

Unraveled Yarns

It started as a joke.

Melinda's friends, Chelsea and Amy, ski instructors from her "other life"--*before the accident*--were visiting one evening when her service dog, Baxter, dropped a mangled, cobalt blue object on the coffee table. It turned out to be what was left of Amy's mitten. Apparently, Baxter liked to chew wool.

Amy laughed it off. "Reminds me of abstract art," she said.

"Enter it in an art show," Chelsea giggled. "Give it a pretentious name like *Submission* or *Omen*. *I dare you!*"

Melinda had never been one to turn down a dare.

Two weeks later, the ravaged mitten was on display with the title: *Annulment*. It won first prize.

The art community and the public were smitten with the attractive, wheelchair bound former athlete. It would have been awkward to come clean.

Melinda mentioned her misgivings to Chelsea and Amy, but they enjoyed the situation. "You go, girl!" they said.

Like her fall down the mountain three years before, her art career gained unstoppable momentum. As long as Baxter chewed and she came up with titles like "Maturity," "Jealousy," and "Calm Chaos," people were eager to write checks.

Then came Cass Benton.

The handsome news anchor was the type Melinda's grandmother would have described as "a dreamboat." Beneath his rugged, good looks and resonant voice was a warm sensitivity and an impressive intelligence. Other anchors read the news, but Cass appeared to know *everything*.

They met at an Art Museum benefit. Melinda had no expectations. After all, she was a paraplegic--a *chick in a chair*--who hadn't been in a relationship for a while. Cass had other ideas.

Suddenly, they were dating. If this weren't terrifying enough, she was also falling in love.

Cass told Melinda he admired her independence, success and imagination. What would happen when he found out she was a mitten-wrecking, service-dog-baiting, name-generating fraud?

Perhaps if she explained how the joke got out of hand, come clean before he found out some other way, she'd have a chance. But she kept putting it off.

Then one evening, Cass seemed distant and uncomfortable. "I need to talk to you," he said.

Melinda felt a wave of dread.

"I don't know how to start," he began. "It's about honesty."

Melinda held her breath.

"I don't know how to tell you this," he began painfully, "but I don't know *anything* about what I talk about on T.V. I'm an actor, not a journalist. I fell into

this job. Everything I read on the teleprompter goes in one ear and out the other. Nothing sticks. Everyone thinks I'm smart, Melinda, but I'm not. I'm just your average Joe."

Melinda laughed. "Is *that* all?" she asked. "I'm glad you're sitting down, Cass, because I have a confession for you."

And from then on, they were no longer a T.V. anchor and an artist, a former athlete and a hunk, or even a 'chick in a chair' and an average Joe. They were simply Melinda and Cass.

By Caroline Zarlengo Sposto