



Family
COMPOSITION
Affair

Saxon
Bennett

Family Affair

Saxon Bennett



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Biography

Saxon Bennett lives in New Mexico with her beloved partner and three fur kids. She is the author of ten novels.

Dedication

To Lin for her amusing and enlightening stories which serve
as the stuff fiction is made of.

Acknowledgments

To the real Annie and Jane for their cameo appearances—
you will be paid in biscuits.

Chapter One

“Rumor has it you’re holed up here pouting,” Lacey James said as she stood in the doorway.

“I am not. I’m working. I have a lot of editing to do and it’s not going well,” Chase Banter said as she sat at her desk. Chase’s two dogs of mixed origin, sat next to her with mournful looks on their doggy faces as if mimicking the mood of their mistress. They had been taken into her custody while she nursed her hurt pride and her smashed aorta. They seemed to ache for new company as Chase had been so quiet and self-absorbed. Fortunately for them, Lacey had appeared like their fairy dog mother.

Lacey scooted Annie, the black dog, away from her crotch. “Damn, I swear that dog reaches my cervix when she does that.” Chase looked up. “She wants to work for the TSA as an official underwear sniffer in search of contraband.”

Lacey laughed.

“What are you doing up here, anyway?” Chase’s attention

returned to the task at hand, primarily getting rid of Lacey so she could get back to work. She was now horribly behind because the household crisis had distracted her.

“Gitana called me. She’s worried about you. This is the longest you’ve held out and she really wants to talk.” Lacey moved a stack of papers and sat on the blue leather couch. “This place is a mess.”

Chase studied her best friend. Tall and thin with brown, shoulder-length, fashionably cut hair, Lacey had an upturned nose and a pointy but not unattractive chin. Her parts taken separately should have made her pretty but somehow put altogether they made her only interesting looking. Lacey rued this fact but worked hard to conceal it. Chase had told her she had what Jane Austen referred to as a not unpleasing countenance. This did not hearten her, having never read Jane Austen.

“I know where everything is.” But she conceded that the writing studio was a scary place. It had been a guesthouse of questionable nature. She would never have allowed anyone to stay in it except her mother, whom she loathed. She and Gitana had completely gutted the inside and started over. It was utilitarian pine—wood floors, a coat of sunflower yellow paint, a cast-off couch, a wooden coffee table full of nicks and stains, and three burgundy wingback chairs Chase had dug out of her mother’s attic which was filled with unwanted furniture.

“What is all this anyway?” Lacey pointed to the wall and then the ceiling. Cork panels ran the length of one wall at eye level where Chase attached her storyboards. She’d run a cord from the front of the studio to the back where she hung index cards that held her character notes. “It’s how I keep track of things.”

“I thought you had it all in your head.”

“That’s a common misconception.”

“Oh, you writers are so misunderstood. Now, when you’re going to talk to your girlfriend? It’s really stupid that I have to drive from Albuquerque when you two are only separated by a few steps.”

“The studio is half an acre from the house,” Chase informed her.

“Yeah, yeah. Why the hell you live in the middle of nowhere, I’ll never understand.”

“I like the mountain views and my flower garden and it’s not technically the middle of nowhere. It is thirty-eight miles north of downtown. A mere forty minutes from the conveniences of New Mexico’s largest city.”

“You sound just like the realtor that sold you the house eight years ago. You live up here because you hate people. Just admit it.”

“You know me so well we could be kindred spirits.” Chase glanced down at her notebook and thought of *Anne of Green Gables* and wished she had been as fortunate as that vivacious orphan in the kindred spirits department.

“Don’t be so hard on Gitana. I’m sure there’s a good explanation hiding in there somewhere.”

“Like immaculate conception. You can tell her they used to stone adulteresses in the virgin birth days. I’d like to know how you’d feel if your significant other had been puking every morning for a month, finally goes to the doctor and comes home to tell you she’s pregnant.”

“You’re overreacting.” Lacey scratched Jane’s head as the dog climbed up beside her on the couch. Annie was napping at her feet.

“Go away.” Chase turned back to her desk and tapped her pencil.

“I can see where I’m not wanted. I’m going to talk to Gitana.” Jane licked her face. “At least you like me.”

“She’s not home.”

“For someone who doesn’t care you’re sure keeping tabs on her.”

“Don’t you have a Jazzercise class or something?” Chase opened another of her notebooks and began scribbling.

“This is my rest day. Why don’t you call me when you’re done

brooding.”

“I’m not brooding. I’m working.”

Lacey gave the dogs another pat on the head and left.

Chase’s notebook blurred as her eyes filled with tears. She quickly wiped them away. She never cried unless something incredibly painful occurred like the time she fell off the pump house roof and dislocated her shoulder. She had cried and then puked.

She could cry, she told herself. First, she’d been angry and now she was depressed. How had this happened to them? Gitana wasn’t one to stray. She had been pursued a time or two but that was to be expected owing to Gitana’s very pleasing countenance, but she laughed them off as idle infatuations. No one could ever replace Chase in her heart. Or so she had said.

The dogs woke up and barked at the French doors that opened up onto the small deck. Chase saw Gitana’s white Land Rover pull up in the driveway. That used to be a happy sound. It meant an end to her solitary day. The orchid nursery that Gitana ran was just outside the small town of Cedar Meadows ten miles away. They decided when Gitana started the business that having it on the property wasn’t a good idea—too close to home. The nursery employed people and Chase disliked most of the human race. She was certain that she was a modern descendent of the anchorites that lived in caves—communing only with God so the story went. She figured it was just their excuse to steer clear of people.

She looked over at the dogs. “You’re staying put. Don’t be traitors to the cause.”

Annie sat down obediently. Jane took one look at the door and sailed out the loose end of the screen that had served as a doggie door ever since they broke through it to chase a rabbit. Chase had never bothered to fix it. Annie followed suit.

“Come back here you Benedict Arnolds!” Chase yelled.

They were on the stairs and across the front yard by the time Gitana was in the gate with a bag of groceries.

“Hi, girls,” she said, before they floored her and she dropped the groceries.

“Girls, girls, get down,” Chase yelled as she ran across the yard. The dogs had crushed a carton of eggs and were licking the yolks with great fervor. She stuck her fingers in her mouth and let out a piercing whistle. Both dogs stopped licking the sidewalk and sat at attention—Alpha had spoken. “You’re grounded. Report to your room immediately.” They slunk, tails between their legs, to the sunroom.

“They’ll both get sick now,” Gitana said, her beautiful almond shaped eyes not meeting Chase’s. She pulled back her disheveled long hair, twisting the dark mass into a French knot like she so often did—the gesture broke Chase’s heart. She tried to pick up the egg shells while Chase salvaged the rest of the groceries. Gitana started to cry. “I can’t live like this.”

They were still kneeling. Chase saw her wretchedness. “Hey, don’t cry.” She reached out and held her.

“I miss you. I miss the dogs.”

“I miss you too.” Chase brushed away her tears. “Come on, let’s get the rest of this inside then I’ll hose what’s left of the eggs off the sidewalk.”

Chase didn’t know if going back to the house was her anger caving in or the simple resignation of her depression. She couldn’t live without Gitana, anymore than Gitana could live without her, whatever this was they’d get through it.

They carried what was left of the groceries into the sunroom where Annie and Jane were sitting like perfect angels who had no prior memory of their transgression.

“Right. You two are still in trouble. Five minutes of grounding.” She held up five fingers. Not only did the dogs understand voice commands when they deemed fit, they also responded to hand signals, because those most often supplied treats. Both dogs went to their beds. Chase put the milk and butter in the fridge.

The phone rang and Gitana picked it up. “This is she. Hello, Dr. Bertine.”

Chase reached over and clicked on the speakerphone.

“We regret to inform you that it appears that your chart was mixed up with another woman with the same last name. You were both scheduled for the same time slot last month on the second. This produced some complications as you were scheduled for a pap smear and she was scheduled for artificial insemination. This is most regrettable. If you decide to keep the baby we will, of course, pay all medical costs.”

“How about a fucking college education for the kid, you moron? And how come it took you so long to figure out how it happened? Were your files like the lost Dead Sea scrolls?” Chase shouted at the phone.

Dr. Bertine cleared his throat. He appeared to realize his ass was in a sling. Chase savored the moment. She’d spent four days in relationship purgatory. Now, it was his turn to sweat.

Gitana pointed to the living room. “Go sit. Right now.”

Chase stomped off toward the living room, but not before she turned around and scowled at the phone.

“I’m sorry. My partner is a little upset by all this.”

“A little?” Chase shouted from the living room.

Gitana finished the call without the speakerphone. She came and sat on the couch next to Chase. “He says I can terminate it.”

“I’m sorry I doubted you.” Chase felt the weight of ultimate contrition.

Gitana took her hand. “I didn’t mean for this to happen.”

“I know. It’s not your fault. It’s just so...unsettling.” It was the only word she could think of to describe this. She liked things ordered and settled. She chewed the cuticle of her forefinger. There had been incidences where mix-ups occurred. Mark Twain used it in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. It was the entire premise of the book, but then one had to adhere to Coleridge’s willing suspension of disbelief. She couldn’t see how it would work in this instance. If she had used this premise in one of her novels her editor would have tossed the idea as preposterous, yet what didn’t ride in fiction was here in fact. “I just don’t understand it. Didn’t you think

something was odd? I mean a pap smear and artificial insemination are extremely different procedures.”

“Not really. I mean, you sit on the exam table, spread your legs, scoot down like they tell you and relax like they tell you, which is virtually impossible, and the doctor sticks something cold up there. The nurse did wish me good luck, but I just thought she hoped that I didn’t have cervical cancer.” Gitana frowned.

Chase took a deep breath. “It’s a horrid mistake. What, one Ortega is as good as another? Oh, it’s just another Hispanic woman with long dark hair—you all look alike. That’s racist. Someone should have checked.”

“I know. They were busy that day and they made a mistake.”

“A major fuck-up is more like it.” She looked over at Gitana who appeared more miserable than Chase felt. “It’s all right. We’ll get through it. We always do.” She took Gitana’s face in her hands and kissed her softly.

Chase got up to go. She needed to go to the writing studio and think. She did her best thinking there, like Winnie the Pooh, who sat on a log and thought, usually about honey.

Gitana pleaded, “Don’t go.”

She gave her that look which would make Chase chew off her own arm if Gitana asked her to. She sat down and tried to look cheerful. Gitana wrapped her arms around Chase’s neck and then kissed it. Chase’s nether regions did a loop-de-loop and thoughts of Gitana’s warm body reminded her of the four days of deprivation. She kissed her, their tongues getting reacquainted.

Gitana kissed her harder. She pushed Chase down on the couch and reached for her. She pulled off Chase’s T-shirt and ran her hand up her stomach, sending shivers across her body. Gitana reached under her sports bra and caressed her nipple, taking it in her mouth and running her tongue around it. She undid her shorts, slipping her hand under Chase’s underwear.

“I missed this,” she said, pushing her fingers inside Chase who wrapped her legs around her and moaned.

“Me too.” She struggled with Gitana’s jeans. Gitana helped

her with her free hand until Chase found what she was looking for. They moved against one another with the precision of years of practice. Chase came first and Gitana followed up momentarily. Chase liked that. It made her feel like they were in sync.

They lay there for a moment in a tangle of clothes. “Want to take a nap?” Chase asked.

“I’d love to. I haven’t been sleeping well lately.”

“Me either. If you’re not there to steal all the covers I don’t feel right.” She got up and took Gitana’s hand helping her up.

“I don’t steal the covers. You throw them off when you’re hot and then roll on top of them.”

“And then you steal them,” Chase said, as they climbed the stairs.

“I’m going to get a video camera installed in our room.”

“I didn’t know you were that kinky,” Chase said, raising an eyebrow.

“Not for that! I only wanted one so I can prove my point.”

Chase pulled back the covers. She watched as Gitana took off her T-shirt. She’d never tire of her body, her round firm breasts, her curvy hips and her flat smooth stomach.

“What?”

“I love you,” Chase said.

Gitana pushed her back on the bed and then climbed on top of her.

“More?”

When Chase awoke, pink and yellow covered the mountains outside the bedroom window. Twilight had set in and she knew they’d had a good long nap. She rolled over. Gitana was on her side and she was crying. “What’s wrong?”

Gitana turned to face her. “I don’t want to kill the baby.”

Chase wiped away her tears. “Oh, that.” She hadn’t given it much thought. She was still basking in their reuniting—the other problem had taken a back seat. “Well, we don’t have to go that route, exactly,” she said, although she couldn’t think of another route. She didn’t like the idea of Gitana being some sort

of baby-maker that turned her baby over to someone else after it was born. It didn't seem the correct choice for them.

Gitana started to cry again. Between sobs, and she said, "I know this isn't what you wanted, but he or she is here now, with us."

Chase rolled on her back and studied the ceiling. The bedroom windows were pumped full of setting sun. She would suck at parenting. What if it was a boy—how was she going to teach him to pee? Did boys inherently know how to hold it? This was big—far bigger than she'd ever be ready for. Of course, everything they'd done so far was a risky adventure that always panned out in the end. Why not this?

Gitana sniffled. "Chase?"

"I'll have to take parenting classes because I'm not going to be good at it."

"No, you won't. You can do anything you set your mind to." Gitana wiped away her tears and suddenly looked resolute.

This made Chase apprehensive. Gitana had sallied forth and it was her duty to follow. She gathered up her limited things-I'm-good-at-resources and said, "Can I pick out the clothes and read to him or her?" Aside from writing, those were the only two things that came to mind. She loved to shop and loved to read. This kid would have everything, including a well-stocked library, but not be spoiled. She didn't know how she'd work that one out, but she was certain there must be a way.

"Anything you want." Gitana kissed her.

Chase rummaged around for her own clothes. "My mother will be ecstatic." She found Gitana's underwear and one sock.

"I hadn't thought of that."

Chase heard trepidation in her tone, but then anything to do with Stella gave trepidation. "Do you think the dogs have figured out they're no longer grounded?"

"I'm certain Annie can count." Gitana handed Chase her bra which was under her pillow for some reason.

"I can just see her, one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand."

Gitana hugged her. “I love you.”

“You’re not so bad yourself.”

“Chase!”

“I love you, too.” Chase knew that this might turn out to be the best decision of her life or at least she hoped so. She wasn’t necessarily a believer in happy endings. Perhaps it was all those Brothers Grimm fairy tales her mother had read her as a child. Stella had odd child-rearing methods.

*We hope you enjoyed this
Bella Appetizer.*

