

*My Beloved*

Based on *If Only I Had Told Her* by Laura Nowlin

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As I hold the child, *his child*, the one I hold so dearly to my chest, thoughts of what could've been, *what should've been*, race through my mind. This child should've had a dad. A mentor. A coach in life.

*Finny.*

*My Finny.*

But she doesn't. He's gone. Finny, *my Finny*, is gone. Forever.

I remember those last moments. Right before he disappeared, never to return. I felt so safe in his arms, like I belonged there.

*My beloved*, he had whispered to me then. Nothing had ever felt more true. I was his and he was mine. Finny, the boy I had loved my entire life.

*Finny.*

*My Finny.*

As he let go of me for the final time, with promises of a fast return, I felt happier than I had in a long time. But I let him leave me. *I shouldn't have let him leave me. I should've done more to stop him. He would've listened to me, I know he would have. Finny always listened to me.*

*Finny.*

*My Finny.*

A soft cry wakes me from my trance. The child, *his child*, telling me not to be sad. A sign from Finny. Telling me that it wasn't my fault, that there was nothing I could've done. Telling me to move forward. To give this child, *his child*, the world.

I feel tears dripping down my face. *We should've had more time together.* As I imagine what we could've had, *should've had*, I am filled with immense happiness and sadness. I would've woken up every day to him in my life. Spent every day together with Finny and our child. Our family.

But he's gone.

*Finny.*

*My Finny.*

Another whimper.

*I love you*, he says.

"It's okay," I tell the child. "Mommy loves you. Daddy loves you."

*My beloved.*

I could feel the child calming down in my arms. She's a daddy's girl.

"My little Finley."

As she looks up at me, I can't help but admire the carefree shine in her eyes. The look of complete bliss. She's got his eyes.

*Finny.*

*My Finny.*

I get to look at him every day through her. I'm so lucky.

"Little *Beloved*." Those words feel right on my tongue. *Beloved*.

She smiles up at me, wonder and awe in her eyes. I'm her mother. This little girl is mine.

*My beloved.*

*Our beloved.*

I look up, seeing the picture of me and Finny, both twelve, at our birthday party. Next to it, a picture of the Moms and us as babies, about to leave the hospital for the first time. Under that, Finley, the Moms, and I, about to leave the hospital for the first time again. Without Finny. It's not fair that Finley will have to go her whole life not knowing her dad, but the amount of love she will receive by everyone who knew and loved Finny will be immense. She's going to have a huge family that will love and support her throughout her entire life. That almost makes up for the loss of her dad.

*Almost.*

But who's going to teach her to do all of the things dads teach their daughters? To ride a bike, to change the oil of her first car? Who's going to escort her down the aisle on her wedding day?

Another whine.

*You will be a great mother. Our daughter is lucky to have you. You can't stay in the past.*

"I know, Finley. I know." It'll be the hardest thing I'll ever do, but I have to move on.

Finley deserves more than a mother who cries all the time and can't get over what she can't control. I can't give her the world, but maybe just the ocean is enough.

She's smiling now, obviously satisfied with this conclusion. I am good enough for her. That thought alone cheers me up. *I am good enough for her.*

I twirl her around, and the sound that comes out of her mouth makes me laugh. Almost like it started as a screech, but then turned into a laugh. I twirl her a few more times, and as I complete each spin, I feel my worries disappear.

Yes, she will have a different life than many of her friends. Yes, she will never know her dad. But that doesn't make her any *less* than anyone else in the world.

Another laugh.

"My little beloved."