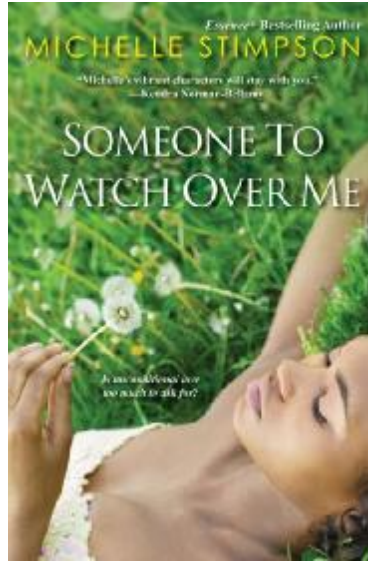


Excerpt from



[“Someone to Watch Over Me”](#)  
by Michelle Stimpson

Nurses came scrambling out with a wheelchair. Thankfully, they had the wherewithal to secure my car and grab my purse. I was transported straight to an examination room. They asked me a ton of questions that I couldn't answer because I was in such agony I couldn't even think straight anymore. Their faces blurred by tears, their words overshadowed by my wailing. I just wanted them to knock me out and do whatever they had to do.

“Who can we notify for you?”

I cried, “Nobody! I came by myself!”

“Have you taken any drugs, Miss Henderson?”

“No!”

“Is there a possibility that you could be pregnant?”

Home-training aside, “No, no, no to everything, alright?”

After they asked everything they could possibly inquire about – including my insurance – a doctor finally entered the room. She asked me two questions about my symptoms, had me lay flat on my back, and pressed one area on my stomach that made me want to slap the judge.

I didn't have to tell her she'd hit the spot.

“Looks like it's your appendix. We'll have to operate right away.” She glanced at my chart again and ordered the nurses to prepare me for surgery.

“Miss Henderson,” the pesky nurse drilled me again, “We have to notify someone before we can proceed. Don't you have *anyone* we can call? Grandparents? Cousins?”

I shook my head violently as, now, a fresh batch of tears spewed from my eyes. These, however, came from a different well.

“How about co-workers or a friend or a boyfriend?”

“He won’t pick up – he’s on a flight.”

“It doesn’t matter. We can leave a message, we just have to let someone know. It’s the law.”

“Kevin.” Then I gave her his number and someone whisked me off for surgery. “And call my job for me, okay?”

“We’ll do that later.”

The last thing I remember was a woman saying, “I’m gonna stick this needle in your arm and you’ll be on your way to la-la land.

I remember thinking, “Lady, you can stick a needle in my *eye* if it’ll get me out of this misery.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Unfamiliar surroundings caused a brief panic as I returned to a state of consciousness. An I.V. in my arm, sterile whiteness all around me.

“Miss Henderson?” a soft voice called.

My voiceway obstructed, I instinctively reached for my throat and felt plastic tubing.

“No. Wait just a second – I’ll take it out.” A red-haired nurse with extremely fair skin stood over me now. Her presence brought everything in to focus. The first thing I realized was the absence of the excruciating pain that had taken over my entire being earlier in the day, replaced by only a tenderness in the area.

In one sweeping motion, the nurse extracted the cylinder from my mouth. Like ripping tape off someone’s mouth, no use in belaboring the action. A few coughs later, I managed to eke out a request for water.

The nurse obliged me only a sip, saying I shouldn’t eat or drink anything until the anesthesia wore off. “Don’t want you to lose whatever you put down.”

I wanted to tell her that after all I’d been through, I was a professional vomitter.

The next thing I remember with clarity is eating jello, trying to convince myself that it was okay to swallow again. The surgery was over, but I still needed to satisfy my psyche. One bite. Wait. Another bite. Wait. Before the next bite, I examined the jello. My taste buds must have been asleep still because I wasn’t able to taste much. I had to rely on texture. Gelatin made with real sugar was thicker than jello made with artificial sweetener. My fork sliced through the shiny red substance easily. Splenda.

I’m pretty sure I slept like a baby for most of my two-day hospital stay. There was little to occupy me except an occasional visit from the doctor or a nurse. I could have kicked myself for leaving my laptop in the car. The outside temperature was cool enough to prevent damage to my equipment, but the workload would certainly swell with neglect. If only I’d had someone I knew come by, I could give them my keys and ask them to go get my bag.

Kevin called once, between meetings, to check on me. “How are you feeling?”

“Much better.” I powered my bed to an upright position. “How’s it going in Chicago?”

“Sweet. I think that pharmaceutical company I told you about is going to award us the account. It’s huge. Seriously – huge.”

“That’s good.” I wish I could say I listened to him go on and on about the deal, his residuals from it, and how his team would probably win the contest if they got this one, which meant a trip to St. Lucia for us both, but as exciting as all that was, something else caught my attention. Actually, it was the lack of something that struck me. I didn’t have any flowers in my room. Not one balloon, not one card.

Voices from the hallway spilled into my room, and I watched for a moment to see who they belonged to. First appeared a woman about my age with her hair pulled behind a white, cloth headband. She wore a full-length halter dress and flip-flops. The child, probably her son, hopped from tile to tile as he traveled alongside her. She told him to stop it because hospitals were no place for leaping.

Slowly, a man came into view pushing an I.V. cart. The patient. They were a family, I figured. The mom and son had come to visit the father. A few elderly family members trailed the man. Maybe his parents. They talked about whether or not the man would still be able to go to “D-I-S-N-E-Y land,” the grandmother spelled out, presumably so the child wouldn’t understand the topic.

As I watched this family’s snapshot, the absence of flowers, cards, and balloons seemed minor in relation to my saddest revelation. No one had come to see me.

I broke into Kevin’s impending-sales-victory train with a question. “Do you think we’re ever going to be a family?”

He stuttered, “Wh-what?”

“A family.” I spelled it out for him, “Me, you, kids, your parents.”

“Tori, we’ve already talked about this.”

I sighed. “I know, I know. It’s just that I’m sitting here in this hospital all alone and—”

“You’re having a moment, babe. Don’t get down about it, alright? You’ll be up on your feet in a few days. This moment will pass,” he assured me. “I gotta go. I’ll call you when I get a chance.” He hung up before I could even say good-bye.

My eyes began to sting and lumps jumbled in my throat. *I’m having moment?* A moment of wanting someone to care enough to check on me? This ain’t no Twix commercial, this is life. I didn’t want a moment of being cared about – I wanted someone to care about me every day.

I blinked back the tears because crying, like vomiting, was not my forte. The last time I could remember crying, I mean shoulder-shaking, snot-flying crying, was when my mother told me *not* to cry.

I was sixteen and had just delivered a stillborn baby boy.