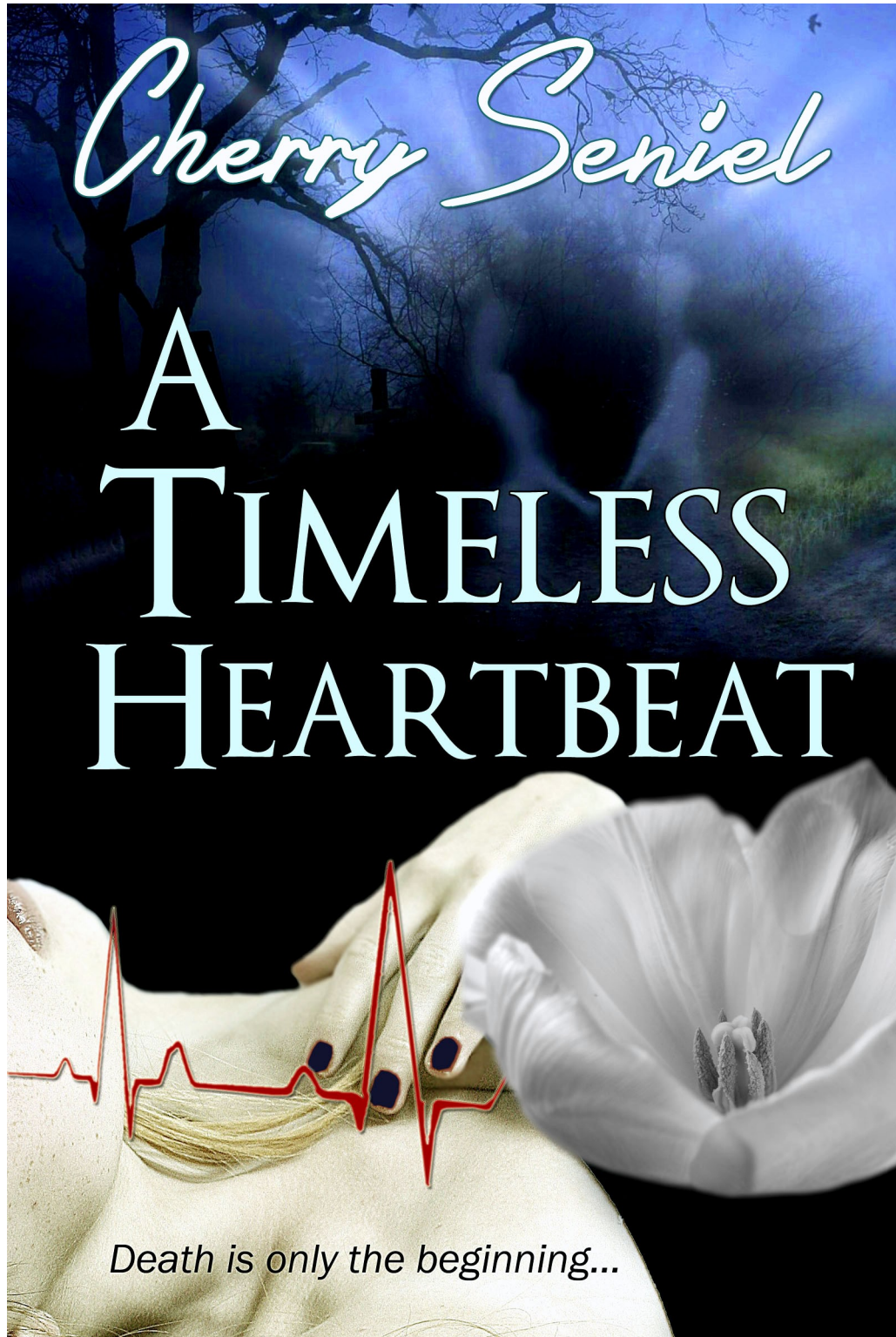


Book Sample



A Timeless Heartbeat

A Novel

By

Cherry Seniel

A Timeless Heartbeat

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DEDICATION

For those who believe in soulmates...

For my son, Christian

*You are my source of strength since that day I felt you in my womb. Thank you for giving me
the joy of motherhood.*

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CHAPTER ONE

A HINT FROM THE PAST

It's March—the bite of the cold wind brought by the slow-moving winter storm kept people living in Detroit, Michigan on the streets. The intrusive wind gusts covered the sidewalks, roads, and freeways—snow accumulated quickly. It became a normal view to see people digging out a pile of snow early in the morning. The winter has picked up smells from all around—burning wood and coal. But the crisp earthy-rain smell was Mila's favorite. It brought her the comfort to her new home.

She leaned closer to her window. There's no sign of dawn yet—daylight will come out late. She checked again the sky and imagined there were invisible stars. A habit she made since the day her parents left. She would know they watched over her. That thought helped her move forward. She opened the pendant of her necklace and stared at the image of them. Memories flashed back in her mind, but she controlled herself not to get emotional, again. Past is past. They were long gone, but they lived in her heart. Ah, her heart—that's one feeling she was sure about, second to her love for Esmeralda and her aunt, Roberta. The rest remained a mystery to her.

She sighed and turned to see herself in the big mirror. She exposed a portion of her left chest. The scar was her constant reminder. She took a deep breath and released it slowly. Sleepless nights of worrying caused the puffiness of her eyes. She must support her family. The muffin business of her aunt won't sustain that long—she is not getting younger too. She tried to seek a steady source of income but failed many times. It's been almost a year of job hunting, but work left her—almost. But not this day, a one shot opportunity. Victoria Manufacturing called her for the final interview with the CEO.

She yawned lazily while she fixed her bed. It was six in the morning and everyone in the house was sleeping except her. It's been a year since they migrated. The house belonged to her late grandparents. They died of old age. Her aunt wanted to take good care of the house and she liked the idea. Besides, she wanted to see where her mother grew up too. It made her become closer to her, through her memories.

She opened her planner to double check her appointment schedule. The interview was set at nine o'clock. It was the only schedule listed in the page that was open. The rest was crashed out. The reason—she didn't get the job, or the company gave a second thought and canceled her appointment. Finding a job is getting difficult these days. She grimaced at that thought.

She hoped she will nail it this time. Her eight-year-old daughter, Esmeralda, will need her support. She hasn't heard about the father since she was three or even attempts from his side to communicate—absolutely nothing. She's on her own to raise her and secure her future.

Mila shivered as she traveled the road in that cold weather. The side of the road was filled with thick piles of snow. Although the winter has gotten worse, it was fortunate that traveling was still possible. She tightened her jacket around her body and increased the heater of her car for more comfort. She glanced at the mirror to check herself. Her face was pale and lips lost its color—normally, it's pinkish. Her breathing produced trails in the air—an evidence that the temperature dropped tremendously. She applied lipstick for rescue. It wasn't her thing. She hated wearing

makeup and never bothered buying any of it. But the lipstick was a gift from her best friend, Sandra. She insisted and so she kept it, but never uses it until that day. A small amount applied to her lips was enough to give life. She dumped a small dot to her cheeks and spread it evenly with her fingers. *That will do.* She chuckled. She remembered the first time when Sandra taught her how to apply lipstick. It wasn't her thing, but her persistence persuaded her. She was fortunate to have her in her life.

Sandra became her best friend since she was ten, but more like a sister to her. She and her family migrated to Michigan a year before them, but they never failed to communicate. When it was their time to move in, they were both thrilled. Others would say they were inseparable. The truth—they were right. She owed her a lot, during those times when she thought that was the end. It was Sandra who never gave up to fight for her life. Her love and care sustained her. She clung to that and so she made it.

She inhaled a gulp of air and released it gently to make her feel better. Recalling her past will spoil her day and she can't allow that. Not that day—her chance to get a job.

She arrived at the place and pulled over to the vacant parking space.

"I can do this," she told herself. She got out of her car and proceeded to the building of Victoria Manufacturing.

She waited in the visitor lounge for her name to be called out. A moment later, a lady in her early thirties approached her.

"Mila Grace Johnsons?" she asked.

"Hi, I am Mila," she answered.

"Good Morning, Miss Johnsons, I am Rebecca. I am the HR officer who called you the other day for this meeting. Right this way, please, The CEO is waiting for you."

Mila nodded and followed her without a word.

Rebecca knocked at the glass door thrice and yanked it open. She went inside, leaving Mila behind.

"She is here, Joshua."

Mila heard her say.

"Send her in and you may leave us. Thank you, Rebecca."

She opened the door and asked Mila to go inside. She whispered good luck to her before she closed the door for her. Mila smiled but looked tense.

Suddenly, her heart raced uncontrollably. Her palms were sweating. The interview hasn't started yet.

Gosh, calm down Mila. She walked near to his table. He was busy signing papers. She cleared her throat and greeted him.

"Good morning."

"Good morning," he replied without looking at her. "Please have a seat. I am sorry, I am just finishing this one last document."

She took her seat and lowered her gaze to the floor. She crossed her legs in her effort to calm down herself and grabbed her handkerchief from her pocket to dry her hands from her sweat. The jolting of her heartbeat made her breathing uneven. She bit her lip and tried to control it.

"Hi again," he said.

She looked at him. His smile was welcoming. The effect of his nearness was different. She trusted him. Has she met him before? Her forehead creased as she tried to recall, but her memory betrayed her. She can't remember. She looked into his eyes and held it there for a moment. Intriguingly, she wanted to cry for no particular reason. *What's wrong with me?* She pinched her leg hard, enough to cause pain to divert the feeling. It helped. She smiled nervously.

He stood up to get a bottle of cold water from the fridge. As he emptied the bottle, she took her chance to check on him. He was wearing a white long sleeve paired with a dark necktie loosened for air. His eyeglasses perfectly settled to his beautifully defined nose. It made him look more intelligent. His hair—tousled neatly made him look like a model in a fashion magazine. In her estimates, he was in his early thirties. Whatever his age was, she admired how he carried himself. She caught him taking a deep breath before he returned to his chair. He seemed nervous.

But why would he be? Did I make him nervous? Of course not, silly.

She glanced at his face and settled her regard on his lips. It flickered as traces of water coated it wet. Its pinkish color made it more vibrant, tempting her to kiss him. *What it's like kissing him? Whoa! Am I insane? Where on earth that idea came from?* Her cheeks flushed. She tried to hide her face by looking at the door, pretending that she heard someone knocking.

"Is anything wrong?"

"I thought there was someone at the door. Sorry..." She replied and bit her lip.

Heavens, this is a job interview Mila and not a blind date. She reminded herself. She shifted her focus to his desk.

He followed her. "The builder finished the desk with special sapphire blue-car painting and I think they used Plexiglas," he said, to address her curiosity.

"Nice, who knew royal blue could look so sleek and it's a perfect match to this vintage chair," she replied and ran her fingers on the surface.

"Glad you like them. Anyway, I am Joshua De Fuer. But please, call me Joshua. It's very nice to meet you. How are you today?"

"Cold, but I am great sir. Winter is not my favorite season of the year."

"I don't think everybody like it either. I don't like it. The other day, I had to use a shovel to remove a pile of snow from the hood all the way to the top of my car. Almost got buried. Well, that was a good exercise, anyway." He chuckled.

Her two dimples became visible when she smiled with tight lips.

He was silent and looked at her. His penetrating stare sank her to her chair.

Who are you, Joshua? Why does it feel like you are a part of me?

He noticed her unsettling reaction. He smiled to make her feel comfortable.

His smile was breathtaking. She can stare into his face forever. She smiled back and averted her gaze to anywhere but him. His closeness made her want something, his kiss, and embrace. She panicked inside. *That's ridiculous, why would I like to kiss a guy I just met?* Her thoughts deliberated. She heard he cleared his throat.

"Thank you for your interest in applying as our Marketing Consultant. What made you choose our company Mila?"

Her hands were sweating, cold. She never felt distracted by a guy's appeal before. Esmeralda's father was different. But with this guy, it was a matter of recovering her past with him. But how could that happen? She believed that was her first time meeting him in Michigan.

He waited for her answers.

"Oh, that..." She replied, but her voice seemed not to cooperate. She tried harder to relax and to sound formal. Her voice was intolerant, but she answered him anyway.

"Well, I wanted to work in a company where my expertise will be of great use." She cleared her throat before she continued. "And based on my initial research, you offered products that need an all out support in the marketing aspects. I believe my experience and skills in this field will help your company boost more sales and profits. I am hardworking, resourceful and I am also very eager to learn more out of this experience."

He listened intently but remained impassive—calculating. His gaze was intense. Perhaps her answer was too flowery.

"Do you know that I have waited for you for a very long time?" he asked. His reaction was nonchalant.

Confused by his words, she creased her forehead and said, "What do you mean?"

"I mean someone who can do the job better," he replied but sounded too defensive. "I reviewed your resume and your other credentials. And it is what I needed. You've stayed in London before, what made you decide to transfer to Michigan?"

"After my parents died, I stayed with my mom's sister, who was also living in Europe at that time. But she and my mom grew up here. They've spent most of their childhood years in this town. I knew my aunt wanted to come back to her native land. I figured it out it will make her happy if we moved in. So we did it, a year ago."

"How about you, were you happy with that decision?"

"I am..."

"Mila, do you feel like searching for something missing in your life? And feeling that things happened not by coincidence, but rather, a call of destiny?"

She looked at him, searching for the right words to describe her feelings. Since she had the operation, she searched for something unfathomable. It was silly to feel that way, but that's the truth and it haunted her. No one will understand how she feels, finding a missing piece that puzzled her existence. Not even she can understand it. No one can. Not him. So there's no use of opening it up.

"At the moment, a job sir, so I can support my family," she replied, shifting her gaze to the floor. Partly it was the truth—job eluded her. It was a longing of a mother to support her child. She looked into his eyes, they were full of sympathy like any moment, he will get up and hide her in his arms for comfort. Her heart beats faster. She averted her stare to hide her eyes—his gaze was intrusive, wanting for more answers.

There was a brief silence.

She glanced in his direction through her lashes.

He took a deep breath and looked at her intently.

"Mila, I believe in your potential. And I am glad to hear how much you care for your family. And yes, consider this official. You are already hired."

She looked at him, speechless. She tried to remain cool and professional, but inside, her joy soared. "Thank you. I will try my best not to disappoint you."

"I am sure you won't Mila. You, being here is more than enough."

Her suspicion rose higher, so she dared to ask.

"Joshua, have we met before?" She studied his reaction.

He looked excited and tensed at the same time. His lips were half-opened as if he wanted to say something. But he stopped himself and seemed diverting the topic.

"So tell me more about yourself. What are your other interests?"

"There's nothing much to say about me, sir—I mean Joshua. But I love doing research and come up with different ideas and marketing campaigns. I believe we can boost the sales of your product through timely marketing strategies."

She interlaced her fingers and settled them on her lap. She glanced at her manicured fingers and a trace of a smile curved her lips. Esmeralda did her part of that interview. The pastel-lavender manicure she applied to her nails matched well to her purple blouse."

"That's great to hear Mila. And you are correct. Our products need more marketing campaign to attract more consumers. I hope we can work that out together."

Together? I would love that.

"I will try my best not to fail you," she assured him.

"Thank you. But it's my job not to fail you this time."

What does he mean when he said this time? Meaning, he failed me before? Stop thinking too much Mila. She scolded herself.

"I—"

"So what do you enjoy doing in your free time?"

He interrupted, diverting to another topic.

Although puzzled, she pretended she didn't notice how strange his words are. She gave up and went with the flow of the conversation.

"I do some needlework," she replied, tucking her loosed bangs to her left ear.

"Sewing?" he asked, relaxing his back in his chair.

"Yes, but it's more about Quilting. I know it is sedentary and passive, but I just find it relaxing and can give relief to worries and distress. For me, it feels like projecting my emotions through the art of quilting."

He stroked his chin reflectively. "That's interesting. I hope one day I can see some of your work. I'm sure they were beautiful."

She smiled and nodded. If ever, he will be the first outsider who will see her work.

"Do you have questions for me Mila?"

"When should I start?"

"As soon as possible, if you don't mind. Please coordinate your preferred date to Rebecca. Would that be alright?"

"Yes. All good."

"Is there anything more?"

She smiled and shook her head slightly.

"Well, I hope you will like it here. If you have any concern, please tell me."

He reached his phone and dialled a number.

"Rebecca, please assist Miss Johnsons for her employment requirements. I want you to take good care of her. Yes Rebecca, I haven't forgotten that meeting. Thank you."

He hanged up and rested his elbow on the table.

Looking at him made her emotions turned to 360 degrees—it was kind of push and pull effect. She sank into her chair, which he noticed abruptly.

He withdrew his gaze and pretended to scan some documents.

"Our HR officer will be here shortly. Please tell her if you need anything. I won't hold you for long because of my other meeting," he said, without looking at her.

"Thank you, Joshua."

He took a deep breath and looked at her again. "I'm glad you are here with me now Mila."

He extended his hand for a handshake and she accepted it. As they touched, a different sensation travelled to her senses. Her heart palpitated more. She breathed hardly for a moment. Her stomach churned and her knees lost its control for support. She withdrew her hand and leaned back to the chair. She closed her eyes briefly and took a deep breath.

"Are you all right?" he asked, half-standing, in his attempt to reach her across his desk. He looked worried.

"I'm sorry. Yes, I am," she lied.

"No need to say sorry. You can be as you like in front of me. I want you to be happy here."

Baffled by his words, she nodded. She calmed herself and regained her posture.

His eyes never left hers.

She can't help but to meet his gaze. Each stare fueled her curiosity.

Why he looked at me as if I am a very important person in his life? Or maybe I have dirt in my face. Or did I smudge that lipstick? I'm sure I looked ridiculous now. Her thoughts squirming, inside her head.

There's a soft knock at the door. It was Rebecca.

"Rebecca, you know what to do. Please guide Miss Johnsons. She can start as soon as possible."

"Yes, Joshua. Anything else?"

"Come to my office after my meeting. I would like to discuss something with you. That would be all. Thank you."

The thought of Rebecca and Joshua, alone in the room disturbed Mila's thoughts. Are they going to be inside in this room for long? Slightly annoyed, she gasped. Why is she feeling all these? Her curiosity soared. And then strange thoughts confronted her.

No, you don't know it yet, but my heart only belongs to you Adella. It's always been yours. Wait, where that idea came from? What led her to think that way? She concentrated on him. Her nostrils caught his scent—traditional, subtle and comforting. It urged her to reflect on her past. She started to panic. Her head seemed to make up things for her.

"Alright, shall we go Miss Johnsons? Rebecca asked. "Let's proceed to my office so we can discuss the details of your requirements."

Mila stood up and followed her. The moment Rebecca closed the door behind them, a feeling of dismay overwhelmed her. Something was pulling her back—she doesn't want to leave him. Why it felt that she has known him her entire life?

Adella, you don't know how happy I am to finally find you. You don't know how long I have been searching for you.

Who is Adella? I didn't know any Adella. She battled herself. Confused, she felt one side of her head and laid her hand there for a moment.

"This is crazy," she whispered, shaking her head slightly. "Now I am losing my wits? Who are you Joshua?"

-END OF CHAPTER 1-

Visit your favorite ebook retailer and purchase this book to continue reading. Thank you for appreciating the hard work of this author.