



RELENTLESS – DELETED SCENE

By Cassia Leo

CHRIS KNIGHT POV

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Tasha Singer's office is located inside a three-story office building in North Raleigh. It appears as if the building is a combined office space for doctor and lawyer offices. The entire first and second floors are reserved for family practitioners, endocrinologists, and therapists. The entire third floor is occupied by Stellar & Kushman Family Law Practice.

Tasha came highly recommended by my entertainment lawyer, Ernie Daniels. I haven't known Ernie long enough to know whether I can trust his recommendations, but it's the only lead I have on finding the child Claire gave up for adoption four months ago.

The elevator doors open onto a modern reception area that puts me at ease. Tweed armchairs and rosette wallpaper are okay at your grandma's house, but they're not a good sign in a lawyer's office. The receptionist looks up from her desk and her blond hair makes my chest ache. For the past year, I've struggled with the pain of losing Claire; not just the emotional pain, but the physical. I even saw a doctor while we were on tour in

Japan. I was certain there was something wrong with my heart because every time I saw someone who slightly resembled Claire or smelled something that reminded me of her, I'd get these sharp pains in my chest. The doctor told me I was perfectly healthy, but that I might want to slow down on the alcoholic beverage consumption. Not surprisingly, this didn't make me feel any better.

“May I – ” her voice cuts off as she recognizes me.

“I'm here to see Tasha Singer.”

“Yes,” she whispers as her hand fumbles for the handset on her desk phone. “Yes, just a minute.”

I turn my back on the receptionist so I don't have to stare at her hair and wonder if it's as soft as Claire's. My gaze wanders over the clean white walls, the boxy slate-gray armchairs, the glass tables, until I hear someone call my name.

“Chris Knight?”

I turn around at the sound of Tasha's voice, which I recognize from the many phone conversations we've had over the last three days. But when I see her holding open the glass door for me to enter the back office space, I'm

stunned by her appearance. She looks more like a model than a lawyer. Well, a healthy-sized model.

Despite the fact that Claire dumped me more than a year ago, I still feel a twinge of guilt every time I ogle another girl's tits or ass. It's reflexive guilt left over from all the years Claire and I were together. It's hard to break reflexive emotions after a long-term relationship ends; especially when you've spent the past year secretly telling yourself that you'll need to hold onto those for later, when the two of you get back together.

By the smile on Tasha's face, I have a feeling she caught me glancing at her *burgeoning bosom*. Ha. I think I read that phrase in one of the many romance novels Senia used to leave lying around the dorm. Claire used to read those to me for fun once in a while.

Damn. I miss the fuck out of her.

"Right this way," Tasha says, flipping her red hair over her shoulder as she leads me into the first office on the left side of the corridor. "Please have a seat."

Her office looks a lot like the reception area, but she has a few photos of herself in frames on her glass desk.

Behind her desk, a single long wall-shelf extends from one end of the wall to the other. Black magazine files with white labels on the spines line the shelf, separated intermittently by a few white statuettes in the shape of birds.

“Nice office,” I offer. My mom always taught me it’s best to start a conversation with a compliment. It sets a positive tone and the other person is more likely to listen carefully to what you have to say, hoping you’ll slip in another compliment along the way.

“Thank you. But you’re not here to admire my office.” She reaches into a black paper tray on her desk and retrieves a large manila envelope. “This was delivered by courier this morning. It’s the adoption decree, which you did not sign.” I reach across the desk to take the envelope from her hand and she pulls it back. “And, there’s a picture in there.”

There goes that pain in my chest again. The anticipation is killing me as I stare at the envelope in her hand. There’s a picture of my child in there. I almost want to ask Tasha if it’s a girl or a boy, to prepare myself, but I

don't. I honestly don't think anything can prepare me for what I'm about to see.

"I'm ready," I say with a nod and she slowly hands over the envelope.

My stomach is in knots as I undo the metal clasp and lift the flap. I reach my hand inside the envelope and I immediately feel the smooth surface of a glossy photograph against the pad of my thumb. I take a deep breath as I grip the stack of papers the photo is attached to and pull them out of the envelope.

My throat thickens painfully at the sight of her soft blond hair. She's lying peacefully on a fluffy, cream-colored blanket; an angel I never knew I had until now. I bite my lip to hold back the flood of emotions I'm feeling: the rage from being kept in the dark; the hurt from losing everything; and the fear that I may never get it back.

"Are you all right?" Tasha asks.

"No," I reply. "But I'm going to do everything I can to change that."