more with each year that passes. You are and will always be, my one true love'.

Alexa wiped the single tear from her cheek and took a Kleenex from the end table.

“Jayce, please hunny, you can come out now.”

Yet again, silence. *What more can he possibly be up to?*

Time passed and the warmth of the wine made her sleepy. He’d have to show himself eventually. She chuckled lightly as she turned off the fire and stereo. Alexa made her way to their bedroom. She didn’t slip into a nightgown tonight; she slipped between the sheets naked. The cool fabric against her warm skin brought her body to life, coupled with the anticipation of having her husband home her body cried out for him.

She watched the clock, 11:30 soon turned to midnight and she closed her eyes. She felt the weight of him settle into bed behind her, but feigned sleep. Her heartbeat raced as the scent of his cologne drew near. He pressed his body, his naked body against her back and she felt the warmth of his breath on her neck.

“From this day forward, I promise you will never spend another night alone. I love you now, I love you tomorrow, I love you always.”

He kissed her neck sending a shiver up her spine as it had thirty five years ago when they shared their first kiss, and as it did every time since.

“Grow old with me, my love...the best is yet to be.”