Life is Strange: A New Year

by Tangent101

Summary

Chloe is blazing and chilling in her room for the New Year when she gets an unexpected call from the last person she expected to hear. Can she truly alter her fate? And what happens if she does? (This story takes place before the events in Life is Strange: Before the Storm.)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
An Unexpected Call

Life is Strange: A New Year

by R. A. Howard

The stub of my joint glowed as I baked, the only light coming from the glowing panda on the bookshelf on the far end of my room and light filtering in through the window. Midnight. Another fucking New Year. I glanced at my phone and then looked away. Like Max would fucking call. She's moved on.

I blinked back tears. The house was too fucking quiet; Mom was out with that fucking asshole she'd dragged home from the diner, David. I swear, she didn't wait a year after Dad died before she... I scrubbed my eyes. Fuck that. I could put on some music but first... I inhaled deep, feeling the heat of the embers from the joint. Any more and I'd burn my lips or fingers.

I held my breath, trying hard to keep the smoke in as long as possible, when my phone rang. I started coughing as I startled, the stub falling from my fingers and onto my shirt. I quickly beat it out before grabbing my phone, and flipped it open without even looking at it. It was probably Mom checking up on me. At least she still cares a little...

"Yello!" Silence greeted me on the other end. Okay... "Um, this a butt-dial?" I snorted and lifted the phone to my eyes, the glow making me squint as I looked at the number... Max Caulfield.

"C-Chloe?" I heard a hesitant voice through the phone's speaker, barely audible.

For a moment I couldn't move as I stared at the phone, my eyes starting to burn and my lungs ache. I forced myself to inhale and brought the phone back to my ear. Casual. Nice and casual. Don't need to... "What the fuck do you want?" I winced. Damn it! "Um, I mean hi!" There was a long pause on the other end and I sighed. "Fuck. I didn't scare you off, did I?"

"No, I'm here. I-" I heard a small gasp on the other end and had to smile. She'd also forgotten to breathe. Well, either that or she was busy getting some New Year's nookie and her boyfriend had dared her to call... my stomach twisted at the thought of her with some damn Seattle hippie. Sheesh, where'd that come from?

"Wishing me a happy New Year? Man, how much did you have to drink? Did you spill wine all over your parents' rug again?" Yeah, Max, drink? That'd be the day.

"Fuck you, you spilled it, not me! You wouldn't share!"

I grinned as I imagined how miffed she had to be looking. "Dude, you had your chance. You chickened out of it so I got the spoils of the booty. And if I remember, you grabbed the bottle from me. Lush." We'd gotten in trouble when we'd been caught but... damn I missed being with Max. I closed my eyes, the smile fading from my face.

She laughed back, a small breathless laugh I'd nearly forgotten. I heard something rustle over the phone. Paper? "Chloe. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, you should be! Mom was furious! Though more for you wasting a bottle of good wine and staining her rug." My eyes blurred and I rubbed them dry.

Max broke in as I paused for breath. "Not that. I—I've been a... how'd I put it? A chickenshit. Um.
Chloe? Do you bel—" she paused and let out an exasperated sigh. "This is nuts."

"What's nuts, Max? That you actually called me after who knows how long? I was giving up on you!" I winced again. The weed had gone to my head and loosened my tongue. Well, that and the two beers I'd had earlier. Fucking A, Chloe, way to go. At least I've not made a total ass of myself yet. I shook my head and tried to focus.

I heard her inhale and then pause, her struggle almost audible. "Chloe. I—I just woke up after taking a selfie. I was holding the picture and then found myself holding a letter saying it was from the future."

Wait. What? "Oooookay. So been nipping the bud there, Maximus?" Seriously. How drunk is she? But she's not slurring her words...

"Chloe, it said you're going to die. That I had to talk to you. It gave me dates. Things that would happen. Proof!"

I paused, my thoughts racing. "Okay, Max. Let's pretend you're not shitting me—"

"I'd never joke about this!" Max cut in, her voice almost squeaking. I felt my lips quirk upward as I visualized Max pouting and all angry. She was so adorable when she got mad. "Look, the first one's not for another three days. Some football game, predicts who wins and the score. Another one a day later. And..." her voice petered off.

"And?" It had to be a prank. It had to be. But... scores? And what else? "Max? And what?"

She drew in a breath and started to speak again, her voice all tight and stressed. "And an earthquake. In two weeks in Haiti. In Port-au-Prince. She didn't' know when exactly, she thought it was the 12th but you know me and dates."

Earthquake? Football scores? What the fuck is going on? "Okay. Start at the beginning. Who sent this letter?"

"I did. I think? It's kinda my handwriting. It's not exact but close? The letter says you'd meet a girl, Rachel Amber, and she'd die six months before I come to Arcadia Bay and—"

Wait, what? I broke in. "Wait You're coming back to Arcadia Bay?" My heart was pounding in my chest and I forced several slow deep breaths to try and calm down.

"Not for a couple years?" Max sounded confused and I heard the paper rustle again. "It says in 2013. That's when—that's when it says you die. That Nathan fucking Prescott shot you in the girl's bathroom and you had blue hair and—"

"Blue hair?" Okay, I'd always wanted to dye my hair but blue?

"-and that I could travel through time and I saved you and there's a storm and you wanted me to let you die and..." she broke down sobbing. My heart clenched and I involuntarily reached out. Yeah, like I could somehow reach through the phone and touch her. Fuck I miss you Max.

"Max. Max. Calm down. Calm down. It's okay, I'm right here. I've got the same boring blonde hair. And no one's going to shoot me. No one gives a fuck about me here. I skip school, no one gives a shit. I could quit today and no one would miss me. No one's going to kill me."

"What if it's true? My future self begged me to text you! To talk to you! I don't want to lose you!" I heard Max sniffle through the phone and sighed. Even if I could afford a Greyhound, Seattle was
over six hours away. But I sure as hell wanted to hug her right now.

We both were silent as I pondered. Okay. Earthquakes. Football... why football? Hmm. "Max?"

"Chloe?"

"Look, could you... well, e-mail me the letter? Type it in. Don't skip anything. We've three days before that first prediction. If it comes true..." I sighed. The weird thing is, I believed Max. She'd never think up something this crazy. But I could see her writing down things to prove it if this was real. "Well, I don't know. But we may already have changed things."

"How?" I heard another sniffle.

"Well, were you planning on calling me tonight?" Of course you weren't. But I could have called you...

The phone went silent again and after a painful pause a plaintive voice responded "I wanted to?"

"But you were too chickenshit to. Like you said," I said, my tone teasing. "But we're talking now. And I know... when'd you say I die?"

"Um, October 7, 2013," Max responded, her voice cracking again.

"Sounds to me like I just have to avoid using the bathroom then. Or call in sick from school. And I could dye my hair red! Though blue is rather cool, like Priss in Bladerunner!" I smiled and could envision Max rolling her eyes at me. "So yeah. E-mail me the letter and we'll figure things out. I mean, assuming this ain't a joke and you're just trying to get in good with me again," I added with a grin.

"I wouldn't do that to you, Chloe!" She sounded on the verge of tears again and guilt gnawed at me. She was really shook up over this. Then again, so was I.

"Max, I know. Okay, do you need to get going?"

The phone went silent again and then I barely heard Max's voice. "Can we talk more? I miss you."

My cheeks ached from my smile. "Of course we can. You can tell me all about the cute hipster guys you're dating and I'll bore you with tales of skipping class, tagging walls, and being a deadbeat."

"You've more of a life than me. I don't do anything. I don't have any friends."

Well, fuck. My heart almost broke at the plaintive admission. "You have me, Max. Always and forever."
Echos from the Past

Chapter Summary

Max and Chloe touch base as Max starts to type the letter from her future self into the computer when Chloe comes to a chilling realization

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The phone was silent. For a moment I wondered if Max had hung up on me until I heard rustling. Paper. Max always insisted on propping her papers up on books before she typed them into the computer. I probably should boot up my own computer to receive her e-mail but my bed was so comfy and I felt... fuzzy. It was the weed. The weed and the beer and having my best friend... my only friend, on the phone with me. After a moment I could hear Max's voice. "I'm sorry, what was that?"

"Hmm? Oh, sorry. I was talking to myself," Max responded. She did that sometimes and it was adorable. She was such a dork at times. I loved every bit of her. It was why her silence hurt so much, especially after she promised me we'd stay in touch and told me she loved me. I still have that tape stashed away somewhere safe. "So... Joyce remarried?" Max asked, and I heard the clack of keys as she started typing.

I blew air out of my lips. "Yeah. Working at the diner must have knocked some brain cells loose. She found some lost ex-military type who tries to boss me around and tell me how to live my life. You know what he said when he moved in?"

"What?"

"That I'd enjoyed enough of a vacation from having a father figure," I snarked, mockingly trying to mimic his voice. Okay, it was a truly sucky imitation, but let's be honest. He's a sucky person, he didn't deserve the effort to properly mock him.

Max sputtered over the phone and I couldn't help but smirk, though I went wide-eyed at Max's next words. "Wow. He truly is a step-douche!"

"Holy spitballs, Max, where'd you learn language like that?"

Max went silent for a moment. My cheeks started to ache again as I grinned. She had to be blushing up a storm right now. Little Maxine Caulfield, saying things like 'douche' and 'fuck'... next thing I know she'll be toking it up and drinking! Nah. Be funny to watch her drunk though. I sighed, thinking back to the wine incident. I should have given her the bottle.

"Um... it's in my letter. It..." Max sniffled and then her voice got forced. "Chloe dies on October 7, 2013. We're a chickenshit, ah, that's why she called herself a chickenshit! "We never got in touch with her. I went back to Arcadia Bay for my senior year and I dragged my fucking heels and I saw this cool blue-haired girl shot by Nathan fucking Prescott in the girl's bathroom and then woke up in my classroom. Everything repeats but I find I can reverse time. I save the girl and find out she's Chloe and things go shitty for you. Er, her. Um... where was I?"
"Things went shitty," I helpfully reminded her. Wow, future Max was dropping f-bombs left and right. She almost sounded badass. Well, as badass as Max could be. It's like watching a kitten try to be all tough and all... it's cute, but the moment the kitten opened its mouth you know a pathetically adorable little mew was going to come out of that mouth.

"Thanks! Joyce remarried a step-douche named David Madsen. He's head of security at Blackhell. Real fucking number. Yeah, he saved my life once but he hit Chloe! More than once if I remember... and then it goes on about Rachel Amber and the storm," her voice petered off and I frowned.

"Head at Blackwell? Hmm. He's unemployed right now," I said, my thoughts racing. That's the last thing I needed was for Sergeant Dickhead to start following me around Blackwell all the time. "He and Mom got hitched last fall. All he does is tinker around with this ugly muscle car that breaks down all the time. You said he hit me?"

"Um... the letter said that. He didn't?" Max asked, her voice soft.

"Dude, if that asshole hit me, Joyce would have his balls for garters. No, he just speaks down to me all the time and act like I'm some soldier for him to command. Asshole probably was a private digging latrines but you know men. They got to act big." Actually, I didn't remember if David ever talked about what he'd done. He just droned on about being a soldier but it was all talk, no action. What the fuck does Mom see in him?

"Ah," Max said and the keyboard started clacking again. I was halfway tempted to ask her to read the letter to me. I was dying to hear more about it. Especially about Rachel. She had started attending Blackwell last year and everyone loved her. Why the fuck would she be interested in me? The phone was silent but for the clacking of the keyboard for a good minute when Max spoke up again. "So, how's school?"

Naturally I let my rapier wit and sardonic charm respond. "Um, what?" Oh fuck. I sure wish I had Max's time-travel talent. Um, future-Max's talent. How does it work anyway? Okay, she can jump back in time somehow... with pictures? Max said something about a selfie. And she possesses her past self but Max didn't remember what happened... I scrunched up my face, trying to think. Fuck. Why does that seem--

"Chloe? Are you okay?" Max's voice called out and I realized I'd been busy navel-gazing.

I shook my head and glanced over at the phone, picked it up from the bed where it had fallen from my shoulder. "Sorry Max. I was thinking."

"Wow. School must really suck if you have to think how it's going," Max teased and I couldn't help but laugh.

"Look at you, all snarky! You're feeling better," I said and stretched in bed. She'd been so withdrawn that last week before she'd left for Seattle. What the fuck were Ryan and Vanessa thinking anyway, making Max break the news to me? She finally works up the courage and tells me... the day Dad dies.

My eyes started to burn and I clenched them shut. It still fucking hurts. I'd go to sleep and I'd be riding in his car. Country music would be playing on the radio, Dad would sing along, and that fucking truck would come barreling through the intersection and I wake up screaming. Not that chased off Step-Ass. No, he scolded me for waking Joyce up and then tried to get all understanding. Like I fucking want to hear about his problems. Asshole. What am I thinking about again? Fucking David, you ruin everything. I need to listen to Max anyway. Bad enough we drifted...
"Sorry Max. My thoughts are a bit scattered. I was--" I paused for a moment. Dad's death really tore Max up too. *Lie? No. No lies, not with Max.* "I was thinking about Dad."

A sniffle broke the silence. It took me a moment to realize it was from the phone rather than from me. "I'm so sorry, Chloe. Sorry I couldn't be there for you. Sorry I couldn't do anything. Hell, if I could go back in time, why not go back and save your dad?"

_Fuck. Oh fuck me. No._ My thoughts raced. This was what I'd been thinking of. _What if she didn't have a picture though? But Dad took one and she started acting weird right afterward.... "Maaaax? Do you remember when Dad died? That day? When he left?"

There was a pause on the phone and then Max spoke reluctantly. "Sort of? It's all jumbled. I mean we found our old time capsule and I told you I was leaving and then--"

"No. Before that," I said, my voice rough. _Why would she... what happened?_

She paused longer this time. "I-- I don't... I went to your house and we were hanging out and William left. You said I was acting weird and sprayed me with water and I grabbed the sprayer and we had to change clothes and started cleaning your room."

I started to laugh. I'd forgotten that. "Oh yeah and we blew up those Barbies! That was so cool! We'll have to have a water fight next time we're together and find more dolls to blow up!"

"Definitely. That would rule!" Max's voice was almost reverent, her earlier sadness fading. I hated to drag her back to that... but I had to know.

"Okay. But remember how odd you were acting just before William left? He took our picture and you just-- started acting off."

Once more the phone went dead. After half a minute Max spoke. "What picture? I don't remember him taking our picture."

I nodded and then shook my head at myself. Next thing I'd be gesturing at the phone. "Do you remember William actually *leaving*, Max?"

"I-- um. No?" Max said in a tiny voice.

"Max, you went back in time before," I said and took a deep shuddering breath. "You saved Dad."

"But-- but he's dead!"

I closed my eyes as they burned again. _What happened? What, did I die instead of Dad? _"Yeah. I think you changed things back, Max."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay. The chapter didn't really want to write itself. Interestingly enough, it was "Farewell" that finally knocked things loose, as this chapter will show (with the Farewell homages). Sure, I hated "Farewell" and find it to be pandering and idiotic in nature (you might notice some of that snark in Chloe's thoughts) but at least it was far
truer to LiS continuity than Before the Storm was.

What's funny is that Chloe's revelation was not intended. I'd been trying to figure out if I should skip ahead and exposition Max and Chloe touching base but reveal the letter sooner, or go through Max writing the letter. The former is easier. But easier is not always better and something in me said I needed to show more. Starting with an information dump is not good writing. Yes, I know many older science fiction authors did it but that doesn't make it okay.

There is one thing I do like about Chloe's realization about future Max going into past Max on that fateful day... and that is it shows Chloe isn't stupid. She's not. She was a nearly-straight-A student (though seriously, "Farewell," we see pictures of Chloe excelling in track-and-field, why do you have Max having phys-ed be where she's "better" than Chloe?) up until her father died. She has the potential to be that once more. (So many writers have her be a tattoo artist or a mechanic but Chloe loved science. Once she pulls herself out of the pit that is Arcadia Bay she could be so much more.)

So yeah. Having her realize something was off with past-Max and even work out that "maybe I died" as a reason as to why Max changed things back? Well, it not only shows that Chloe is quite bright when she applies herself... but also sets the scene for what's going to happen next chapter possibly. Though I'm not entirely sure, Max and Chloe haven't told me everything that is going to happen.

This story is like a sonnet. It has a specific structure and form... but within is tremendous freedom. It is a scary way of writing, something I've not done for some time. But it is also inspirational and keeps me from getting bored. I'm as interested as you all are in what's going to happen next.
All Good Things

Chapter Summary

All good things sadly must end, and that includes New Year's Eve phone calls. But was it all just a dream, will Chloe's life come crashing down once more?

Chapter Notes

I've chosen not to abbreviate Chloe and Max's text messages for ease of understanding and because I'm unfamiliar with texting abbreviations. Until a couple years ago all my friends had to pay for each text, so it was cheaper just to call them. That and my phone gives me word options when texting so it's easier just to write things out. My apologies if this stretches the suspension of disbelief.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

We both fell silent. Outside I heard the slam of a door, followed by a second slam. Low voices filtered through my window and it took a moment for me to realize... that was Mom. And David. "Fuck! Um, Max? I'll call you tomorrow. Just-- just copy that letter and e-mail it to me and I'll read it when I wake, okay?"

"What's wrong?" Max asked. I heard her draw her breath between her teeth, something she would do when she started overthinking things. Damn it David, you have to fuck everything up by existing! Just when I was starting to connect to Max again!

"It's not you! Mom just got back with Sergeant Pepper. Have to run, sorry!" I heard the key jiggling in the door and stood, taking a swift glance around. Nothing obviously incriminating but... I stepped over to the glowing panda and turned it off.

"Good night, Chloe!" Max sounded sad as I flipped the phone shut, hanging up on her. Fuck. But she doesn't need to hear me getting lectured by that fuckhead, especially after he'd knocked back a few brews. Mom definitely traded down when she married that dickhead. I'd give anything if Dad were still alive. But... I guess I did, didn't I?

I sat back on the bed as I heard Mom and David walking up the stairs, David's voice low as he said something to her. Was that a giggle? How much did you have to drink, Mom? David's not funny. Okay, so his mustache does look like it could crawl off and start eating leaves on its own but outside of that he's not funny. It fucking sucks, I want to talk to Max more. Wait a moment... I law back down and flipped my phone open to start writing a text.

Sorry I bailed. Didn't want to deal with dickhead. It rocked talking to you. I stared at the text. Too much? Nah. She'll eat it up. She's probably busy second-guessing herself and blaming herself for my bailing. I hit Send before I could talk myself out of it.

A few seconds later my phone dinged as Max texted back. I cringed, staring at the door, hoping the Migraine Master hadn't heard, but a moment later I heard Mom's bedroom door slam shut. Another
faint giggle penetrated two doors and the squeak of the bed. And another. And another giggle. 
What the... oh God no. Please let him be too drunk to do anything! Please! Oh fuck no! Fuck my life!

I switched the phone to vibrate mode to avoid attracting any attention and flipped it shut without reading Max's text. Pulling a pillow over my head I tried to ignore the sound of bedsprings squeaking or the soft thud of a headboard against the wall. I'm not drunk enough for this shit.

Room's bright. When did it get bright out? What's going on? I rubbed my eyes and the pictures strung up by the dormer slowly came into focus. Max had taken them all. She loved that I hung them up, told me it was like her own personal gallery.

Max!

I bolted up in bed and winced as the room started spinning. My hand pressed down on something hard and smooth and my fingers closed around my phone. I'd fallen asleep with it next to me. What fucking died and crawled in my mouth? Man, sometimes I hate cigarettes. Tastes like I was sucking on the ashtray.

My head started to throb. Like some fucking noob, I didn't drink any water before bed. Even if I'd not drunk enough to feel it, I was still hung over. Fuck, hangovers are bad enough but I didn't even get buzzed. Well, not really.

I glanced down at my hand and the phone I was still grasping. Did last night happen? Did Max actually call? If I flipped the phone open and her text was waiting for me... but if I don't, then it's Schrodinger's message. It both exists and doesn't exist at the same time. Sort of like when I dreamed of Dad, he's alive until that fucking truck smacks into the dream and wakes me up. I don't want Max to be a dream.

My vision blurred as a tear tried to make its way down my cheek. I scrubbed my face angrily. You're a fucking coward, Price. Open the damn phone already.

I pulled myself up and staggered to the door, letting procrastination win for the moment. I edged the door open, glancing down the hall. Fortunately Mom's door was shut tight. The house was quiet. I don't know when I fell asleep but I don't remember listening to them for that long. My headache spiked as I turned on the bathroom light and I fumbled the cup, letting the toothbrushes fall onto the counter. I rinsed the cup a couple times and then filled it, chugging the water down quickly. I filled it a second time even as my stomach tossed. Water on an empty stomach sucks. Normally I bake first thing in the morning but with classes out, David would be lurking and looking for things to yell at me about. He overcompensates for that tiny dick of his.

My mouth tasted slightly better after the second cup of water and I splashed water on my face before turning the faucet off. One pee break later and I snuck back to my room. The phone sat in the middle of my bed, mocking me. Fucker. Screw that. I plopped down in front of the computer instead, powering it up, while I blinked blearily out the window at the entirely-too-bright January morning. Finally the computer finished its morning calisthenics or whatever the fuck computers do when booting up.

Come on already. Wait. What's my password? Fuck David, I never had to have a password until he started snooping around everywhere... ah, there we go. I opened my e-mail and froze.

An email from Max Caulfield. Subject: Letter from the Future.
It wasn't a dream. Max called me. The screen suddenly blurred and I scrubbed my eyes dry. The mouse cursor wiggled as my fingers trembled... and I let out a sigh as I clicked the email.

Chapter End Notes

And once more the infamous letter ends up procrastinated upon. Only bits and pieces of it ultimately will make their way into the story, but even so I've had enough problems with this segment that I chose to cut the chapter short rather than include the third part as Chloe starts reading what future-Max had to say.

I must admit, this is one of the more difficult parts I've had writing. I know what comes next. I have fun planned with it, especially when I introduce Rachel into the story (especially as my Rachel is going to be perhaps a little bit less the manipulative gaslighting brat that BtS crafted and closer to how she was depicted within the original story). But this is still a vital part of the story, laying the groundwork for much of what is to come.

Hopefully you've enjoyed it. Even if I drag my heels with the letter itself. ;)

End Notes

I will admit I was inspired in part by another fanfic, "All the Scars You Cannot See" by Vengesim - insofar as the basic premise - using an early picture to send a message to the past. I kind of go a different route though (with future-Max leaving a letter for herself rather than contacting Chloe), and this story's going to be from Chloe's eyes and perspective which will limit things a bit but make it more interesting I think. I do highly recommend Vengesim's tale (which is complete), which does provide for happily-ever-afters.

As for this tale? I know some of the branches it will travel down. I also plan on incorporating some elements from "Before the Storm" into the story... because it doesn't make sense not to. But there were a couple reasons I chose to use January 1st, 2010 as the starting point. It allows for a more damaged Chloe and a more damaged Max to try and fix things. That and I just like the thought of Max taking a selfie at New Year's Eve. It seems a very Max Caulfield sort of thing to do.

I must warn you updates will not be that rapid. One thing I did with this first chapter was put it aside for a few days and then transcribe it into a new document file while rewriting and editing it. This worked well actually and allowed this to be a far more polished work than a number of my past stories I've posted elsewhere (which I'll get around to posting here in time, though I might rewrite them in turn and polish them up as well). Given the first part worked as well as it did? Well, I'd much rather try to capture lightning in a bottle again and give you all the story you deserve. The story that deserves to be written.

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