

Naming Day

By Cindy Rae



Dedicated to the wonderfully talented Joseph Campanella.

Catherine: Peter, did you ever tell Father how we met?

Peter: Of course not. After all, I have your reputation to protect.

Would you believe she was stark naked, at the time?

Catherine: In a hospital delivery room.

-Dead of Winter

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“Time for me to meet this little princess, while she isn’t hanging upside down and screaming,” Peter said, softly entering Caroline Chandler’s private hospital room. Mother and daughter were propped up on the bed, Caroline gazing in awe at her several-hours old child, as the latter slept. Morning sun streamed in through the windows, as out in the hall, the busy metropolitan hospital came to daily life.

Caroline’s smile was more than just the subtle indication of happiness that Peter usually got from her.

“We did it. I can’t believe it, but we actually did it,” Caroline said, gently tugging back the pink blanket, so Peter could see her daughter’s soft, rosy cheek. “You’re sure she’s healthy? I mean, you’re absolutely positive? That is...”

“I promise you did most of the work. And she’s hale and hearty as any future queen of America could be,” Peter reassured, as he eyed the scene approvingly. Caroline gazed down at her infant daughter in wonder, her eyes scanning the lovely features before her. He knew she could find no defect, there.

Still, Peter watched her expression change from one of wonder to one of worry. *Here it comes*, he thought, knowing it would. He’d known Caroline for many years, and he knew she had grown up with too much “bad” just to be able to relax, and accept the “good.” She wasn’t paranoid. It was just that life had taught her not to expect much.

“There might be something wrong, though,” she worried. “Shouldn’t we run tests? I mean, there’s only so much you can know, listening to her heart and lungs,” Caroline prompted.

Peter knew that Caroline was worrying needlessly. Also that he refused to let dark thoughts steal away her joy.

Not everything you have is going to be taken from you, honey. Not every good thing is a bad one, waiting to happen, Peter thought, knowing that Caroline was only just starting to trust that fact, thanks to marriage to Charles Chandler.

“She’s six pounds and two ounces of sleeping joy,” Peter whispered comfortingly, watching the baby reflexively suck on a closed fist, while she dozed. “Her blood type is B positive, she’s not showing any signs of jaundice, she’s nursed, and given us all the appropriate samples,” he said delicately. “And I don’t think she’d like us poking her again, Caroline. She’s already put in a long day.”

Caroline was instantly contrite. “You’re right. Here I am, thinking she needs more tests, not realizing that would mean she’d get poked by a needle, or made cold, in one of your machines, or on an examining table. Oh, Peter, how could I not even realize what I was asking?” Her concerned eyes sought his.

“How am I going to do this?” She cradled the baby closer, in the protective gesture all mothers used, when covering an infant. “I’m sorry, baby,” she apologized to her obliviously content infant.

Peter gave her hospital gown clad shoulder a reassuring pat.

I know what you’re thinking, Caroline. ‘How do I save her from myself, from what happened in my own childhood? How do I save her from the joyless thing that was? How do I do this well, having never seen it done well, myself?’

Caroline continued to fret, as she beheld her new daughter. "I'm just anxious. After all, she was a little early. You said she was a little early."

Peter knew this wasn't just a case of nerves, or post-partum let down. He'd known her too long to think that. She was afraid. Truly afraid, and struggling with it. It was a small fear, but he knew that if left unchecked, it could build.

Time to end this. End it, before it gets ahold of her, and gets going, he thought.

Peter kept his voice steady and calm. "She was, a few weeks. But that happens, and it's no surprise."

He sat at the edge of the bed with her deciding she needed both a professional and a personal approach. He knew the demons she was fighting, from her past. Her own childhood had been a thing of little security.

"Six pounds is a nice weight for an early bird," he soothed, in his best professional voice. "I think she was just plain ready to meet you, Caroline." He tugged the blanket open, a little more. "Her reflexes are good, her temperature is normal. See her skin color, and how warm she is? See her nails?" He asked, forcing his pinkie finger into the infant's grip. "That pink color means she's getting plenty of oxygen, that her heart and lungs are working just fine. Not that her very ... *loud* entrance into the world wasn't indication of that." He smiled.

Caroline had tears in her eyes, but she blinked them away, happily remembering her daughter's squalling debut, in the hospital delivery room. Part of her had been afraid that it was a sound she'd never hear. "She did put up a fuss, didn't she?" Caroline said, letting some of her tension go.

“My hands were probably cold. I believe I owe her a teddy bear, in apology. I want us to be friends,” Peter replied. He watched some of the tension leave Caroline’s shoulders.

That’s it. That’s the way. Enjoy this, Caroline.

“Make it a rabbit,” Caroline said, thinking of her favorite children’s book. She brushed a soft kiss on her child’s sleeping forehead. “You can’t tell it right now, but her eyes are blue. Like Charles,” she noted, clearly pleased about that.

They were, but Peter knew they might not stay that way. Most Caucasian infants were born with blue eyes. True eye color was a thing that only the future would reveal. Caroline’s own eyes were an interesting shade of grey-green. Time would tell.

“And she has two arms, two legs, ten fingers and ten toes,” Peter replied, listing Caroline’s daughter’s virtues. “But this finger, well. This is the most important one,” he said, turning his hand so Caroline could see the baby’s incredibly tiny pinkie finger, as it gripped his much larger one. “As a matter of fact, I do think in my six years of medicine, I’ve never seen one quite like this.”

Caroline’s gaze went where Peter indicated, and even in her curiosity, she had to admit she could see no defect with the perfect, miniature digit.

“Why? What is it, Peter?” she asked.

His smile was ever-gentle. “Why, I do believe this is the finger she’s going to have all of us wrapped around, Caroline,” he replied, with good humor. He waited until her smile returned, before he continued. “Now... how do you suppose all three of us are going to fit around something so small?”

You're not alone in this. I'm with you. Charles is with you. And you're stronger than any other woman I know.

Caroline Chandler smiled at the image of her, Charles, and Peter Alcott all wrapped around the exquisitely tiny pinkie finger of this amazing, sleeping child. And for no reason she could name, the ridiculous image stuck in her head, and stayed. Her smile became large, and then it turned into a soft chuckle, her happiness refusing to stay bottled up inside.

"I bet you're right, that's just where she'll have us. Charles is buying out a florist shop, somewhere, right now, waiting for visiting hours to start." She laughed, and felt her inner tension go.

It's going to be all right. I'll make it be all right. The things that touched me will never touch you, my daughter, I'll see to that. I swear it.

She kissed the blonde, sleeping head again. *Sweet dreams, my angel*, she thought.

Inside the blanket, the baby yawned, settled, and continued to doze.

"I doubt he's going to stop at just one. I imagine there's an incredible shortage of roses in New York right now," Peter replied.

That's it. That's it, Caroline. Have a little faith. You love her. And she's going to love you. For now, maybe that's all you need to know.

Peter let go of the baby's hand, picturing Charles carrying in dozens of bouquets of roses, and having even more delivered. He was a man in love with the world, right now, and every possibility lay open, before him. *As every new father should be*, Peter thought.

"Charles tells me he's thinking of opening his own firm," Peter prompted, "maybe taking on a partner." Peter quickly pointed out the

positive things going on in Caroline's life, knowing they helped her to banish the bad ones that had come before. "Best save this Little Miss a corner office," he predicted. He wanted her to see it, in her mind's eye. He could tell by her expression that she was beginning to.

"Of course, I do think she should become a doctor, instead," he lobbied.

Caroline didn't stop looking at her child. "He's been in touch with Jay Coolidge, yes," she confirmed. "It's a thing he's been talking about since... well. Since you helped me get pregnant," Caroline replied, knowing that it had been a difficult process, for her.

"I promise I let you and Charles do most of the work, on that end," Peter smiled, glad the injections had worked. "So. Coolidge and Chandler, is it?" he asked.

"Chandler and Coolidge," Caroline stated, with just a bit of an aristocratic lift of her chin. "It's alphabetical," she added practically, the librarian in her showing, just a little. Not to mention the fighter.

That's it. Be stubborn. Remember how strong you are. You're going to need it, for motherhood. And if she's lucky, your daughter will get that trait from you.

"And now the other reason I came in. She still needs a name, Caroline," Peter prompted.

Caroline stared lovingly at her little girl. She knew she'd never name her for her own, troubled mother, nor her cold and dismissive grandmother. Charles had firmly nixed "Charlene," but told her she could have any other name she pleased.

She glanced at the bedside table, seeing the carved rose Charles had gifted her with. In the back of her mind, that had always been a possibility, for a name.

“Rose. Rose, for a middle name, I think. I always loved roses,” she said, cradling her tiny love.

I love you. I'll do anything for you, she thought, adoring her child. You're so innocent. So innocent, and pure. I know you won't always be that way. Life won't always let you. But I think I'd like it if that quality was always... a part of who you were, somehow, no matter what. Love innocence, my baby. And protect it, where you find it. It's the thing the world has too little of.

“You and Charles have names that both start with ‘C.’” Peter observed, not the first person to notice that. “Care to start a tradition? Constance? Charlotte? You’ll save a fortune on monogramming. Just give her Charles’ old briefcase,” Peter teased.

“Innocent,” Caroline said out of the blue, knowing the word ‘innocent’ didn’t start with ‘C.’ “I need a word that means that. She’s so... innocent, Peter. And I think I’d like it if, in her heart, she could always hold onto a little bit of that. Always believe in just a touch of magic, and in the wonder of the world. Especially when it... when it can be less than kind.” She looked down at her daughter, then banished bad memories. “Is there a name in the baby book that means that? One that maybe starts with ‘C?’” she asked, doubting that there was.

Peter reached for the book on her bedside table, and flipped open the pages of the thick paperback. It was so well thumbed, it looked years old, rather than the months-old volume he knew it to be. It had been in Caroline’s constant possession, and had made the trip with her to

the hospital. A name for the baby was the thing Caroline had been utterly unable to come up with.

Maybe you were afraid this wouldn't happen, Caroline, that life wouldn't really give you this joy. Well, now it has. And that joy needs a name.

He scanned the alphabetized text. *Wait a minute... I think I just found the one.*

"How about this one?" Peter asked, showing her the open book. His finger pointed right to the name he wanted her to see. "It means 'innocent, pure, and clear,' he said, quoting the book. "'One whose heart is innocent.' And it even starts with 'C.'"

Caroline's eyes lit up, as she rolled the old, lovely name, around in her mind. *Yes. Yes, that's it. I should have picked that one long ago. Thank you, Peter. Thank you. Thank you for everything.*

"I like it. No, more than that; I love it. I can't wait to tell Charles." She smiled again, and it was radiant.

"You can't go wrong with the classics. I'll let the nurse know."

Peter rose and set the book on the table, next to a beautiful porcelain rose, sitting in a little box. It had been a gift from Charles to his lovely wife. Caroline had said it was the thing he'd bought her when they'd both confirmed she was pregnant. She'd carried it as kind of a good luck charm, throughout her pregnancy. "Roses grow and so will you," her husband had told her.

You're a good man, Charles. And you have a beautiful family. Peter thought.

The subject of his thoughts chose that particular moment to come bursting through her hospital room door, carrying a huge vase full of two dozen pink roses, and an array of helium balloons.

“Rose. I was thinking ‘Rose.’ I mean, ‘Rose,’ for a middle name,” he said without preamble. “I mean, I told you you could pick whatever you wanted, Carrie, but I think that one,” he said, setting the large vase on a table near the window, as two assistants came in behind him, each carrying an assortment of bouquet baskets, cut flowers, and dish gardens. It took the men three trips back and forth, from a laden cart in the hall. By the time they were done, the room was awash, in color and fragrance.

“Would you believe there’s only one florist in Manhattan, open this early?” Charles asked. Peter chuckled at the parade.

“Of course, he can’t open, now. He has nothing left to sell,” Peter observed, watching a potted palm take its place near the radiator.

Charles supervised his helpers, then gave each of them a generous tip and a hearty handshake.

“It’s a girl,” he pronounced proudly, as if the trappings of the room hadn’t given that away.

“Yes, sir. Congratulations,” one of the men replied, gratefully eyeing the size of his tip, as he left.

“You’re going to have to work very hard to be able to afford these kinds of gestures,” Peter teased his longtime friend.

“Money. What’s money?” Charles said expansively. “We’re going to be rich. Disgustingly rich. We’ll be the kind of people you and I could never stand, back in school,” Charles replied, his brown hair a bit disheveled, and his normally pressed suit a bit ruffled. Peter got the

impression that Charles had barely slept, and hadn't bothered to fuss over his wardrobe.

"I called Jay Coolidge, this morning. Can you believe he was still asleep?"

"Imagine that," Peter chuckled.

Charles cheerfully ignored the dig. "Anyway, I already confirmed things with him. I'm having the paperwork drawn up. We'll go looking for office sites, next week," he told his wife, his blue eyes alight with plans for the future. "And how are my two girls, this morning?"

"Chandler and Coolidge. Not Coolidge and Chandler. Make sure you tell him," Caroline instructed, receiving her husband's loving kiss, on her forehead.

Earnest blue eyes fastened on his beautiful daughter. "Chandler and Coolidge it is, or he can go take a hike," Charles promised. "And how are both my angels?" he repeated, his gaze full of love.

"I'm just fine. And Peter assures me she's perfect," Caroline said, relaxing, amid the flowers. She'd always been happiest, near them.

"So. Like I was saying. Rose?" he asked, tracing his wife's lovely cheek with an adoring forefinger. "I know how you like them." The contents of the room were testament to that.

Peter piped up. "Funny you should say that. Caroline was just saying the same thing. As to the first name, I think we've got that sorted," he replied, making a show of straightening his tie. He was clearly preparing to leave, to allow the little family to have some time alone, together.

"Peter helped me, Charles. He helped me find just the right name for her." Caroline beamed.

“Peter did?” Charles asked, clearly relieved at the prospect. They’d spent months going back and forth about it, with the normally decisive Caroline utterly unable to settle on one. They’d thought to have a name before the baby came, but what with Caroline going into labor early, and having nothing determined between them, Caroline had birthed their daughter with no name on her birth certificate, for now.

“He did,” Caroline confirmed. “It means ‘Innocent heart.’ And I think it’s perfect.”

“Does it now?” Charles said, liking the sound of that, on instinct. *All fathers want their daughters to remain innocent. Or at least keep a sense of that,* Charles mused, stroking his daughter’s downy cheek.

“Charles Chandler, I want you to meet the next member of ‘Chandler and Coolidge.’ And her name...” Caroline paused, for dramatic effect.

“Yes?” Charles prompted, dying to know.

Peter moved toward the door, but the last thing he heard was Caroline’s proud, sure voice, as she introduced their daughter to her husband. There was reverence in her tone.

“Her name... is Catherine,” Caroline said, making it sound like a love word.

“Catherine...”

The door closed softly over Charles delighted exclamation. Peter knew that his friend was, right now, repeating the lovely old name over and over, saying it to his daughter and wife, as he said it to himself. *“Catherine. Catherine Rose Chandler. Catherine. Cathy.”*

Somehow, Peter knew she'd never be a Katie or a Kate. He made his way to down the long, antiseptic hallway, knowing he had a birth certificate to sign.

"Jeanie, pull up baby Chandler's file. We've got a name." Peter instructed the nurse behind the desk.

"Praise the Lord," Nurse Jean Hammond said, taking out the appropriate folder. Peter stood behind her as she filled in the name, rolling the official looking document in and out of a manual typewriter. Peter signed it with a small flourish.

Welcome to the world, little one, Peter thought, not for the first time, in the last twenty-four hours.

"I'll take this down to records," he said, knowing that was usually someone else's job.

"You're sure?" Nurse Hammond asked. She knew Doctor Alcott was a wonderful man. But few doctors would perform a chore usually given to clerical people.

"Absolutely. I'm going down, anyway," Peter smiled, liking the official looking weight of the paper. He tucked it carefully back in the file folder, happy at this small chore. He'd hand deliver it to the clerk, who would, in turn, make sure it got filed at the courthouse. Copies would be issued. Verifications would get made. Catherine Rose Chandler was now official. She was now a real person, in this world, complete with her lovely name. She was a citizen of America. A resident of New York. A tiny baby girl, born to two people who deeply loved her, and had desperately wanted her.

Peter had no idea what the future would hold for her. But he had every reason to think it would be a good one.

Catherine. Her name... is Catherine. Caroline had spoken the word with all the love in the world, in her bruised, but healing heart.

Peter could only hope that one day, years from now, a good man would learn Catherine's name, and speak it with such devotion, such adoration, in his voice. *Catherine. Her name... is Catherine.*

But that was a thought for another day. For now, Peter had a consequential/inconsequential task to perform. And then, someplace he had to be, after. A secret place. A load of groceries waited in his car. Canned goods, mostly, he knew he had one more delivery to make, after he dropped off Catherine's paperwork.

He whistled as he waited for the elevator, liking this new day, as it unfolded before him. He liked knowing that the world could be a good place, and was full of miracles, large and small. *More than you know, Nurse Hammond,* he mused, happy in his job.

Delivering a file would hardly be the only thing he did today that would have surprised most people.

If only they knew, he mused, thinking of the fledgling world Below. *Caroline Chandler isn't the only person who's getting a second chance at finding happiness, today.* Two new people had just come down to the tunnels, last week. A black man, physically strong, but battered by the world. And his young son, a boy named Winslow.

The elevator dinged and the door slid open, calling Peter's attention back to present concerns, as people filed out. It was full of happy people. Ones who, like Charles, were visiting new mothers and their children.

Peter watched them cheerfully go past, as he contemplated the order of his day. He'd drop off the file, and from there, it would be a quick

trip to the second-hand store over on Third. A man named Eli had a repair shop, there, and would help him unload the car.

In Eli's basement stood a cast off piano, and a doorway to a world few people knew of. Peter knew he'd stop to deliver the much-appreciated food and a few medical supplies, and then maybe share a quick cup of tea, with Jacob. He'd then check in on Devin, Vincent, and the other children, before he came back to the hospital. It was going to be a busy day. Most of them were. *Good thing I'm young*, he mused, realizing he'd had no more sleep than Charles Chandler had had.

And it's a good world, he thought, getting into the metal car, as the last happy visitor to the maternity ward filed out. A man with a gigantic stuffed teddy bear with a blue bow tied around its neck made his way down the hall, beaming.

A good world, he confirmed, feeling it. *There's more to it than most people know. But it's a good one.* He pushed the button for the floor as he eyed the file in his hands. He knew this simple piece of paper granted Catherine Chandler access to a world people like little Vincent could never be a part of. And while that thought made him a little sad, for Vincent, it also filled him with hope, for tiny Catherine.

Hope is enough. Sometimes, it's all we have, to see us through. He knew it was so.

Welcome to the world, Catherine Chandler, Peter thought, one more time. *Welcome to the world. I hope you discover its treasures. And I hope it helps you discover yours.*



*No matter where you are in your own fairy tale, I wish you love. ~
Cindy*

Pacem Muros