

Arrow's Grief

FPD Case File: Fletcher Ross

Loren Weaver

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"My grief lies all within,
And these external manners of lament
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortured soul."
By William Shakespeare

Chapter 1

The Date

She looked gorgeous. Absolutely stunning. I'd asked her to dress nicely for our date tonight, but this exceeded any of my wildest fantasies. Her black dress was cut in a flattering formfitting style. The hem of the dress didn't quite reach her knees, the jagged edges playing hide-and-reveal with her thighs. Spaghetti straps showed off her nicely tanned shoulders to perfection and the sweetheart neckline of the dress framed a beautiful ruby necklace.

I knew her father had given her the necklace on her twenty-first birthday. Just as I knew her younger sister had picked out the strappy black three-inch heels she wore with pride. Her ruby earrings matched her necklace and were a gift from her mother. Sofia's family was important to her, and she was very close to all of them.

She'd grown up in a small town complete with Sunday BBQ dinners and Fridays in the local Wal*Mart parking lot, just because there wasn't anywhere else to go. She'd attended the same high school as her parents before her, and her sister after her. The only reason she'd left was a college education.

My gaze roamed over her body, but finally came to rest on her face. Long auburn locks framed her lovely tan skin. Her hair wasn't straight, but it wasn't really curly either. Rather, the auburn mess was that almost perfectly in between stage. Tonight, she'd pulled it up in a carefully styled artwork of falling pieces just barely held in place with unseen pins. Hazel eyes framed by almost

invisible auburn eyelashes showed her joy at seeing me. I knew, whole-heartedly and completely, that I could never live without her.

"Fletcher!" she called as she saw me at the bottom of the stairs in her apartment building. I was standing in the entry, waiting for her.

"Sophia," I replied, moving to embrace her. She molded willingly into my tight embrace. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes, will you tell me where we're going now?" she asked with mock sternness. Sophia loved surprises, and she loved romantic gestures. I would never have considered myself a romantic. I was logical, controlled, and reserved. But for Sophia, I'd found in myself many things I never realized were there.

"Of course not," I answered, smiling at her. "It's a surprise. Let's go." She gave me a pout, completely ruined but the happiness dancing in her eyes. I took her hand and led her towards the door.

I opened the passenger side door and held it as she climbed inside. When she'd sat down and pulled the edge of her dress into my steel colored BMW, I closed her door and went around to my side of the car. I started the engine, and we were off.

On the way to my very special surprise, Sophia told me all her news. We'd talked only last night in person, and this afternoon on the phone, but Sophia could always find more to talk about. Sophia was the manager for a children's clothing store in the mall. She loved her job and the children she interacted with on a daily basis.

I responded to her questions and stories, and even telling her about my own day. Mostly, I did desk work at the CIA's head office in Langley. I aspired to something more, but everyone must pay their dues at first. For now, my days were filled with paper shuffling.

The restaurant I'd chosen for this most special of nights was Italian, her favorite. Inside, the decor boasted everything stereotypical of this kind of date. Small, round tables with white table clothes and elegantly rolled up napkins, too much silverware, crystal glasses. A white rose in a bud vase sat at the back edge of the table, out of the way but still beautiful.

A maitre d' in a black suit and white shirt took my name and found the reservation I'd made over a month earlier. This restaurant wasn't the kind easily accessible to the average walk-in.

When we went through the doors and into the main dining room, I saw that my own tailored suit was among the lower-end compared to some of the others in the room. I saw tuxes worth thousands of dollars as well as several of the typical expensive 'little black dresses' with more diamonds than I could count.

The maitre d' pulled out Sophia's chair and seated her gracefully. She loved the attention, thanking him and beaming at me. Our waiter wasn't far behind, filling the crystal water glasses and handing us menus, hers first of course. He asked if we wanted anything else to drink, but we both declined.

Dinner went spectacularly and as we walked out of the restaurant hand-in-hand, Sophia leaned up and gave me a soft kiss on my cheek. She was still smiling happily.

"Oh, Fletcher, that was amazing," she whispered. I took my hand from hers and wrapped my arm around her waist, pulling her close. She smelled like roses.

"It's not over yet," I whispered back as we walked down the front steps of the restaurant. Instead of leading her back to the car, I started down the street at a slow casual pace. I knew to shorten my stride due to her shorter frame and higher heels. The short stride was becoming almost as natural for me as my original longer one.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"You'll see," I answered. I know my smile must have been a little silly, but I couldn't help it. She just affected me that way. We walked in silence for a few minutes, but it wasn't uncomfortable silence. Both of us were happy just to be together, doing something.

I turned her into a small garden just a few blocks away from the restaurant. The garden was a little known attraction in the big city, but I'd done my research. When we first stepped inside, the many tiny white lights illuminated a scene out of a chick-flick. A large willow tree grew in the middle of the garden. Roses, lilies, and many other flowers I had no name for grew in patches around the tree. I can't exactly say what the pattern was, but there was something to the arrangement that was just stunning.

Sophia's soft gasp was all the confirmation I needed. This was the perfect place.

Chapter 2

The Proposal

I followed Sophia around the garden, just admiring. She led me, flitting from patch to patch, oohing and ahing over all the flowers. Sophia loved flowers. Her father was a florist in her home town and she'd wanted to follow him into the family business after she had some outside experience. Now, her delighted laughter was music to my ears, and I was lost in the moment.

When we'd made the circuit of the garden, I took her hand and led her gently to the base of the willow tree. The branches had been cut to form a sort of door that led under the tree's draping leaves. Once underneath, the world outside seemed to disappear. Sophia walked to the trunk of the tree, touching its bark gently. I heard her soft sigh.

"Fletcher, it's beautiful," she whispered, turning to face me.

What she saw, stopped her mid thought. I was kneeling, framed by the soft light coming in the makeshift door. In my hands, I held a small black box. While she gaped at me in wonder, I reached out for her hand. She stepped forward as I tugged gently on her hand, bringing her closer to me.

"Sophia Hartman, will you marry me?" I asked, looking up into her shining hazel eyes.

The silence stretched, but I wasn't worried. The shock showed in her face. But there was no tension in her, just the shocked amazement. Her beautiful eyes filled with tears.

"Yes," she finally whispered hoarsely. Then, more strongly.
"Yes, I will marry you, Fletcher Ross."

I pulled the ring out of the black box, setting the box on the ground in front of me. The ring was gold and set with three diamonds. The largest was in the middle with the two smaller but no less stunning jewels on either side. I slid the ring onto her left ring finger, watching her face the entire time.

She was watching my hands slid the ring onto her finger. When it was in place, she pulled her hand up closer to her face, examining the ring. She wiggled her fingers in that way a woman will do when she's showing off a sparkly ring. Her whole face lit up.

Something deep in my gut clenched at the sight of her lovely face and that ring on her finger. Some primitive part of my brain screamed *Mine! Mine forever!*

I stood up, pulling her into my arms, and kissed her.

Three Weeks Later

Chapter 3 ~ The Attack

“Sophia!” I called. The adorable woman had decided hide-and-seek wasn’t just a child’s game. I could hear her laughter echo from the woods ahead of me, so I followed the sound. I knew she wasn’t that far ahead of me.

Her sudden scream ripped the night’s air in two. I started to run, calling in fear now.

About The Author

Loren Weaver is an engineer for an oil company as her day job. Although she currently lives in Wyoming, she's a Georgia girl at heart. She loves crazy sports and has her black belt in Tae Kwon Do, master SCUBA diver certificate, and motorcycle license. Although engineering pays the rent, she writes because she loves to hear and to tell a good story.

You can find out more about Loren and her writing at www.lorenweaver.com.