

Holidays...time for family and friends and...if you're me, being watched 24/7.

With everyone concerned about my well being, in the days leading up to Thanksgiving, I was receiving more and more pressure to have an extended stay at my mom's. Even Tommy was trying to push me. He called me a couple of days before Thanksgiving.

"I can't believe you're not coming to California for the holidays." I said.

"Kim and I want a nice quiet Thanksgiving alone and then we're going to Chicago for Christmas to see my parents."

"I know the Olivers are your parents, but so is Mom...our mom."

"Mich, you know you're my sister and I've forgiven Lea for giving me up, but the fact remains that the Olivers are my parents. Living in California I got all caught up in the drama of your family and I've neglected them, but moving away from the constant chaos made me realize I need to spend more time with them."

"What?! Tommy, they are 'our' family."

"I know, I didn't mean it like that. Of course you all are my family, but I want to spend Christmas with my parents."

I sighed, "I guess I get it. It can't be easy having two families."

"I do think you should spend some extra time with Lea this year though."

"What do you mean?"

"You could use the time away from LA and now that she's living in Stone Canyon its close enough you can spend time in Angel Grove and get yourself grounded again."

"Excuse me; I'm perfectly grounded thank you."

"No, you're not. You're damn near out of control."

"Why does everyone think that? You're not the first person to tell me I need to spend more time with Mom."

"Maybe there's something to it then."

I sighed again, "I wish everyone would leave me alone. I'm fine."

"No, you're not."

"The only problem I have right now is that Jon can't spend the holidays with me because of his stupid wife...well that and everyone needs to leave me alone. Aside from that, I'm fine!"

"Do you even hear yourself?! Michelle, you're dating a MARRIED MAN!"

"Oh lay off. I am tired of listening to everyone telling me how bad Jonny is."

"I give up. Do what you want, as long as your power is in check I don't care."

"Well then you'll be glad to know my powers are just fine so you can leave me alone."

"Fine."

"Fine. Have fun in Chicago with your real family."

"Fine, I will!"

"Fine!" I said as I hung up.

After arguing with pretty much everyone about my well being (including Jonny), I finally gave in and decided I would stay with my mom until January, when we had the two week reunion tour. After that it was back to LA for me.

Thanksgiving was interesting, to say the least. Zack and Kelly came over with the kids and they were the center of attention. I was pretty much in the background. It was pretty average I guess.

I do have to say, it was weird being at Mom's because it wasn't the same house I'd grown up in. I was glad her job had transferred her to Stone Canyon because I'd never been a fan of San Francisco, but it was still weird. The guest room that I was staying really did look like a guest room. I convinced Mom to let me put some purple sheets on the bed and add a few of my own personal touches since I'd be staying in it for awhile.

A couple of days after Thanksgiving I was in 'my room', reading a book when there was a knock on the door.

"Come in." I said.

Mom opened the door and walked in, "Hey sweetie, how are you doing?"

"Fine." I said as I put my book to the side.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Everyone keeps acting so worried about me, but I’m fine.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t come up here to upset you.”

I sighed, “I know Mom. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you.”

“Michelle, I know you feel like everyone is ganging up on you, but it’s only because you have so many people that care.”

“I’m just tired of people saying I’m out of control...even Jonny of all people thinks I need someone to ‘save’ me.”

Mom made a face, “As much as I hate to agree with Jon on anything, maybe he’s right for once.”

“Mom, don’t start. I know you hate Jon and it bothers you that I’m seeing him again.”

“Well, he is married.”

“Yeah, and he still loves me.”

“Sweetheart, he beat you up horribly. How can you expect me to support you going back to him?”

“He’ll never hit me again.”

“What’s changed?”

“I’m more powerf...stronger now than I was then.”

“I hope you’re right. Any chance of you and Hunter reconciling?”

I laughed, “You really liked Hunter didn’t you?”

“I did. He’s a good man and he was good for you.”

“How so?”

“He brought stability to your life and you just seemed happier and more grounded.”

“I was a different person then. To answer your question, no. Hunter tried to reconcile and I told him no. It’s over between us. I’m with Jon and you need to accept that...well Jon and Rocky.”

“Rocky I don’t mind. Rocky has always treated you like a princess. I don’t think he’s right for you, but at least he treats you well.”

“I thought you liked Rocky and I together.” I said.

“I do...more than Jon anyway. Not that that would take much. But you’re an intense person and you need someone who can stand toe to toe with you without being abusive in the process. Hunter is the only man I’ve seen you with that can do that...and maybe RJ to an extent. Rocky can’t stand up to you. You dominate him and he’s not your equal...but he does treat you like a princess.”

I raised an eyebrow. My mom was clearly more observant and insightful than I’d previously given her credit for.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing. You do need to accept Jon though. After all the years he’s been in my life you should have realized he’s not going anywhere.”

“You divorced him.”

“My mistake.”

Mom’s eyes widened, “You consider the divorce a mistake?”

“Yeah, a big one. I never should have divorced him.”

“Then you never would have been with Hunter.”

“I threw away what Jon and I had for something that clearly didn’t last. Jon and I go through rough patches, it’s true, but in the end we always find our way back to each other.”

“That doesn’t make it right, that makes it an addiction. Jon was bad for you when you were 12 and he’s bad for you now.”

“He’s coming over later. I expect you to be nice.”

“What?”

“You heard me. You said we had an extra ticket to the LA Kings game and that I could invite a friend so I invited Jon.”

“What? I meant Rocky or Mina, not Jon!”

“You didn’t specify. He’s going.”

Mom sighed, “Baby girl, he’s not good for you.”

“Be nice to him Mom.”

“I will, but you know how I feel about him.”

“I am well aware.”

Later that night we arrived at a fast food restaurant in LA to have dinner before the game. Jon met us there and we all went to the game together.

“Hi Ms. Cagle.” Jon said after he greeted me, “Hi Mr. Cagle.”

“Hello Jon.” Mom said politely.

Dean waved.

“You know press may get pictures of us at the game. Have you thought about what to tell Dot?” I asked.

“Yeah, I actually told her about the game. I told her you and Rich were going and Rich invited me.” Jon said.

“But Rich won’t be there.”

“Yeah, so any pictures she sees I’ll just tell her that Rich was at the concession stand or something.”

“Such an honest man.” Mom mumbled.

“Mom, don’t start.” I sighed.

“Ms. Cagle, I know you don’t like me but know that I love your daughter very much and always have.” Jon said.

“That’s why you be...” Mom started.

“Mom...” I warned.

“It’s ok Michi, I deserve this. You’re right ma’am, I have not always treated Michelle with the respect she deserves and I deeply regret that. I know that ultimately that it was my actions that led to the end of our marriage and I really am sorry for that. I would give anything to take it back, but I can’t. All I can do is treat her well now.” Jon replied.

“And you think having her as your mistress is the way to do that?” Mom asked.

“It is an arrangement we have agreed to and are both ok with. It concerns only us.”

“And your wife and children.”

“Please do not drag them into this.”

“Enough, really...can we just get to the game and enjoy some nice hockey fun?” I asked.

“Sure.” Mom mumbled.

We got to the game and found our seats. It was a total blast. Hockey was one of my very favorite sports to watch live. It was SO much fun and fast paced. It was also fun being there with Jonny. I saw the flashbulbs go off from time to time so I knew someone had spotted us and was taking pictures so I was careful not to cuddle or hold his hand...not much anyway.

After the game (which we lost, by the way), we headed back to Stone Canyon, Jon included. He said he wasn’t ready to say goodnight to me and he’d tell Dot he was crashing at Rich’s. Mom wasn’t thrilled but she decided to bite her tongue on this one.

We got back to the house and Jon and I went directly up to my room.

“I am glad you came back with me. I’ve missed you.” I said.

“Then why are you hiding out in Stone Canyon? Come back to LA.” Jon said as he watched me change into my pajamas.

“I thought you wanted me to come here and chill out like everyone else.”

“No, I said you needed to get some help...I don’t like the idea of you spending so much time with your mother though. She’ll turn you against me again.”

I laughed, “Baby, when has my mother ever had an impact on how I feel about you?”

“I guess...I just feel like we’re those kids again, fighting to be together.”

“Because we are...we’re not kids but we’re doing the same thing as we did back then.”

“Can’t you just go to rehab like a normal celebrity?”

I started laughing so hard I could barely speak, “Are you kidding me? Rehab for what exactly?”

“I don’t know. Since when do celebrities need a valid reason?”

“Hmm, good point...but no...mostly because I’m still not convinced I need help anyway.”

“So then why are you here?”

“To spend time with my parents and to appease everyone else. Besides, it’s nice to have a break from LA. It does get intense and after the year I’ve had with the marriage and miscarriage and annulment and...everything...it’s nice to step back and breathe.”

“I guess I can see that.”

“Can we get some sleep now? I’m exhausted.”

“Sleep? I had something else in mind.” Jon said with a smirk.

“What? Jonny! We’re in my mom’s house!”

“Never stopped you before.”

"I was a teenager with no respect."  
"Oh come on...it'll be like when we were younger."  
I laughed, "You weren't all that young."  
"I said younger, smartass."  
I smiled, "Ok, fine, for old time's sake."  
"Come here." He said as he pulled me into his arms and kissed me.

The next day Jon had to head back to LA, much to the joy of Mom. Dean was out for the day so Mom and I were at home decorating for Christmas.

"This is so my favorite time of year." I said with a smile as I taped some garland to the mantle.

"It always has been, since you were a little girl." Mom said.

I paused and looked at Mom, "Momma, I don't think I tell you this enough, but I love you."

Mom looked at me, "I love you too baby girl...are you ok?"

"I'm not sure."

Mom walked over to the sofa and sat down, "Come here."

I went and sat next to her and put her arm around me and I put my head on her shoulder.

"I'm worried about you Mich." She said as she brushed my hair with her hand.

"It's just been a really hard year."

"I know. Between RJ and Aubrey and everything..."

"Yeah...I was almost a mom myself. It made me realize how horrible I've been to you."

"Sweetie, you are a mom."

"What?" I asked, worried for a second she somehow knew about Savannah.

"Baby, you will always be Aubrey's mom. You felt that love and had a bond...it doesn't matter that you never got to hold her or raise her. You will always be her mother."

I started to cry, "I loved her so much."

"I know sweetie...and that's a pain that no woman should ever have to feel. I'm so sorry that it happened to you."

"I've been trying so hard to cover it up and move on but I still miss her everyday."

"I know...I know. That's why you can't be with Hunter isn't it? You blame him?"

I nodded, "I do. If he wouldn't have started that fight with me Aubrey might be alive."

"You have a lot of built up pain and anger. I think that's what's causing your behavior that everyone is so concerned about."

"I just want the pain to stop Mom."

"I know, but being self destructive isn't the way." Mom said as there was a knock on the door. "Hold that thought." She said as she went to the door and opened it. A few seconds later she came back into the room with Zack. He looked sad.

"What's wrong?" I asked him as I wiped my eyes.

"Just found out my show got cancelled." He said.

"Oh god, I'm so sorry." I said.

"Are you ok?" Mom asked.

"Yeah, I just needed my family. Kelly is in New York this week filming some on location scenes for her show and the kids are spending time with her parents. I didn't want to be alone right now." Zack said.

"Then you can stay here with Mich and I. It'll be fun to have my kids with me again for a bit."

"Mich, are you ok?" Zack asked as he sat next to me.

"Not really. Was just thinking about Aubrey." I said.

"I was explaining to Michelle how she will always be Aubrey's mother and that will never change." Mom said.

"Of course you will. Aubrey was your daughter. She's always a part of you." Zack said as he hugged me.

"Maybe she's better off. I would have been a horrible mother anyway." I said as I started to cry again.

"That's not true." Zack said.

"Actually sweetie, I think you would have made a wonderful mother to Aubrey." Mom said.

"This would have been her first holiday." I said.

"Oh Mich, I know you miss Aubrey and you always will, but I promise you, it will get easier."

"You're really lucky to have two healthy kids Zack."

Zack nodded, "I know Mich...and I'm grateful everyday."

I took a deep breath, "Ugh, enough crying. Let's get back to decorating."

"Are you sure? We can finish later. Let's all go out and get some coffee or something then we'll come back and finish

decorating.” Mom said.  
“Sounds great.” Zack said.  
“OK.” I agreed.

Sitting at the coffee shop with my mom and Zack made me feel like a kid again... I know, considering I’m almost 30 that’s a little weird. It was nice though. When I looked at Zack I still saw my big brother that always protected me. I hated that he had another show cancelled. He’d been working steady since the end of our show, but not on any real long term projects. He needed another hit. Then again my career had it low points too. I was famous, to be sure, but not at the level I once was. Neither of us were. A new generation of teen idols had replaced us... actually a couple of generations since we were at the top. It wasn’t the early 90s anymore. Wow... was I actually dated and past my prime? In this business, yeah. God... \*I\* needed another hit. I hadn’t had a really big hit since 2003... eh, 2004. “This Woman” had some hit singles but “Family” really hadn’t... neither had “Whatever We Wanna”, although that was just a European release. “This Woman” was my comeback... it was more mature... it... it was mostly inspired by Hunter. Did that have something to do with it’s success? Was it because of the place I was writing from? Had my writing become stale after Hunter left me? Surely not... I’d written hit songs before Hunter.

I was feeling trapped in my own head and it sucked.

“Earth to Michelle, come in Michelle.” Zack said as he waved his hand in front of my face.

“What? Oh... sorry, I think I spaced.” I said.

“Are you ok?”

“Yeah, fine. Just thinking.”

“Ah, dangerous stuff.”

I laughed and hit him in the arm.

“It’s nice to have you both home.” Mom said.

“It’s actually really nice to be home.” I replied.

“Even if it is Stone Canyon.” Zack added.

“Yeah, not my favorite place, but it’ll do.”

Mom laughed, “Not like I had a choice. I go where the work takes me.”

“You don’t have to work at all. Zack and I could provide you more than enough for you and Dean to take care of yourselves.”

“I know sweetie, but I’m not taking yours and Zack’s money. You know that.”

“Yeah, yeah. I know.”

That night I was in my room alone and I was getting lost in my own thoughts again. It was like my head was just a mass of jumbled thoughts and emotions I couldn’t make sense of. I didn’t like it at all. I got up and went to the other guest room, where Zack was staying, and knocked.

“Come in.” he said.

I went in. Zack was in bed playing his PSP.

“Hey Mich.” He said.

“Hey... I didn’t mean to bother you, I just...” I started.

“No bother. Come on in and have a seat.” He said.

I nodded and closed the door behind me and got in bed next to him to see what game he was playing. “What is it?” I asked.

“GTA: Chinatown Wars.” He replied.

I nodded, “Nice.”

He paused it and looked at me, “Are you ok?”

“Not really. I feel trapped in my own head.”

“It’s called thinking and that’s good. If you keep covering up your emotions with alcohol you’ll never sort through it.”

“Maybe I don’t want to sort through it.”

“Probably not, but you need to.”

“I was happier just hanging out on Sunset.”

Zack sighed and turned the game off and put it on the nightstand, “That’s how you get yourself in trouble.”

“I had it under control.”

“No sweetie, you didn’t. In fact, I think you’re damn near out of control...the fact even Jon is worried about you worries me even more.”

I started crying, “I’m in control as much as I will ever be again.”

“That isn’t true and you know it.” Zack said as he put his arm around me.

“It is true.”

“Michelle Pauline Morris, you’re one of the strongest women I know...and I’m not just talking about your powers, but your inner strength. You’ll figure this out and rise above it. You always do.”

“This time I’m not sure I can.” I said as I curled up with a pillow and started to cry harder.

Zack lied down next to me, “I know you can.”

“This is like when I was little and I would have a bad dream.” I said as I curled up in his arms.

“I protected you then and I’ll protect you now.” Zack said as he held on to me.

“Except this time my whole life is a bad dream.”

“Shh, it’ll be ok.” He said as he brushed my hair with his hand.

“I love you Zack.”

“I love you too Mich.”

I closed my eyes and ended up falling asleep.