

ELLORA'S CAVE

Blush

MOST
UNPOPULAR
WORKDAY
OF THE
YEAR

Ashlyn Chase

SCINTILLATING
SAMPLES

Most Unpopular Workday of the Year

Ashlyn Chase

Andy is the new nurse and has to work on Christmas Day. She's part of a skeleton crew taking care of one little boy with end-stage Muscular Dystrophy. As she reads to him, Jeff, a young intern, visits. Through their love of this little boy, Andy and Jeff discover a deep connection and love for each other.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Most Unpopular Workday of the Year

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Most Unpopular Workday of the Year Copyright© 2010 Ashlyn Chase

Edited by Helen Woodall

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication: October 2010

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing Inc., 1056 Home Avenue, Akron, OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

MOST UNPOPULAR WORKDAY OF THE YEAR

Ashlyn Chase

Dedication

To all the people who work shifts covering twenty-four hours each day and three hundred sixty-five days each year—especially those of you in the health care field. I've been there, done that, and now that I'm not doing it anymore, I thank you for taking my place.

And especially to the original Bobby.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to acknowledge the hard-working staff of the Massachusetts Hospital School for Handicapped Children. It was my first job as a new and very green RN. You took me under your wing and taught me so much. I learned as much from the LPNs and aides as I did from my supervisor and the MDs. The field of Medicine is more than science. It takes heart to do the job right.

Chapter One

Since I was the newest nurse and the senior nurses were given first choice of holiday time, I cursed the fact that I had to work on the least favorite workday of the year. Even though I knew why I had pulled this shift, I couldn't help resenting the fact that I wouldn't be able to share Christmas morning with my own five-year-old child. Heather's little face scrunched up and tears settled in her eyes when I told her that even though she *would* be able to open her stocking and gifts from Santa with Grandma and Grandpa at their house, Mommy wouldn't be there. She would have to wait until I arrived in the early evening for the rest of her gifts from me. That's a lot to ask of a five-year-old. My aching heart made me wish that I could be in two places at once. Remind me again...why did I want to become a nurse?

By the time I arrived at work on Christmas morning, all the kids who were capable of leaving the hospital had gone home on a leave of absence for the holiday...all except Bobby. The state hospital for handicapped children was eerily quiet and deserted. Even the boy in the iron lung had gone home with a special breathing apparatus.

One of the head nurses, an aide, a supervisor and I staffed the hospital. As soon as the aide had finished getting Bobby dressed, I went in to see him, gave him his meds and then presented him with a candy cane.

"Thank you for the Christmas present!" The expression of delight lit up his round face.

I was sad to see that he had no packages to unwrap, so I decided that my real gift would have to be my undivided attention. Our Massachusetts state hospital near Boston served patients whose parents could afford only the basics. Expensive gifts from the staff were strictly forbidden to avoid embarrassing comparisons.

Bobby looked up at me with his huge, brown eyes and confessed. "I'm glad you're here today. Since you sometimes read to us kids, would you please read me the Christmas story right out of the Bible, today?"

I had never read the Bible to the patients so I was a bit surprised, but that didn't matter. I would have stood on my head and read the telephone book if he had asked me to. Bobby's severe Muscular Dystrophy was terminal.

"Sure, Bobby," I said with a smile, trying to remember my New Testament. Religion and I had parted ways a long time ago. Shaking my head, I thought about how Bobby, once the number one whirlwind and troublemaker of the unit, was now the most loving and spiritual child imaginable.

I flipped through the well-worn Bible that we kept on our unit. I located the story in the book of Matthew, as well as the "Beatitudes", another story which I thought might be helpful to a child in his dismal situation.

Reading to eleven-year-old Bobby was the least I could do. His one special Christmas wish, he told me, was that his mother would come to visit him in the hospital. However, no one had heard whether or not she would be coming.

My heart went out to his mother, who had given birth to three boys, all of whom possessed the dreaded terminal prognosis. Talk about terrible situations! Bobby's older brother had already died on this very ward. The youngest was still at home, not yet debilitated enough to qualify for admission.

Since Bobby's mother's visits were few and far between, we staff members couldn't help but become a whole unit of mothers to him. I understood his mother's reasons for infrequent visits. She hated to leave her youngest son in anyone else's care. Putting myself in her place, I also guessed that she couldn't help but be broken-hearted each time she visited and saw Bobby's health deteriorating.

I began to read to him. I did my very best to concentrate on each verse so I could read well, yet be able to make eye contact, and not mess up. Sweet Bobby's eyes barely blinked as he listened, riveted to every word.

Quite a while later, when I had finished the entire book of Matthew, he looked at me hopefully and asked, "Read it again...please?"

Somewhere between his very polite request and the pleading expression in his eyes, my heart turned to mush. With the sad realization that this might prove to be one of his last easily granted wishes, I reopened the book, turned to Matthew, chapter one, verse one, and began reading again. When I had finished the second reading of the entire story, Doctor Jeff Murphy, a vibrant, caring and sensitive young intern, poked his head in.

"Doctor Murphy! I didn't expect to see you on Christmas day!"

"Merry Christmas," he said with a bright smile.

A wonderful natural healer, he had always impressed me, but I couldn't help being doubly awed that he took time out of his holiday to visit Bobby. I left them alone and did my necessary paperwork while the good doctor kept him occupied.

Before he left, Doctor Murphy found me in the charting room.

"Bobby told me about your story time."

His wide smile told me that he approved. *Whew*. Not all doctors would have. "He told me that he was sure he was going to be all right, even when it was his time to go to heaven."

I looked at my lap and couldn't speak. Words wouldn't pass the lump forming in my throat. I didn't want to cry, but I looked up, saw tears in Dr. Murphy's eyes and lost it.

To lighten the mood, we wiped our eyes and recalled stories of Bobby's formerly rowdy nature and practical jokes, ending with a couple of good laughs.

"By the way, call me Jeff," he said and winked as he departed.

Chapter Two

During the day, different staff members floated in and out of Bobby's room, listening to me read. The aide, Bettina, arrived with some eggnog and Christmas cookies along with his Christmas dinner, so I took a break to eat while she sat with him.

After Bettina left, I returned to Bobby's room. Still waiting for his mother to arrive, he asked, "Will you read to me again?"

"Sure, hon, what would you like me to read?" I thought he would want a different story this time. To my amazement, he requested a third reading of the same story. I flipped to Matthew, parts of which I thought I might be able to recite by heart this time, but I read it again just as carefully as the first time, all the way through.

By now my shift was over, and I was ready to go to my parents' house to spend what was left of Christmas with my parents and Heather. Bobby's mother still hadn't arrived.

The nurse who replaced me, Cathy, had a very different style, which I admired. Cathy was an LPN who would probably spend her time playing cards with him, telling him clean jokes, funny stories, and laughing her head off. I left him in good hands, knowing he wouldn't be sad or lonely for the rest of the evening. Spending time with these kids in any way showed that they mattered to us. We knew how much we mattered to them.

* * * * *

I had the next day off, so I didn't know whether or not Bobby's mother had made it to the hospital until I was back on duty, December 27. As soon as I had the chance, I asked if his mom had visited Christmas evening.

The supervisor shook her head. “No, but she called and said the car wouldn’t start. Bobby accepted the explanation without question. I heard that she made it in yesterday, though, and was able to stay for a while.”

Whew. I wasn’t sure if it was really the car that couldn’t handle the trip or if maybe it was too hard for the mom. It didn’t seem to matter to Bobby. He seemed sweeter and more content than he a right to be, and no one wanted to see that smile fade.

* * * * *

He died on January 3. Almost every staff member and child from our unit attended Bobby’s memorial service. I don’t think there was a dry eye among the friends, relatives, nurse’s aides, nurses, social workers, physical therapists, doctors, nurse practitioners, and children in the chapel.

I cast a sidelong glance around the chapel and saw many sitting quietly with hands folded, an expression of anguish on their faces and tears escaping. Dr. Murphy – Jeff – with his eyes closed, appeared to be in a private, meditative place.

I couldn’t help noticing the sun’s rays streaming in through the stained glass windows, casting what looked like hints of rainbows over many who suffered there in the front rows, Jeff among them.

Afterward, I waited for him and he offered a sad smile when he looked up and saw me standing off to the side.

“Well, I wouldn’t have missed knowing Bobby for anything in the world,” he said. “And I’m thinking that most people in the chapel wouldn’t have either. I know losing him hurt, but loving him was worth the pain.”

Jeff watched as my defenses crumbled and the tears let loose like a dam had burst. He hugged me and then wrapped his arms around me tighter as I sobbed, gasped for air, and ruined his suit with my mascara. The patients and hospital staff had already filed out. There were a few higher-ups still talking to Bobby’s mother and younger brother.

Jeff escorted me out of the building. I thought he was taking me somewhere I could cry in private.

"Andy, I've been thinking about you ever since Christmas. In fact, I can't stop thinking about you. You're ruining my concentration."

Me? He was thinking about me? My nose was red and my eyes were puffy. It sounded like a compliment might be coming, but I figured it had to do with my nursing ability.

"I know we're not supposed to do this, but I want to ask you out to dinner."

I stared at him. "Do you mean as friends or..."

"Both." Smiling without the sad look, he said, "We'll have to keep it a secret at first, but someday, if we're married, there's not much they can do about it."

"Married?" I took in a huge breath and didn't even realize I was holding it.

"Well, yeah," he said. "If it's all right with you, I'd like to see you with that possibility in the back of my mind."

My hand flew to cover my mouth and I gaped at him. Hyperventilation took its toll a few seconds later, and the whole world went white. I closed my eyes and nearly fainted. At any rate, my knees crumpled beneath me. Fortunately, I didn't land on the concrete walk. Jeff caught me moments before I landed in the January snow.

Still in his strong arms, I opened my eyes, and when my vision cleared I searched his face. Jeff's familiar look of concern for another reached me somewhere in the depths of my soul. That's when I fell in love. I reached up and touched his cheek, my mouth still slightly open. He smiled, leaned in and kissed me. At first his lips barely brushed mine. He hesitated a moment but didn't move away. I could feel myself drawing toward his warm, offered kiss. I moved my mouth to his, giving him permission. Our first kiss was so tender, I was sure I was dreaming.

* * * * *

A few happy weeks later, we flew first class to visit his out-of-state family and announce our engagement.

On the plane, while Heather was asleep in my lap, I drifted off too and had a strange dream. It was only a moment, maybe five seconds long. I saw an olive-skinned, dark-haired Bobby offering me a candy cane.

I awoke with a start and told Jeff about my dream. He nodded and said that Bobby had given us many gifts but this was probably one of the more special ones. He believed, as I did, that maybe Bobby had “visited” us from the Other Side.

“Do you think he knows that he brought us together?” I asked.

“I think he does. I think maybe he was offering an engagement gift.”

We had already discussed having our wedding the following December. Heather would be the flower girl, Cathy, my maid of honor, and Jeff’s brother, whom I was about to meet, would be his best man.

“Sharing your life is the best gift I’ll ever receive from now on,” Jeff whispered. “Let’s not wait until Christmas. Let’s get married in the hospital chapel this summer.”

I grinned and kissed my beloved on the nose.

I shared the story with my future mother-in-law, at the kitchen table saying, “I’m glad I went to work on Christmas, if only for one little boy, and Jeff too, of course.”

She smiled and put a hand on my arm. “Gifts unwrapped and enjoyed under the tree with your loved ones will give you many wonderful memories. But because of Bobby, you and Jeff will probably spend part of the holiday reflecting deeply on the intended spiritual meaning of the day.”

“Yes, you understand,” I said, delighted. “And to think I resented having to work on the most unpopular workday of the year.”

Jeff overheard the conversation, but he didn’t bring it up until we were in bed later that evening.

“My mom thinks you’re pretty special.”

“Yeah, she’s pretty special too. I’m glad she understood the spiritual part of the experience. My own mother didn’t see it that way.”

“Ah, the mind of a scientist,” Jeff offered. “Many of my colleagues are like that.”

“Yeah, she always has to see the proof. I do in most cases too, but this is one thing I’ve never questioned. My faith in *us* is too strong.”

Jeff took me in his arms and pulled me close. “I don’t know what I did to deserve you, but I’m grateful.”

He kissed me as deeply and passionately as he had when our love was brand new, secret and forbidden. “I love you more than ever,” he said. “It’s hard to believe, but I’ll love you even more than this someday.”

I’ve told several special people all about Bobby. I’ve had to call him by a different name and leave out identifying details in order to protect his family’s privacy, but some children and staff members know the story. It’s a priceless piece of our family history. Even our future children will know about Bobby.

About the Author

Kidnapped by gypsies as an infant, Ashlyn Chase was left on the doorstep of the Massachusetts home in which she grew up—at least that's what her older siblings told her. It seems that storytelling runs in the family.

Ashlyn worked as a psychiatric nurse for several years, holds a degree in behavioral sciences and has been trained as a fine artist, registered nurse, hypnotherapist, and interior designer. Writing is one career she wasn't formally educated in, yet by sheer determination she's become a multi-published, award-winning author.

Most writers, whether they're aware of it or not, have a "theme", some sort of thread that runs through all of their books, uniting the whole mishmash into an identifiable signature. Ashlyn's identified her theme as involving characters who reinvent themselves. It's no wonder, since she has reinvented herself numerous times. Finally content with her life, she lives in beautiful New Hampshire with her true-life hero husband and a spoiled brat cat.

Ashlyn welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by Ashlyn Chase

Being Randy

Dear Sexy Lexie

Death by Delilah

Demolishing Mr. Perfect

Djinn and Tonic

Giggles by Gabby

Heaving Bosoms

Kayla's Birthday Present

Love Cuffs *with Dalton Diaz*

Quivering Thighs

Strokes *with Dalton Diaz*

Vampire Vintage

Wonder Witch



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer ebooks or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com