

PART I - MICHAEL SULLIVAN

Chapter 1

Seen, But Unattainable

It was well into the evening and again I sat in my car watching and waiting. It was nearly time for Rachel to come out of her apartment. Her ride would be pulling up at any moment. I watched the door to the apartment building unwavering. I didn't want to miss her come out.

I pulled out the pack of cigarettes from my front pocket. That was what I needed, a cigarette. I lit it quickly, inhaling. It didn't ease the anxiety I felt over the situation. Finally the door of the apartment building opened and she came out. She stood there near the door looking towards the parking lot. I knew she didn't see me. I borrowed one of my men's car. She knew my Mustang very well. She had no idea I was there. If she had I was sure she'd call the M. P.'s i on the spot and I wouldn't blame her.

I watched her as she waited. She was so beautiful. It must have been her night to usher at her church. I had watched her so often lately. I knew her routine. She wore a black mid length skirt and a white long sleeved blouse, trimmed in lace at the collar and cuffs. She had on low heeled black pumps. In her hand she carried her bible and a white sweater hung neatly over her arm. Over her shoulder hung a black shoulder strap purse.

That night she wore her hair the way it was the first time I saw her. It was combed down at the sides of her face to her shoulders and curled at the ends. She was so beautiful and unattainable to me. But I had brought it upon myself. I knew no matter

how much I'd try to apologize or be kind to her, deep down she would probably never trust me, not after the things I said and did to her, not after the names I'd called her.

I shook my head with a heaviness that would not go away. I was deeply, impossibly in love with this girl, who was out of reach. The possibility of being with her was like reaching for a star and catching hold of it, impossible. I shook my head again thinking; if I had just did things differently. I sighed within thinking, thinking of the day that I first saw her.

It was in the main P.X. in Fort Hood, Texas. I was making my usual stop after work, for a six pack of beer and pack of cigarettes. That seemed to have been my routine for years. My name is Michael Sullivan. I'm a staff Sergeant stationed at Fort Hood, Texas and have been for the past seven years. I did a double tour at Fort Sam Houston. Before that, three years in Germany and three years in Korea.

The Army was my life. I dropped out of school at fourteen, and then enlisted at seventeen after lying about my age. I always looked older than I was. The army was all I knew and I liked it. I liked the authority, power and the respect it gave me. I had a company of men under me. I was known to be short-tempered and rough and I didn't care for pansies in my company. I knew the men called me names behind my back, but that was fine with me. I knew it was due to respect. And if dislike was a part, that was fine also. The dislike would make them rougher and fight harder to prove me wrong, which would never happen. If I was a pushover or not serious, there would be no respect and I would have no control. Something I or any commanding officer always needed with men under them. I never forgot that their lives were in my hands. I prided myself on making the right decisions all the time. I didn't see anything wrong with my lifestyle or me.

That particular day I was in a hurry. I felt to mention I was impatient also. I got into an express line. There was one person in front of me and one at the check out. He was a private and he was going on and on in conversation with the cashier. They actually acted as if everyone had time to stand and watch them yap away. I was in no mood and I made it known by clearing my throat loudly. She and the private looked up at me. I was sure I was easy to spot. I was tall, six feet, four inches. I had always been tall growing up, that and the fact that I was staring at them angrily.

She seemed to ignore my complaint. She turned back to the private, said a few more words and then bagged his items and gave him his change. Then to my disbelief she started to talk to the man in front of me who was older and probably a civilian or retired. She was answering to his question.

“It’s been a long day Mr. Mackey, but it’s been a blessed day”
The older man smiled, then said “The misses says to say hello and she’ll see you Sunday.”

The girl smiled at him. I shifted my weight and signed impatiently. She looked up at me again. She smiled unconcerned as if telling me to wait my turn. I stood there seriously thinking of how many ways I could ring her neck. Finally my turn arrived. She looked up and would have said something, but the look I turn on her must have changed her mind. She quickly rang my items and bagged them. I left quickly glad to have my purchase and get out of there.

The only things I remembered about her that time was the fact that she was short, maybe five feet and she was a black girl. Her skin was the color of light Carmel. I also remember the fact that she infuriated me and was very lucky that I didn't say anything to her at the checkout and more so that I did not do anything. It had happen before. My short temper that I didn't recognize had gotten me into several scrapes.

I had very little patience with people, especially black people. I was raised in New York City in the Irish section. There are several cultures in New York, and everyone knew to stay in their own area. There was no mixing of the races then and if anyone did they were look down on or stubbed at, finally they would move away. There were often gang fights and shooting if a gang crossed over someone's territory. Usually someone ended up dead.

So her being black was enough to tick me off. It wasn't until the next time that I saw her that I notice anything else. It was two days later. My friend and I worked in the same company. Lucas Matthews. I called him Luke. Luke was next in command in the company. We were longtime friends. We did several tours together and we both were from New York City, so we kind of hit it off. I had been his best man at his wedding ten years earlier. His wives name is Kate.

They were a pair. They argued more than they ate and fought and drank more than that. I was usually the one to break them up and make them behave. I was surprised that they were still together but glad they were. They were my best and probably my only friends. I had spent many nights out cold drunk on their sofa. Their place was a second home to me.

That day, again we were in line. I didn't notice I was in her line until it was too late. I didn't want to deal with her again. She talked to a man at the checkout, rattling on as before. There were two soldiers in front of us. She looked up at that moment. Her eyes rested on Luke, and then she smiled at him and said hi with her lips. Then she noticed me and her smile disappeared.

"You know her?" I shot the question at Luke

"Not really, I just know her by going through the line. I like to talk to her"

"Talk, I hope that's all"

"It's not like that man. She's just really nice, like a sister. Someone to talk to" he said.

I glanced at her again. She was smiling and talking to the next man. I notice how her hair fell down on the sides of her face when she'd tilt her head as she rang up items and she'd pull it back with her hand. I thought she should pin it up, wasting our time by not having her hair in a sensible style. The last time she pulled her hair back, I notice too she seemed kind of plain. No earrings were in her ears or any lipstick covered her lips like the other cashiers. When she smiled, it was a full smile and I could see her teeth, they were perfectly even and white. I was sure she wasn't a smoker with beautiful white teeth like those. I suppose some men might think she was appealing, but she aggravated me.

“Luke what do you see in her” I asked seriously thinking I knew Luke. He just didn’t talk to girls. He had cheated on Kate before and I had to cleanup his mess. I wasn’t going to do it again. I asked him as much again.

“Mike I told you, she’s just a friend”

“Friend my-“

“Don’t say it” he cut me off quickly “it’s true, she’s goes to church, we just talk. Her name is Rachel, Rachel Warner”

Well I watched him closely and questioning, still not believing him. Finally we were at her check out. She smiled again at Luke saying hi. She said a feeble hi to me. I only stared at her impatient. She looked away quickly.

“Rachel don’t pay any attention to him. This is Sergeant. Sullivan a friend of mine.”

She glanced at me again quickly then back at Luke.

“How have you been?” she asked Luke

“Fine”

“And your wife?”

“She’s better, I told her I had a whole church congregation praying for us.”

“What did she say?”

“She laughed”

What was that all about I wondered and what was Luke doing. She rang up his cigarettes, and then gave him the eye. Like the one my mother use to give me when I was in big trouble. Luke lifted his shoulders.

“I’m trying”

“Okay” she answered smiling.

She finished Luke's order then said to him "We'll keep praying until God work it out"

Well it was my turn and I just stood there staring at her daring her to start that mumble jumble to me about church and God. She seemed to read my thoughts. She checked my items not daring to look up. Again her hair fell about her face as she looked down. Her hair was a dark brown color. It glistened with some kind of oil.

She finished my order. I practically snatched the bag then started to leave. Luke looked at her apologetic. I signed angrily at him, leaving him to melt over her if he wanted. He caught up with me a minute or so later and we left.

ⁱ M.P. Military Police

ⁱⁱ P,X. Post Exchange (Base Store)