



Heartless
DOCTOR

EMMA SPENCER

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A Single Dad Second Chance Romance

Emma Spencer

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Chapter One

The Man Who Changed my Mind

Olivia

I have had the worst luck for as long as I've known. And that week, I was reminded of all of it again. On Friday, I attended a close friend's parent's hundredth birthday party. My mother died during childbirth, and my father overworked himself to death trying to provide for me.

On Saturday, I attended the wedding of a colleague at the hospital. My boyfriend disappeared as soon as our daughter was born. On Wednesday, a close friend of mine had her third baby. I lost my daughter after she turned five.

I'm not listing all these things because I'm jealous of the people I've mentioned. I'm just trying to talk about how unlucky I am when it came to this game of life. The only thing I seemed to have lucked out on is my job here... no wait, that didn't work out properly. I wanted to be a medical doctor, but I ended up as a traveling auxiliary nurse.

It's not a bad job. I get to help the patients and work closely with the doctors to make their jobs easier. When I remember the faces of gratitude I got to see while I worked, I don't even complain. But... I felt so alone. I watched my friend circle get smaller and smaller. Everyone was getting married or forming

new families. I was the only one who seemed unable to move on.

I tried... believe me, I tried. But when you get abandoned by someone who promised to marry you—who would have at least not disappeared when you were still pregnant, stayed an extra year to help out while you went to medical school while raising a child, or maybe stayed until your child died before moving on—you wouldn't even know if it would be worth trying.

“There's no point thinking so hard about it,” I sighed as I tried to focus on the event.

My eyes were tired. I scanned the room and saw some of the younger nurses talking with some of the good-looking doctors who had come for the conference.

Another thing... I was twenty-eight, old news to most of those men. I didn't bother myself trying to get into the romance thing. Besides, who'd want to be with a woman who had already had a child once and lost said child?

It was different that day. Sitting next to me was a man who seemed to be in his early forties. Just like me, his eyes seemed tired. His brown hair was neatly drawn back, he had a trimmed beard and wore glasses that rested on his nose elegantly. His body was bulked with muscle but not extremely; and even while seated, he was taller than me.

He seemed like one of those sexy doctors in romance novels who was a sadist. I swallowed hard as I tried to peel my eyes away.

“If you stare too much, I'll blush,” he said as he adjusted his glasses. His voice was gentle, but the baritone gave him a power boost.

Just like that, my eyes weren't so tired anymore.

“I'm.. I'm sorry,” I apologized and looked away immediately.

He didn't say anything, and I could feel my heartbeat.

What was this? It was a new sensation. I could feel his gaze. I know I mentioned that I was old news to most men, but I did get the occasional lecherous gaze. Another thing my terrible luck didn't attack, it was my body: D-cup breasts, a gift from motherhood that didn't sag, thighs soft enough to rest a tired head as said by my ex-boyfriend, and childbearing hips—all a testament to what I once had.

What would it be this time? I wondered as I felt his gaze. Strangely, there was nothing lecherous about it. In fact, he only focused on my face. He didn't seem disgusted. I looked at him from the corner of my eye, and those tired eyes of his were accompanied by a smile. He noticed that I had caught him staring and looked away to focus on the event at hand. It was his gentle smile that didn't leave, even as he looked away, that drew me in.

“I guess it's your turn now,” he offered.

My turn?

I racked my brain hard before realizing that he meant it was my turn to stare at him.

I'm sorry, stranger but unlike you, I'm actually a woman who will have sinful thoughts about you later because she has zero chances of doing anything with you.

I placed my hands on my thighs and took in a deep breath, then turned to scan his body properly. His arms were big and seemed strong, making me wonder how being hugged from behind would feel. The announcer said something, but I didn't care. Whatever he said caused my stranger and everyone else to clap. I shifted my attention to his hands, those big hands that made me realize almost instantly that they would do a magnificent job on my pussy if given the opportunity.

I got a little excited while thinking about it. Then my eyes went lower to his groin. He raised his left hand towards my face stopping me.

“Okay, that's enough,” he said calmly.

“Hey, why are you interrupting me?” I frowned.

“I was expecting an innocent gaze, but I feel like I’m being touched sexually under your gaze,” he replied, but he didn’t sound offended in the slightest manner.

“Does it offend you?” I asked.

“No, that’s the funny thing. You don’t want to arouse me here,” he warned in a whisper.

“Why is that?” I smirked.

“You should buy me a drink first,” he said.

“Ah,” I held back the urge to laugh as I leaned back in my chair.

Where are we hitting on each other? Probably my imagination. Something like this didn’t happen often. After I lost everything, I tried. But it always seemed like there was kind of a spell placed on me to ward off good looking men.

I’m not a sex addict or anything, but there were moments when I would miss my ex’s touch, and I had to settle with my fingers, taking matters into my own hands or consensual humping my pillow until I soaked it. So having a man who didn’t mind the thoughts I was having was a gift. And to think I nearly didn’t attend the conference.

“Isn’t it your turn?” I asked.

I wore a navy-blue dress that revealed a little of my thighs. I sat at the end of the row of chairs, so there was no one watching my side. As for his side, a man had somehow miraculously fallen asleep. We were in a situation where no one bothered us.

“To stare?” he responded as he started to stare at my face.

“Come on, you don’t have to be so respectful; you can look at other parts,” I teased.

“No it’s just.... Your face is so beautiful, and you and I have similar eyes,” he remarked as he reached for my face, stopping halfway. “May I?”

I didn’t say anything but leaned toward his hand. As my face made contact with the warmth of his palm, I couldn’t pull

away. I didn't want him to pull away, either. When was the last time anyone told me I had a beautiful face?

Maybe, he was one of those men who pretended to be interested in only one...his fingers started to move on my face. His thumb gently played with the corner of my lips. I didn't have lipstick on, just some gloss. Well, even if he was like those men, I didn't mind it the way I would if it was the rest of them.

He let go of my face, and I almost voiced my protest. He was still staring at me; and judging by the smirk on his face, he had noticed my attempt to protest.

"You're quite interesting," he said.

"You flatter me," I said as I looked away and focused on the stage.

"Are you married? Or in any relationships?" he asked.

"No," I replied without looking at him. "What about you?"

"Same boat..." He sounded like he wanted to add something but decided to leave it unsaid.

"Were you asking because you didn't want an affair?" I asked.

"I'm just being cautious," he replied.

"Cautious? I doubt you even see me sexually," I sighed, "focusing only on my face."

"Do you want me to look at you?" he asked.

I turned to face him; the tired look in his eyes had disappeared. There was this intensity left in them that is hard to describe.

"Go ahead," I said.

Just like an unspoken rule was being followed, I looked away. I had created a new kink with a stranger I had just met and would probably never see again. He stared at my neck and quickly settled on my breasts. I felt his gaze stay there longer than I'd expect.

A boobs man, huh?

I took in a deep breath to push out my chest properly. I wanted to show off, but his gaze started to make me feel hot. He lowered his gaze down to my thighs. I didn't mind it until I found myself spreading them slightly open. I honestly don't know why I was doing it. All I know is that I was.

I glanced at him from the corner of my eye, and he seemed interested in what I was doing. I closed my legs and he looked ahead. I was out of breath.

"That was nice," he said, "I correct my earlier statement about your face being beautiful... it's your entire body that's beautiful."

"I was expecting you to say sexy," I said.

"Well if you think about it, you are indeed sexy," he said. "But anyone can be sexy after trying. In my eyes, if someone can pull off that appeal without even trying, then they're beautiful."

I stared at him in wonder.

"Who are you and where did you come from?" I asked.

"Ben, a lonely doctor from Richmond," he replied. "What about you?"

"Olivia, a nurse that has no permanent job," I said.

"Oh, you're a traveling nurse?" he asked.

"Well, yeah," I shrugged.

"Fly in, to Richmond sometime," he suggested. "I'll be sure to take good care of you."

"I don't doubt that" I said with a smile.

He was brilliant. We hadn't said much to each other about ourselves... then again what we discussed can't be regarded as... much. I was drawn by his relaxing aura. I could tell he was hiding something...well, a lot of things, but it didn't seem like the red flags I'd actually worry about. I wanted more of him. His hand on my face had made me feel so safe and wanted.

“If it’s just for tonight, then I don’t mind,” I said to myself.

“Looks like they’re done,” he said as he got to his feet along with everyone else, “Thank you for your company.”

I got up and held his arm, stopping him in his tracks.

He turned to look at me, “Are you in a hurry to go?”

It was the last day of the conference, and it was already around seven pm-ish.

“Back to my hotel,” he said.

“Can I get you that drink?” I asked.

“I don’t mind,” he said with a gentle smile, “But my mother wants me home by nine.”

“I promise.”

I took him to one of the best pubs in London... in my own view.

“Do you drink often?” he asked.

“No, I’m usually here for the snooker,” I replied.

“Snooker?”

“Pool or billiards,” I explained as I pointed at the empty table with the balls.

“Oh, I see, are you very good?” he asked as he took off his coat.

I knew he had muscle bulk, but I didn’t think it would be the kind that would look sexier with only a dress shirt. He pulled down his tie and removed the first button.

“I’m quite the beginner,” I replied.

“Liar,” he smirked. “Let’s make a deal. I win, I pay for the drinks. You win, I’ll do whatever you want.”

Whatever I want?

“Do you really want me to do whatever I want?” I had to confirm.

He took a step closer, towering over me, “I’ll be all yours. I can take whatever you want to dish out.”

I swallowed hard. I normally played pool during my free time to help me stress out. But this offer was too good to turn down.

He handed me the stick, “what do you say?”

“I’ll get the drinks,” I said.

When we started playing, he put up more of a challenge than I thought. It wasn’t a best-out-of-three game, just one, and I almost thought I’d lose. Then he made a mistake, and I took my opportunity to win.

“Let’s have a rematch,” he said.

“No, we had a deal that it’s just going to be one game,” I reminded him.

I don’t know how I managed to win, and I didn’t want to try again before my unlucky traits would kick in.

“Dang,” he sighed and took a sip of the beer I had bought. He didn’t seem displeased about losing though. “What are your demands?”

I swallowed hard as I thought about what I wanted him to do to me... I mean, *for* me.

“How about a hug?” I asked with open arms.

“I can manage that,” he replied. “But I was going to give you one for free anyway, so it doesn’t really count.”

He hugged me, and it felt just right. Having his big powerful arms around me, just made me feel safe. I hugged him back, I felt like my body was going to melt into his, and I didn’t mind one bit.

“If only this wouldn’t end,” I whispered inaudibly.

“You feel so soft,” he whispered as his hand caressed my head.

I was probably making a mistake, but it's been ages since a mistake like this felt this right.

"I still have my command left, right?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"I feel a little dizzy," I said as I hugged him a little tighter, "If you don't mind..."

"My hotel isn't far from here," he said.

I was going to tell him to drop me off at my place before I crossed the lines my heart was telling me to.

"Thank you," I said.

It wasn't any good. If anything was going to happen that night, I had a feeling that I would regret it if it never happened.

"I want to be sure that whatever happens if we get there..."

"As long as you're not planning to murder me."

His embrace tightened. "I would never dream of such a thing."

I rested my ear against his chest and listened to the wild pounding of his heart. "Let's go to your hotel."

"It's bigger than I thought," I said as I stepped into his hotel room.

He helped me take off his coat from my body. I had forgotten my coat at the conference center and only remembered it as we left the pub. He offered me his coat... the gentleman that he was.

"Really? Seemed small in my eyes," he said as he set aside the coats on the rack and closed the door.

"Considering the size of my apartment, I would say this is huge," I explained.

He smiled. "Remind me to change that."

"Now then," I said as I looked at him. "What do we do now?"

He didn't say anything, just casually walked up to me like how a wolf would approach a prey that didn't have any means of escape. He held my hips and pulled me close to him.

"I'm going to kiss you," he said in a way that told me that he wasn't going to take no as an answer.

I closed my eyes and got on my toes, resigned to my fate. He kissed me. There was a taste of mint. He had probably put one in after the beer. Never mind that...his lips were bliss. I had never gotten a kiss like this.

It felt like I pressed my lips against a soft pillow that seemed to have an intensity I didn't expect. I opened my mouth slightly, and he captured my upper lip, kissing and sucking on it gently. I wasn't feeling dizzy before, but I was now. He left my upper lip and bit on my lower lip pulling it closer.

I opened my eyes and looked at him. His eyes opened at the same time, the glasses resting on his nose almost slipping off. He opened his mouth, freeing me. I took off his glasses and held his face. My thumbs played with his lips. I felt his hands leave my hips and descend lower, resting on and then squeezing my ass. His fingers sinking in seemed to delight him.

He kissed my forehead and bent lower to kiss my neck, before biting into me.

"Ah..." I groaned softly.

"Mmm..." he murmured as he pulled me even closer. I wrapped my arms around his neck to get a good grip on him.

He started to tug at the bottom half of my dress, slowly pulling it up. I pulled away and looked at him. The hem was just right below my ass.

"Can I?" he asked.

I nodded repeatedly. He lifted it and bared my ass. I wasn't a fan of tights so all I had on was a G-string. His hand pressed against both my ass cheeks and squeezed them a little before turning me around. He bit into my neck again as he pressed his groin against my ass.

His right hand rested on my stomach holding me in place. "I'm going to touch you now."

"Yes, please," I replied shakily.

His left hand made its way between my legs and touched my pussy from the protection of the fabric of my panties. Because of what he was doing to my neck, I knew I had already soaked them.

"How are you this wet already?" he asked.

"I don't.... Ah!" I stopped speaking as he used his tongue to trace a line along my ear before putting it inside of me.

His left hand was making a circular motion against my panties, causing my pussy to protest. I wanted him to touch it directly, but I had the feeling not to interrupt his process. He continued to touch me, using my panties as a shield. His right hand held my chin and forced me to look at him; then he kissed my lips.

I was getting impatient, moving my hips gently, hoping it would provide a chance for my panties to move aside and let his fingers get access my pussy directly. He understood my impatience and finally moved my panties aside, two of fingers caressing my core gently. He pressed against my pussy lips and gently massaged them with his fingers, moving from a slow gentle forward and back movement to a faster circular motion.

"Oh my..." I gasped as my legs started to shake a little.

It was different from when I did it myself. My fingers always felt so small when I tried to handle it myself; but because of how big his fingers were, it felt like I hadn't been doing a good job. One of his fingers started to play with my slit, moving forward and back.

"You hear that?" he asked.

I listened closely and could hear the squelching of my pussy.

"All that liquid and no part of me has gotten inside you yet," he stated. "Just how sexually deprived are you?"

“I’m not... ha...ha.” I wanted to protest that I wasn’t sexually deprived but what was the point in lying?

“You’re not... what?” he asked as he placed the tip of his finger in my pussy.

“Not... nothing,” I replied as I tried to lower my hips to let the rest of his finger in but he wrapped his right arm around my stomach and held me up.

I was right about him being a sadist. Only the tip of his finger stayed in me and circulated a bit before he pulled out and played with my clit. Did he want me to beg?

“Please, I can’t take it anymore, do something,” I pleaded as hard as I could.

Just as the words left my mouth, his finger raced inside of me, causing my legs to buckle. He led me to the bed and made me lay on my stomach while continuing to finger me for the thrill of it.

When I left for the conference that morning, I didn’t expect to be half-naked and having my insides toyed with by someone I’d just met.

“Ahhh!” I moaned loudly as he introduced a second finger and moved it all the way in.

He started to flick against my insides, twisting me just the way he wanted.

“I love the sounds you make,” he said proudly. “I was right to call you beautiful, Olivia.”

I couldn’t talk. I started wiggling my butt just to get a better dose of his fingers until he pulled out. I turned and land on my back as my left hand raced to my pussy, offering me a temporary calm after the fire he had caused. He stared at his finger I had soaked and back at me.

“I’m sorry...” I apologized, although I wasn’t sorry at all. It was his fault for making me soak this much.

“It’s no matter,” he said as he licked his fingers and stared down at me. “We’re just getting started.”

Chapter Two

The Woman who Changed me

Ben (*Before the hotel room; before the conference*)
Richmond

Dr. Ben Sullivan, forty year old, is a successful billionaire surgeon, and the oldest of the Sullivan brothers and a terrible father.

“So how is grandma treating you?” I asked softly.

“She’s okay,” Chloe, my five-year-old daughter, replied.

“And you, are you doing okay?” I felt a little uneasy asking.

“I’m doing alright,” she replied.

“Did you get the toys? And the books?”

“Hmm.”

It felt strained. Every time I tried to communicate with her, it felt strained. I wanted to be a good father, a good role model or something, but it didn’t seem like it was working. I was always on trips or trying to save someone’s life.

“When are you coming, Daddy?” Chloe asked, disrupting my thoughts, “Grandma made cookies. They’re good!”

“I’m sure they are, but I don’t think I’ll be able to taste them today,” I apologized. “I’m sorry my angel.”

“It’s alright, see you soon daddy,” she said.

“Soon, I love you,” I reminded her.

“Love you too, byeee,” she said before hanging up.

I let out a tired sigh as I buried my face in my palms.

“He does not look good,” Ethan said.

“You’re telling me? I can see it too,” Ian agreed.

Ethan and Ian Sullivan, my younger brothers, were better known as the Sullivan twins. They both had their hospitals and were billionaires, but both their personalities were way different. Ethan was an outstanding surgeon, a social butterfly and had the highest success rates among all of us, but he was extremely careless, needing Ian and me to bail him out.

Ian, the youngest of us, was more cool and collected; his quietness made him seem alienated from the rest of society. But he was a kind man, and Chloe once said he was her favorite uncle... removing Ethan who used to be her favorite, after Ethan damaged her birthday cake by accident.

There was no discord between the three of us, and whenever there was a crisis in one of our lives, the rest of us would turn up. I was still going through a crisis of my own.

“Are you sure you don’t want Chloe to have a mother figure?” Ethan asked. “I know some of female friends who have been wanting to meet with you.”

“No thank you,” I replied. “They’ll all be the same way. I don’t...”

“Feel anything for women like I used to,” Ian completed my statement. “While I understand your doubts and all, it’s still a fact that you’re doing a terrible job as a father.”

“There you go being all harsh again; that is why nobody likes you,” Ethan hissed at him then turned to me. “The brooding man is right Ben, you can’t keep neglecting Chloe. Even when Dad was alive, he still looked out for us.”

“Dad wasn’t a billionaire with multiple medical centers under his command was he?” I asked, rhetorically.

“No... but, never mind,” Ethan powered down.

I understood what he meant, but I couldn't afford to lose my company standing.

“Look, we can help you run things, take a month off and look after Chloe, properly, or get a new wife,” Ian said.

“Get a new wife? Like is there a market out there where I could just buy one with a widower's discount?” I smiled wryly and Ethan snickered at my statement.

“Very funny, but at this rate Chloe is going to see Mom as more of a parent figure than her own dad,” Ian said as he reached for the pack of mints I kept on my table. “Are you still going for the conference?”

“I have to, and maybe something interesting might happen,” I replied as I opened the brochure for the event.

“I don't want to sound like Ian here, but don't you think maybe after the event, you should slow down on operations?” Ethan asked. “You have the most talented staff compared to the rest of us, so I'm sure they can handle themselves if you were to take some days off.”

“Both of us aren't fathers, but we want what's best for you and our niece,” Ian said.

“Thank you. You're both right. After this conference and I settle things down next month, I'll get more breaks because of Chloe,” I concluded.

“I'd love to help with management, but I'm planning to do a special program involving fly-in nurses sometime soon, so I might be occupied with that; but I promise to help out in whatever way I can,” Ethan offered.

“No problem, then.”

My brothers were right. To be honest, I had already considered most of what they advised. For instance, I tried finding a new wife, but none of the women I encountered ever felt right. I knew that whomever I would feel a connection with in my heart would also make a perfect mother for Chloe.

The problem was that none of them were causing the effect I desired.

The trip to London wasn't one I was really excited about. The first two days were educational and informative. I got to learn from other doctors and so on and so forth, but I just wanted to go back to Richmond and talk to Chloe.

On the third day, as I made my way to my seat, I noticed a lady dressed in navy blue dress. Her eyes were closed but she wasn't asleep. I could tell because she would occasionally touch her hair. I was drawn to her just by looking at her. I made my way to the seat next to her and sat down. When she opened her eyes and started to look at me in the manner she did, I felt moved.

It was the first time in how many years that my heart pounded in the company of a woman who wasn't my late wife. It was her voice and the naughty nature she did poorly at hiding. And just like mine, her eyes were tired. The difference was that I felt she had gone through so much and was trying her best to live positively.

I wanted her; in fact, I desired her so badly. We had just met, and I knew nothing about her; she could have been a criminal, a murderer, or someone sent to assassinate me, but I didn't care. When I touched her face, how she fit so perfectly against my palm, or when she asked me to gaze at her just the way she did to me, it all felt too good to be true.

I started to be grateful that I actually came to London. As I had her in my hotel room, under the mercy of my fingers, there was nothing better I could ask for.

"We're just getting started," I said to her as I licked off the honey she had drenched my fingers with.

"That's what I like to hear," she said as she pulled the gown off her body.

Her dress made her breasts look smaller, but her bra told a different story. She took it off and lay on her back before slowly lifting her hips to reveal her panties. I wished the hotel lights weren't so dull so I could have a better view of her

pussy. I started to undo my buttons and remove my shirt. She waited for me patiently as I joined her in being completely naked. I knelt by the bed and spread her legs open.

“It’s dirty...” she warned.

“I don’t care,” I replied as I buried my face into her pussy and took a whiff of her scent.

She smelled insanely good. The scent of her womanhood spoke of an experience that I couldn’t easily figure out.

“You’re... embarrassing me...” she whimpered as she held my head and tried to push me away, but I remained put.

It would be a waste not to eat her out. I kissed her pussy like it was her mouth, sucking on her labia like my life depended upon solely pleasing her.

“Oh...yeah... like that...,” she refused me at first, but now she held my head in place as I made her body quiver.

I was lost in her taste. Using my left index finger and thumb, I spread her pussy wide open and licked the pink flesh that revealed itself. I licked the flesh and the taste was as sweet as those nectars from hibiscus flowers I used to suck on as a kid. I focused on the stiff doorbell that sat atop her pussy, flicking against it furiously with my tongue.

“Haaa,” she gasped; her grip left my head and instead focused on my hair.

I was a little worried that she’d uproot my hair, but at the same time it seemed like a small price to pay if it meant that she felt good. I left her clit and slid my tongue deep into her. After years of being celibate, I worried that I had gotten rusty, but her voice....

“Oh please, please... more,” she pleaded as she started to slowly move her hips.

Well, it seemed like I was doing a good job. Her body started to quiver as she stopped moving. Her legs locked around my neck as the first wave of her climax hit her. She let go of me when she had calmed down but she stared at me hungrily.

“You’re not satisfied yet are you?” I asked as I got to my feet and stroked my cock.

She licked her lips, “Not until I’ve... not until I’ve returned the favor.”

She got down from the bed and knelt in front of me. She stroked me gently with her right hand and licked the base of my member.

“You’ll have to forgive me,” she said, “I haven’t done this in a while.”

“It’s al...”

My words were cut short as the tip of my cock made contact with her mouth. The slimy warmth and a tongue that seemed intent on penetrating my urethra was driving me nuts. She attacked only my tip and she maintained eye contact with me.

“Is this... is this revenge?” I asked.

I saw the smile in her eyes. She opened her mouth and let the rest of me inside.

“Godddd,” I groaned as I threw my head back in pleasure.

I had stayed away from sex and even masturbation so I guess everything about me had gotten extra sensitive with the negligence I had built up over the years. She released my cock and licked the underside of my shaft before going lower and placing my balls in her mouth.

“Whoa... whoa...” It was my turn to hold her head in place. She started to move her tongue, stimulating my lower nerve. Her left hand caressed my stomach as she continued her meal.

She let go of my balls and got to her feet pulling my head down and kissing me. It was perfect. Then she pulled back.

“My jaw hurts,” she said as she stroked me gently.

“But I’m not satisfied yet,” I said.

“Hmmm... well, I have another mouth that would be eager to swallow you up,” she said in a sultry voice.

She kissed my chin and pushed me toward the bed, causing me to sit down immediately. She put her hand on my shoulders as she got ready to impale herself on my cock.

“You might want to help me out,” she said with a nervous chuckle.

“With pleasure,” I said as I held her ass and spread her open, directing her hips to sit atop my cock.

I guided my dick into her pussy. She lowered her hips, and I got to feel its warmth. She was a little tighter than I expected so I could only get the tip in. She started panting heavily.

“You’re too tight,” I said.

“I’m not, you’re the one who’s just too big,” she complained, “...just... just give me a sec.”

She took in a deep breath and I aided her. We were able to slide the rest of my cock in. Her insides were a little bumpy and gripped too tightly against my cock.

“Oh my goodness... I’ve needed this,” she said with relief as she kissed my cheek.

“I thought you said you weren’t sexually deprived?” I teased.

“Oh hush, big cock man,” she murmured as she kissed my lips.

I kissed her back as we remained still. I could tell she was trying to get used to me being inside her, so I didn’t try to rush her or anything.

“I’m ready,” she said softly as she lifted her hips gently and lowered them.

I felt like busting, but I managed to keep myself under control.

“You... you seemed like you were about to lose control...” she said as she continued to bounce slowly. She leaned back and used my legs as support as she started thrusting her hips.

I watched my cock go in and out of her from a slow pace to a faster one. I held her waist and started to pull her to me as

fast as I could. The wet sounds of her pussy, the clapping noises that the collision of our bodies caused, and her moans—everything filled the room. The room had suddenly become an orchestra house filled with sounds of our pleasure.

I wondered if she felt it too.

Olivia

I felt dirty... good dirty. I was someone who had tried her best to stay away from men. I mean, they naturally stayed away from me without trying, but Ben wanted me. As I rocked my hips against him, with his cock hitting the right spots, I could tell that I wanted him as well. I knew he was capable of so much more.

“I think you should take... control,” I said.

Immediately as I said the words, he lifted me pulling his cock out and tossed me on the bed. Before I could even realize what was happening, he lifted my legs and offered them to me to hold up. I did as I was told and got ready to receive my reward. He used his cock to slap against my pussy. Pressing it against my clit, he was slapping it again. My clit felt so sore and delighted at the same time.

He slid his cock into me and started to move. There was no slow pace; he just started to go at it as hard and fast as he could. I closed my eyes giving into the pleasure he had freely offered me.

“Don’t... don’t close your eyes, else I’ll stop,” he warned.

I managed to open my eyes, and I found him staring at me.. His left hand found my breasts and squeezed them gently before feeding me two of his fingers. He pressed his fingers on my tongue. I used my tongue to play with them as he assumed a scissors shape and attempted to cut my tongue. While he kept my tongue occupied with one of his hands, his other hand joined in the assault of my pussy, rubbing against my clit while he continued to pound me into submission.

“Ha.. ha.. oh my.. easy.. easy damn you!” I yelled, but I knew him taking it easy on me was the last thing that I wanted.

“You good?” he asked as he continued his pace. He kissed me before I got a chance to reply, “I know you can handle this. You’re a good girl aren’t you.”

I lost every urge to complain.

“Yes...yes I am,” I replied shakily. Hearing him call me a good girl while fucking me like I was a bitch, made me shiver.

“Good,” he said and kissed me again as he reduced his pace, turning his thrusting movements into circular ones.

I was getting close and I could tell that he was as well.

“I’m going to cum,” he warned.

“Me too,” I said amidst my panting, as I also approached my climax. “Ngh!”

“Ha... ha... I can’t... hold it in anymore,” he warned.

“Go ahead, it’s a safe day,” I said.

He continued his movements until he finally released and a few seconds in. I gave into my pleasure and climaxed as well. I stared at him. We were both out of breath...and it felt right.

Ben

As I filled her insides with my seed, I couldn’t stop thinking about what I had done. I leaned forward and kissed her gently on her forehead, then went down to her lips.

“This was the best night I’ve ever had in the past four years,” I said.

“Five years for me,” she admitted with a chuckle, “Thank you for giving me something good to dream about.”

I was still inside her, so I pulled out and lay beside her, gently caressing her pussy.

“Mmm,” she moaned gently, “Easy cowboy, I just came, so I’m still too sensitive to touch.”

“Sorry about that,” I apologized. “I hope I didn’t hurt you.”

“Even if you did, I’m a medical practitioner. I can get it checked and fixed,” she assured me.

“Well, that’s a little reassuring,” I chuckled.

“Want to shower together?” she invited.

“Why not?”

As we bathed together, I still found it difficult to take my hands off her. She was what I had been unconsciously searching for all these years. I didn’t know much about her. But I knew one thing: it wasn’t about the sex. Nor the kissing. She had stolen my heart that night. After I had thought it impossible for anyone to do so. As we laid down to turn in for the night, I was scared to fall asleep.

What if I had already fallen asleep and all this was a dream? If I fell asleep... what if she disappeared?

“You’re making a scary face,” she said with a sigh.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized.

“Can’t sleep?”

“Scared to.”

“Why?”

I couldn’t tell her.

“No reason,” I said.

“Well, whatever it is, I hope it doesn’t keep you up all night, Ben,” she said.

“Alright, good night, Olivia,” I said.

“Goodnight, Ben,” she whispered.

I decided to try and stay awake. But listening to her soft breathing lulled me to sleep.

Chapter Three

Good... Morning?

Olivia

I couldn't sleep. I mean... I could, but I didn't want to. Knowing my luck, if he woke up and saw me there, he might get upset. I heard this kind of thing was called one-night stands. Going by the law, I was supposed to disappear by morning, but waiting for him to fall asleep was the problem.

When I heard the gentle snore, I got up and started to get dressed. I turned my attention to him, and he was still fast asleep. I wanted to touch his face and revel in how beautiful he was, but I decided to hold myself back or I'd risk waking him up.

"I don't know why I'm leaving to be honest," I whispered.

A part of me wanted to stay, but the fear of my bad luck wanted me to leave. He could just wake up and that sweet kind man I met last night could be gone. I wanted to keep my memories of him, as blissful as it was the night before.

But what if I'm wrong? What if he would be excited to see me?

Are you sure about that? Maybe he already expects you to leave by now.

But his heart was pounding, I listened to him.

The heart will always pound when the realization of sex is nearby. You're a nurse, shouldn't you know this?

But what about my heart? I felt a deeper connection...

Haven't you had that "deeper connection" before?

I had an argument with my mind and lost terribly. I needed to be out of here. I decided to leave him a note, but I didn't know what to say. I just wrote what best came to mind before leaving. I took one good look at his sleeping state. I sighed and left.

I put on the lights at my studio apartment. After spending some time at the hotel, this home suddenly felt like a closet. I took off my clothes and slept naked. I felt lonely.

Maybe I should have waited till morning before I decided to disappear from a stranger's life. I turned my attention to a picture at the bedside table. It was a picture of me and Sophia, my late daughter. In a way, she looked like Ben, if we were judging by hair alone.

Speaking of which, I got up and searched my bag. I had bought some after pills on my way back to my department. It was my safe day, but I wasn't taking any chances. This wasn't a romance novel, where women didn't seem to get prepared after a convenient safe day. In reality, pregnancy could still happen on a safe day, so it wouldn't hurt to be extra careful. But being pregnant for Ben... that doesn't sound bad at all.

I returned to the bed. The AC had stopped working, and I had forgotten to fix it. The fan made an obnoxious sound whenever I tried to use it. I was hot, but my mind was elsewhere. My pussy was still hot, and my body still felt like I was still under his control.

I wasn't lying when I said I hadn't had anything like this in five years. My masturbation methods and sessions were all I had. And at that moment, I felt like touching myself. I thought about him, holding me possessively, his mouth that kissed me deeply, his hands squeezing and spreading my ass apart.

And his fingers... I touched my pussy... it didn't feel the same. Ben had taken that pleasure away from me. I forced myself to sleep. Easier said than done really.

As a travel nurse, my job was simple one: go to whatever part of the world needed me. But I haven't done much traveling lately. I was in London because I found a hospital I enjoyed working at. Two days after the Ben issue, I resumed work, taking care of the kids in the children's ward. I couldn't save my daughter, but I could try my best saving these children.

"Will I be okay, Olivia?" a little boy asked.

He had an accident while playing with his friends, resulting in a shoulder sprain. While the doctors handled the serious business, I took on the role of taking care of the boo boos.

"You will, little champ," I said and kissed him arm gently to not cause him any pain.

"Thank you," he said with a smile.

"Now just sit still, your mom's going to finish the paperwork and you'll be good to go," I said to him.

"Alright," he beamed and went to go sit.

"You're so good at this," a lady said.

I turned and found Dr Helen Williams standing behind me. She was in her early fifties and the owner of the hospital.

"Dr. Williams, what brings you to this corner of the building of healing?" I asked.

"Two things. First, I wanted to check in on you," she said. "How was the conference? Unlike you, you didn't brief me on what happened."

I remembered Ben and shook him out of my head.

"Oh uh, there was no reason for that. It was a little boring, so I didn't want to bother telling you anyway," I said with a nervous chuckle.

“You sure? Anyway, never mind,” she sighed. “Onto the second reason I wanted to see you. You’re still a travel nurse, aren’t you?”

“I mean it’s why you’re paying me here,” I smiled.

“Olivia, could you come read us a story? It’s story time,” one of the children called to me.

“I’ll be over there soon,” I replied and turned my attention to the doctor. “Yeah, it’s why you pay me.”

“Well, you’ve been here for a while without actually traveling such that everyone here thinks you work here permanently,” she explained. “Which is a good thing because you motivate the other nurses to do their jobs properly.”

“Thank you,” I said, “but where is this going? I gave a feeling it’s something serious.”

“Well, not to force you or anything, but do you want to travel for work?” she asked.

“Where am I going?” I asked.

“Well, you’ll be going to America,” she replied. “Join me in my office let’s talk some more.”

I followed her to her office. I planned to travel out that year, but I never found an opportunity to do so. So I was excited about an opportunity to let me leave.

“A friend of mine is running a special program at his hospital and wants to host some nurses,” she explained “He asked me to send someone, so I thought about you.”

“You want me to represent the hospital?” I asked.

“Something like that,” she replied, “Well you’re going there to work for yourself really.”

“When am I going to go?” I asked.

“You’re supposed to be there next month,” she replied. “You didn’t even ask where in America you’d be going.”

“Oh, slipped my mind completely, sorry,” I apologized. “Where are you shipping me off to?”

“Richmond, Virginia,” she replied.

Ben stays in Richmond. Could it be his hospital that needed the nurses?

“It’s a billion-dollar hospital, owned by Dr. Ethan Sullivan,” she said as if to answer my inner thoughts.

“Oh thank goodness.” I let out a relieved sigh.

“Did something happen?”

“No, it’s nothing, I just... it’s nothing,” I scratched the side of my face and looked away.

“You seem like you’re hiding something, but I don’t think I want to bother knowing.” She sighed and looked at her desk, “Why am I not still done with all these files?”

“Because you’re busy?” I raised a brow.

“Right,” she sighed. “And I’ve been so busy with the kids and... oh, sorry.”

“Hey, you don’t have to apologize. I’m still grieving about Sophia, but that doesn’t mean you have to walk on eggshells around me,” I said.

To be honest I didn’t like it when everyone else at the hospital couldn’t talk about their kids or life around me because I would be offended. If anything, excluding me and apologizing was a bigger challenge.

“I’m sorry about that,” she said. “So, are you going to join the nurse transfer program?”

“I will,” I said. “I think the change of pace would do me a lot of good.”

“The children will miss you, though,” she said.

“I know. I’ll miss them calling for my attention to the point it haunts my dreams,” I sighed. “But this is going to be a good opportunity. I chose to become a travel nurse so I can help where I’m most needed. So, yeah, I need it.”

“Perfect, I’ll let Ethan know,” she said. “Thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome,” I said.

“Now go back to the kids,” she said. “You’ve already promised them story time.”

“Almost forgot.” I sighed and thanked her one more time before leaving to see the kids.

Even as I read stories to them, I still couldn’t help thinking about what may have happened to Ben when he woke up, and I wasn’t there. I was sure he didn’t really care. But I hoped that he did, even if it was just a little.

Ben

I woke up to strong rays of sunlight. I overslept, which wasn’t like me. But considering all the energy I had expended the night before, it made sense that my body required a good shutdown to get things back in order. As I sat up, I felt like I was forgetting something.

I reached for my glasses at the bedside table and put them on, letting my vision adjust. There was a little blurry effect that the glasses helped adjust. I looked at my side and there was nothing... no one there.

I was confused. Something was meant to be there. Someone was meant to be there.

“Where’s Olivia?” I asked no one in particular as I got out of bed.

I was still naked and found my clothes nearly folded and arranged, but she was nowhere to be found. I checked the bathroom, and it didn’t seem all that different. She didn’t have her bath. Did she go to get breakfast? No, food was served in bed.

Maybe she didn’t know that. *You could always call her.* I thanked my inner thought and reach for my phone scrolling through my contacts when I realized that I hadn’t taken her number.

“Fuck you stupid inner thought,” I cursed at my brain for being so stupid not to remember taking down her phone

number.

I found a paper with a note inscribed:

Hey Ben

I'm sorry I had to disappear. But I decided to because it's the proper way to end a one nightstand.

Thank you for an amazing night. I only hope that I was able to return the favor of how good you made me feel.

Xo Xo, Olivia.

One night stand? What we had was just a one-night stand? Who decided that for her? I was pissed and upset with myself, for falling asleep. Why did my body choose that night of all nights to fall asleep? I dressed up and tried to go to the receptionist table. Fortunately, the man on duty the previous night was still the same man on duty. Nor was she at the venue used for the conference.

I felt like my heart was being ripped out forcefully. I spent that morning trying to describe her to as many people as I could, in hopes that I could find out that someone, anyone, knew something, but it was all dead ends. If not for the receptionist confirming that she left the hotel that morning, and the note she had left behind, I would have been okay thinking that she was a ghost or something.

Why did you have to do this to me? I asked myself as I collapsed into the bed. We had made love on that bed and everything seemed to be alright; we were in sync, and I thought that she would have felt it too.

It was frustrating. If I had taken a picture of her, I would have been able to find her. But unfortunately, it was the case. I thought about scouring the hospitals in London but gave up on it.

Maybe the universe just handed her over to me, just for that night to give me a reminding taste of what it meant to be in love with someone else.

I needed to go back to Richmond.

The moment I returned to Richmond, I decided to stop by at my mother's place. I didn't have to go to the hospital that day, so visiting my daughter only made sense. The drive to Mom's was longer than I remembered it. As I looked out the window, I saw a lot of couples holding hands, being so "in love" that it made me think about Olivia.

I didn't want to keep thinking about her, but I didn't know how to stop. As I arrived at my mother's, with some chocolate treats and a new teddy bear, I took in deep breath and opened the door.

"Daddy!!" Chloe exclaimed as she ran to me.

"Hey there princess," I smiled as I put down the things I had bought and embraced her before lifting her up.

"You're back from your trip. Unlike you, you didn't call to say you were on your way," Mother said as she walked to me with open arms, "How's my big boy doing?"

"It's a pleasure to see you too, Mom," I said as I accepted her embrace.

I needed the company more than ever.

"You got me another teddy," Chloe said as she looked at the stuffed toy.

"Yeah, do you like it?" I asked as I put her down to let her pick up the gift.

"I love it," she said as she picked up the teddy and gave it a squeeze. "Are you going to work now?"

"No, I'll be spending the night here," I replied.

Her eyes lit up and she began to jump in excitement. "Yayyyy! We'll sleep in the same room!"

"Whatever you say my angel," I smiled.

She started to giggle.

"Now why don't you take your chocolate treats and head to the room, while I talk to Daddy?" Mother suggested.

“Okay,” she picked up the treats and started going toward the kitchen. She stopped and turned around to look at me, then blew me a kiss and continued walking.

The kiss helped a lot with my aching heart.

“Alright, what happened in London?” Mother asked.

“What? What are you talking about?” I raised a brow.

“Don’t play dumb with me. You have the same look you did when Selina died,” she said as she crossed her arms.

The door opened and Ian walked in; he looked displeased.

“What happened to you?” he asked.

“What? I was about to ask you the same thing, you look awful,” I shot back.

“It’s just woman troubles,” he said as he made his way to Mom and hugged her.

He was always a Mama’s boy. But not in the annoying way.

“So, what’s wrong with you? Did you visit Selina’s grave?” he asked.

“No,” I replied, “Nothing is wrong, really.”

The both of them stared at me with blank expressions. Waiting for me to give in. I broke.

“I had my heart broken,” I said as I walked into the living room and took a seat.

“You what?” Mom asked.

“I said, I had my heart broken,” I repeated as I rubbed my hands together.

“I’m sorry, didn’t you go for a conference?” Ian asked.

“I did,” I replied, “But I saw a woman who made my heart skip a beat. I couldn’t take my eyes off her and she.. she also seemed to feel the same way about me.”

Mom took a seat next to me.

“Don’t tell Ethan,” I said to both of them.

The last thing I wanted was to have him get a kick out of this.

“We won’t,” Ian promised. “I’m still surprised though I thought you no longer had any feelings for women.”

“Same here, I thought you were showing signs of swinging the other way,” Mom said. I instantly remembered where Ethan inherited his style of talking. “What happened?”

“I slept with her,” I admitted. “She and I just seemed so alike. It felt like she had gone through a similar kind of pain like mine or even worse than mine, we just... clicked.”

“Did she tell you it was only the sex she needed?” Ian asked.

“She didn’t... she thought it was a one-night stand and was gone before I woke up.” I said, “I’ve never felt so... disappointed and upset in years.”

They were both silent, probably thinking about what to say to me.

“Son, I know it hurts right now, but I want you to see this as a good thing,” Mom said. “You have never had your heart touched like this before. The universe has its ways of trying to reward everyone; maybe this is your reward for holding in for so long.”

“It’s more or less torture, if I never see her again,” I admitted.

“I think you will,” she said. “People who capture your heart always have a way of coming back.”

“Thanks, Mom,” I said.

“It’s no problem, don’t forget it,” she insisted.

“Dad, I...” Chloe ran into the living room with her new teddy bear but stopped and looked at Ian, “Uncle Ethan?”

“Wrong,” Ian said.

She giggled and ran to him, hugging him briefly, before running to me and sitting on my thighs.

“You know you don’t have to keep hating Ethan,” I said.

“I don’t hate him; he’s just clumsy,” she said.

“Well, you’re right about that,” I sighed. “You wanted to say something?”

“Oh, I found a picture of mom,” she said. “She looks really beautiful.”

I could feel Ian and my mother’s stares of worry fixated on both of us.

“She is, isn’t she?” I smiled and kissed her forehead.

Chloe needed a mother figure, I knew that. There was no perfect sign that Olivia could fill in that role. There was no need worrying about Olivia at all. But I never forgot her. I always wondered if she would fit if I asked her to.

Chapter Four

The Favor

B^{en}

Her beautiful skin.

Her gentle pleading moans accompanied by my ragged breathing.

Her lips, so soft and warm that made me feel all tingly inside.

Her ass..

God damn her ass.

Her breasts were so soft that my hands felt like they were sinking into her body.

Olivia.

I opened my eyes as my body stirred from yet another dream. At this point, I started to think of them as nightmares, but unlike most nightmares, I didn't want this nightmare to stop.

“Daddy, I want to go to the park today,” Chloe said as I took her to my mother's place.

“Oh okay, I'll tell grandma,” I said.

“I want to go with you,” she pouted.

“I understand sweetie but...”

“Today is not a good day,” she completed my statement and looked out the window.

For a five year old, she was oddly intelligent. Mother said that’s how I was as a kid, but this was something else. She excelled amongst her peers, so we had to move her from kindergarten into Grade 1. I stared at my daughter from the rearview mirror. She was in her seat and kicked her feet playfully while humming a song.

A month had passed, and I was going into my less busy phase with work. I was trying to set new standards that would allow me leave work earlier and attend to my daughter, once summer break was over. During the past month, I still had issues trying to keep up with her. I managed to drop her off at school, but I couldn’t pick her up. Mom would pick her up and attend to her homework. Some nights, I had surgeries and wouldn’t return home so she had to sleep at Mother’s place.

It wasn’t what I expected to happen. I honestly thought things would have changed. But sooner than later, things were about to change. I was so sure about it.

“Here we are, sweetie,” I said as we arrived at my mother’s place. “Have fun.”

She took off her seatbelt and got down from the car with her little schoolbag that held some of her books. She had final exams the coming week and needed to study. I wanted to help her out, and she wanted me to as well. But the timing...I sighed as she opened Mother’s door and went in without saying goodbye. I sunk into my seat and let out a sigh.

“Help me, Selina,” I whispered a prayer.

Chloe wasn’t the only one occupying my mind during that month. I still spent each day thinking about Olivia. I revisited the posts from the conference event and couldn’t find any pictures or videos of her. It always felt like someone was blocking her on purpose, keeping me from finding out about

her or what she looked like. I wanted to use her picture and track her down.

It was a futile attempt. I just spent most of my time thinking about what Mother had told me about whoever my had captured my heart would always find her way back to me. But she was never coming back.

Ethan

I am Ethan Sullivan, thirty-five years old and with a secret.... I'm effectively clumsy. I woke up that morning excited to welcome the incoming nurses. Three of them had arrived, and the remaining three were on their way.

"Stacy be sure to check in with the hotel to make sure everything is in place," I said to my assistant.

She wasn't really my assistant but helped in public relations. I just liked addressing her as one as she always seemed to know how to handle my problems, especially the clumsy moments.

"The hotel already has the five rooms ready," she said. "I checked in with them this morning. And the remaining two nurses will be coming in today."

"What do you mean five rooms and two nurses?" I asked. "You're supposed to get six rooms. And there are three nurses coming in today."

"No, it's five rooms and two nurses," she insisted and frowned.

I frowned as well, "Let me see your list."

She handed it to me and she was right; we accounted for five nurses not six. *Shit*. I looked at my own list and noticed that I had accidentally added another nurse a month ago and forgot to cancel her.

"Fuck," I cursed.

"What did you do this time?" She sighed as she walked over to my side of the table and looked at my computer screen. "You didn't cancel?"

“I forgot,” I groaned.

“We can’t have her going back right now, not when she’s already halfway here,” she pointed out. “Can you imagine how embarrassing it must be?”

“Yeesh, you don’t need to tell me, I can already imagine the look of horror on her face,” I replied as I slammed my hand on the table.

“Don’t injure yourself, I’m not a nurse,” she reminded me.

“What do I do now? If we have her here, there’ll be nothing for her to do, and she’s the nurse Helen talked about,” I said. “What do I do Stacy?”

“Call your brothers?” she suggested.

“Ah, yes.” I sat up and picked up my fun, speed dialing my younger brother.

“What is it?” he asked immediately he picked up the phone.

“And a lovely day to you my sweet brother,” I greeted warmly. “Do you know that cells work better in the body because they get help from other cells? In fact, our body is just a reminder that when one part of us is in trouble, the others can help fix it.”

There was a pause of silence and I heard Stacy facepalm.

Ian let out a long sigh, “What did you mess up this time?”

“That’s quite the assumption, but since you already assumed, I might as well tell you...”

“I’m not doing it,” he cut me off.

“There you go again,” I sighed. “At least let me finish, it might even benefit you.”

“Fine, I’m listening.”

Selfish much?

“Okay so you know that program that I’m organizing involving travel nurses? Yeah, I accidentally ordered an extra one,” I explained. “Now while I would love her to be around me, I just fear that she might not have anything to do.”

“So you want her to work at my place instead?” he asked.

“You know is why you’re the smartest amongst the tree of us,” I grinned. “I’ll give you her details, and she’ll start as soon as tomorrow. Now as for lodging...”

“I’m not doing it,” he cut me off again.

“I thought you were in it,” I said.

“I don’t remember saying I was; you just continued talking, and I didn’t find any way to benefit,” he sighed.

“Give me back the moment where I praised you for being the smartest amongst us.” I frowned.

“I’m still the smartest, and I’m thinking of a better solution for you. My hospital is full now, so I can’t take in extra help,” he replied. “It’s almost summer, patients will be coming to fix botch jobs or give themselves a bigger butt. Lord, have mercy.”

Yeah, Ian did mostly plastic surgery.

“I’m sorry for assuming, please continue,” I apologized.

“I don’t need the extra hand, but Ben mention something about restructuring to make his schedule fit for Chloe,” he said.

“Oh, yeah, I remember,” I said, “Well, we have to hope the Ben doesn’t turn away the poor nurse Olivia.”

“Hmm? What’s her name?” he asked.

“Olivia, she’s coming in from London. Why?” I asked.

“I don’t know, it sounds oddly familiar, but I can’t remember why,” he replied. “Try calling Ben. But don’t tell him her name.”

“Thanks, little bro,” I sighed in relief.

“No problem,” he said before hanging up.

“Call Ben?” Stacy asked.

“Call Ben,” I sighed.

“You really need to work on your clumsy attitude, though. Your brothers will not always be there to bail you out,” she warned.

“I know,” I sighed.

My clumsy attitude would always cause problems for others around me.

Ben

I looked over my plans to restructure the hospital in a way that would let me have more time for Chloe. Everything was in place. If I followed the plan, I could at least be home by six pm, and we’d have dinner together.

It’s been a year since we cooked together; she had been saying she wanted to do it again. I didn’t want her to wait any longer because of me. My phone started to ring. I noticed it was Ethan calling. Unlike me, I hadn’t asked how his nurse plan was going.

“Hello?” I answered.

“And a lovely day to you my sweet brother,” he greeted warmly. “Do you know that cells work better in the body because they get help from other cells? In fact, our body is just a reminder that when one part of us is in trouble, the others can help fix it.”

“What did you do this time?” I asked.

“I don’t get why you and Ian always assumed I did something,” he replied.

“Well, you always drop a word of wisdom or a parable whenever you needed help from us,” I reminded him as I turned my attention to the schedule I had come up with. “So, what is it?”

“Well, I found out that I have made a mistake,” he replied. “Remember my nurse transfer program?”

“I just remembered I didn’t ask you how it was going; sorry about that,” I apologized.

“Ahhh, that’s why you’re the sweetest amongst us,” he said, “Well, I have a problem. The program and the slots available at my hospital are five, but I have an extra nurse.”

“You asked Ian?”

“His hands are full,” he replied. “I thought maybe you would need the extra hand. Besides she’s already on a flight to Richmond as we speak.”

“It would suck turning her away, wouldn’t it?” I asked.

“I’m glad you understand big brother,” he replied. “So, will you help me?”

I looked at my schedule. I didn’t necessarily need an extra nurse. But to have someone help out wasn’t a bad idea at all. Besides, I had a strong feeling, telling me not to turn him down.

“Alright then,” I said. “Will I be the one paying her as well?”

“I don’t mind paying her, though,” he said. “It’s my fault.”

“I’ll help you out,” I said, “and she’ll send her reports to you.”

“Thanks, big brother, now about her lodging,” he said. “We didn’t account for her stay here. And most of the nearby hotels are all booked for the week. I wouldn’t want her paying a lot of money on transportation.”

“What are you trying to say?” I asked, although I knew where it was going.

“Could she stay at your place? Just until this week is over?” he pleaded.

“You have to be kidding me Ethan,” I didn’t raise my voice, but he could tell I was upset.

“I know, I know. Too clumsy and careless of me,” he said.

“Why can’t she stay at your place?” I asked.

“Renovations,” he replied “And you know Ian is going to say no.”

“Of course he would; this is a stranger we’re talking about,” I said.

“Okay hear me out,” he said. “She’s very good with kids and has the support of Dr. Helen Williams herself.”

“The pediatrician from London?” I asked. “With the big hospital?”

“Yeah, that one. She says the nurse did very well in handling the children,” he explained. “Since the nurses aren’t going to work full-time, maybe she can help... watch over Chloe?”

I thought about it. Mom had never complained, but I didn’t like making her go out to get Chloe from school every afternoon. Having someone else do it, won’t be a bad idea. There was another problem.

“You seem to forget doesn’t do too well with other people,” I reminded him.

“Ah... I actually forgot but don’t worry, I’m sure this is going to be the right fit,” he said. “At least for one week.”

I thought about it, and he had a point. Not just that, but hearing that she was a nurse from London reminded me a little of a stranger I met there.

Dr. William’s hospital wasn’t far from the conference. Maybe this nurse knew something about Olivia.

“Fine, but only a week,” I said.

“Thank you,” he said.

“No problems and be more careful,” I warned.

“I will,” he said before hanging up.

“London, huh?” I sighed before getting up to stretch.

I decided to patrol my little kingdom. From the looks of it, my new nurse was going to be arriving soon. I didn’t want her to meet an unprepared facility.

“Speaking of which, is the house clean?” I asked myself as I got into the elevator.

“Good morning, sir,” Dr. David Solomon greeted.

Dr. Solomon was in charge of ER and one of the oldest staff on board. He was a family man who seemed to have mastered the art of balancing work and family—a trait I envied. I trusted him, and he was part of the plan to help me get better structure for work and my family. In fact, he helped me put together the schedule. If I weren’t around, I was confident leaving him in charge. I had come to discuss what Ethan had told me.

“Good morning, David,” I greeted as I adjusted my glasses. “How’s the morning treating you?”

“I’m a little bored,” he sighed as he took a sip out of the *world’s best dad* cup his daughter had gotten him for Father’s Day last month. I envied his cup. I knew that it would most likely take me five more years to earn one.

“You have a pensive look, is everything alright?” he asked.

“Well, Ethan is sending a nurse our way, I just wanted to make sure everything is okay,” I replied.

“A nurse? Why do we need one?” He raised a brow.

“Ethan made a mistake in his nurse transfer program and ended up with an extra one,” I explained. “She’ll be working with us for now.”

“Ah, Ethan, makes sense,” he sighed. “So, what department will she be working with?”

“She’s an auxiliary nurse, but he mentioned that she’s very good with children. So maybe the kids’ ward?” I suggested.

“Makes sense to put someone at their strengths,” he said as he took another sip from the cup, while I gazed at it in jealousy.

“You want some?” he offered.

“No, I was just jealous of your cup,” I admitted.

He looked at the cup and saw the inscription, “Oh, that. Well, you’re about to give it your all, aren’t you?”

“I’m afraid that I might already be too late,” I sighed. “She didn’t tell me goodbye this morning. And don’t say she forgot, because she has never forgotten to. The more I try, the more I can feel us drifting further apart.”

“That’s pretty a normal feeling. But she’s still a kid, barely even a proper pre-teen,” he said. “Now if she was a teenager, I would be panicking with you. But she’s at that age where they are still weirdly understanding. You still have time. Not a lot, but still, it’s time.”

“Thanks, David,” I sighed. “It feels good having someone besides family to talk to about this.”

“It’s no problem. By the way, I don’t mean to pry but are you considering the role of a mother?” he asked. “It can be tough managing everything on your own.”

“To be honest, my mother seems to have automatically carried that role,” I said.

“Ah, yes. That isn’t so bad, but I think she’ll realize that her grandmother can’t play the role of a mother she is in need of,” he explained. “You really haven’t found anyone? There has to be at least one that caught your attention. Either by accident or something?”

I remembered Olivia. This would set a new record for how many times I had thought about her that day.

“There was one,” I replied.

“Oh... and?”

“She disappeared and I haven’t seen her since,” I replied.

“You still think about her?” he asked with a warm smile.

“Not a single day goes by that she doesn’t cross my thoughts,” I replied.

“I see,” he replied, “Love like that always has a way of coming back.”

“My mother said the same thing,” I said as I turned to leave.

“You shouldn’t lose hope,” he said.

“I won’t,” I assured him.

I inspected the rest of the hospital, making sure everything was in good order. The kids’ ward didn’t have a lot of sick children. Well it didn’t matter, the new nurse could just assist the other departments. Then again she wasn’t going to be working throughout the day. So the number of sick children was perfect. As I returned to my office, my phone started to ring.

Mom...

“Hello? Ben?” she asked.

“Hi daddy!” I could hear Chloe’s voice.

“Hey, Mom, hey sweetie,” I greeted. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing really,” Mom replied.

“Can I come see you at work?” Chloe requested.

“She was studying and the book mentioned professions. One of them was a doctor, so she felt like seeing you,” Mom explained.

Hearing that made me feel a little proud of myself.

“So can I come daddy? Please?!” Chloe pleaded.

I wasn’t doing anything, and there hadn’t been any serious cases yet. I needed my daughter’s company as she rarely asked to visit my office.

“Sure thing,” I said.

“Yayyy!” Chloe exclaimed.

“Alright go get ready,” Mom said to her, “Ben, are you alright?”

“Yeah, I am. Ethan asked me for a favor,” I replied.

“What did he do this time?” she asked and sighed.

“Long story, but it looks like I’ll be having someone living with me,” I replied. “Might be a good time to introduce Chloe to the idea of a nanny.”

“I understand,” she said. “I’m going to miss her.”

“Well don’t miss her just yet,” I said. “We still don’t know if Chloe would like the idea of a nanny.”

“I pray she does,” she sighed.

My phone started to buzz.

“Looks like I’m having another call. See you both soon,” I said and switched the call. “Yeah?”

“Looks like she’s landed,” Ethan said. “I forgot to mention this but you don’t want anyone knowing she’s living at your place. We don’t want any rumors that could put you in trouble or make working there a little uneasy for her.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re a little dense in romance affairs, but most of the women in the hospital might already have eyes for you,” he explained. “If they found out that a new, young nurse is staying at your place, then that’s trouble.”

“I understand, I’ll be careful,” I said.

He hung up, and I waited for my nurse to arrive.

Chapter Five

Bad Luck is Sure to Follow

Olivia's POV *Olivia*

I missed Ben. A month had passed and the day before I was ready to leave for Richmond. I walked past the hotel where we had both spent the night. *I spent half the night there, but I'm sure you know what I mean.* To be honest, ever since that night, I'd found myself on several occasions, walking past the hotel.

It seemed like my body was unconsciously looking for him. It would have been better if it was just looking for him... I was yearning for him almost every day. His touch, his kiss, his bullying, everything. I couldn't pleasure myself properly and almost gave in to the temptation to buy a sex toy.

Fine, I bought the dildo, it helped get to that spot, but dildos don't groan, hold your hips possessively, bite your neck, stick a tongue in your ear, or suck on your boobs. Or called you a good girl or writhe in pleasure while you sucked it off. No dildos didn't do any of the things Ben did to me.

Don't even ask why I didn't try other men. I seemed to have used up all my luck when I encountered Ben. Now, hardly any

man looked at me twice. Maybe old age had caught me unawares.

“You’re beautiful,” his voice echoed in my mind, filling me with confidence.

He didn’t lie about that, nor did he say it to flatter me. He thought I was beautiful and made feel that way.

If you regret it this much, then why did you run?

The internal conflict never stopped since that day. I kept on trying to figure out if what I did was right or wrong. The fact that I was still unable to come up with a satisfying answer infuriated me.

“Is there a problem?” a voice asked.

I turned and saw an older man looking at me.

“You’ve been standing there, staring at the hotel for like five minutes now,” he said. “You do this almost every time you walk past. Is there something you need help with?”

I recognized him, but I couldn’t remember where I had seen him. But if he had noticed me, it meant many others already had.

“It’s nothing serious, I just have a memory here that’s all,” I explained.

“I see,” he said, then furrowed his eyes. “You look familiar.”

“I was about to say the same thing about you,” I said.

“Ah... I remember you now,” he said. “I work in this hotel as a receptionist. You came here with a handsome man last month.”

So, that’s why he seemed so familiar? I didn’t feel embarrassed or awkward as he mentioned that I had been there with Ben. The man didn’t have any other intention when he even mentioned it.

“Yes, I did,” I replied with a warm smile. “And now I can remember you as well.”

“Well that’s good,” he said with a nod. “Did you later meet with him? If you don’t mind me asking?”

“No I didn’t,” I replied. “Why?”

He sighed, “He woke up that morning and started looking for you. At first I thought you stole something important and ran. But the look on his face when I told him that you left late in the night. How he bolted out of the hotel to look for you—and his expression like that of a child who had lost his favorite toy—was enough to tell me that he had gotten his heart broken.”

I couldn’t believe what the man had told me.

“You’re making this up aren’t you? I asked.

“I wish I was. If I was that creative, I would have been able to write my own novels or something,” he replied. “That was all I observed happen. And that was how interpreted it.”

“Oh, I get it now,” I said as I turned my attention to the building again.

I made Ben suffer when he didn’t deserve it.

“You ever saw him again after that?” the man asked.

“No, never did. I didn’t give him my contact details so I’ve not reached out to him either,” I answered.

“That’s a shame,” is all he said as he left me to my thoughts. “You might not want to observe the hotel too often. People might get suspicious even if you don’t have any evil intentions.”

“I understand sir, thank you for your time,” I thanked him.

Maybe I should have stayed after all.

What if he paid the man to say that to you?

To what end? When both of us didn’t have any way to get to the other?

The internal conflict was getting extremely annoying. I needed to get ready for my trip.

After a healthy battle with my inner thoughts for the day, I decided to visit my family. I buried the three of them almost together. First was the source of my work: Dad.

“Hey, Dad, I’m going to Richmond,” I said. “Have you ever been there before? Well, I haven’t, so I’m a little worried that I would get lost, just like I did in Greece. Anyway, watch over me like you always do, and help me out with work. I don’t want to overwork myself to exhaustion, no offense. Nah, you’re not offended, you want what’s best for me so you would get mad if I actually overwork myself. I’ll do my best not to. I’m going to Richmond to help save lives, I don’t want to lose mine in the process. Thank you as always.”

Next was the source of my love: Mom. I didn’t actually know her as she died during childbirth, but I had heard various stories. She was a kind woman, loved by all, but a sickle cell patient. I’m lucky Dad was AA. I heard that dad just wanted both of them to live on their own, but she insisted she wanted to give him a child. I’m actually lucky Dad didn’t look at me with hate in his eyes.

He saw me as a manifestation of Mom’s love.

“Hey, Mom, no luck this year either. In terms of finding true love, that is. I may have already found true love but accidentally locked it out of my life by running away,” I said and chuckled at the last part. “I’m going to Richmond. Ben said he worked there... well, he didn’t actually say he did; for all I know maybe he meant he grew up there or something. But what if I meet him, and he hates me now? Well, I’d deserve the hate. I disappeared without actually telling him. I just want him to forgive me for two reasons. One, I need the peace of mind and two, I want him to do what he did to me that night. I don’t think I’ll be able to tell you this in person, though. But help me out with love.”

Then my daughter, Sophia. I didn’t really attach anything to her. I always felt guilty concerning her case. With my genotype being AS, it was logical that I get married or become sexually involved with an AA patient. But my ex was also AS. Through geno pairing, I thought that my first child would be born AA or AS at worst, but Sophia was born SS.

She was my pride and joy, and I never regretted giving birth to her. Her smile could light up a room. Her laughter was medicine to me, and kept me going to work. But she was always sick.

My unluckiness got to her. The medications I tried weren't working for her as well as for other kids. I started to feel like I was personally cursed. She died, and a nurse like me couldn't save her life. I was always ashamed of myself whenever I went to her grave.

I tightened my fist and took in a deep breath. "Hey Sophia. It's... Mom. I miss you."

Those were all the words I could say to her. Anything more and I'd break. I needed to keep my sanity active in that part. She did tell me not to cry. I can't disappoint her now, can I?

"Alright Richmond, beware my arrival," I said to hype myself up.

I double checked my luggage before getting on the plane, and triple checked them as I got down.

My luck always found a way of making me lose important items. In Greece, it was my phone, in France it was my transfer documents, and in Italy, I forgot my toiletries, and my period started on the plane.

I was ready this time. On the plane I held my transfer documents, literally to my chest. My phone was in my pocket, and I had a mini purse with a strap dangling from my wrist holding one or two pads, although my flow had ended the previous week. As I stepped out of the airport, I put on my glasses and took in the sights of Richmond—a lush beautiful place.

So far I had not forgotten anything yet. It was new record that I intended to keep that way. The instructions for the nurses were quite simple and straight to the point. We arrived and told the taxi driver the name of the hospital and they'd take us there.

“Alright, there’s no way to get lost on this,” I said to myself as I hailed a taxi.

I told the driver where I was going.

“Ah the Sullivan brothers,” he said. “I know Ethan’s hospital.”

“Okay,” I smiled.

Sullivan brothers had a nice ring to it.

We arrived at the hospital. I checked to make sure I still had everything with me. So far, I hadn’t lost anything. I had arrived at the hospital on time, but something wasn’t right. Things didn’t go this well whenever I visited a new country. Was I unconsciously overusing my good luck?

I shook off the thought. Maybe because I had spent time with my family before leaving; that’s why I still had my luck. There was no need to worry about anything. I made my way into the hospital. It was big and bustling with a lot of activity.

“Okay, who do I have to hump to find out about the exchange program?” I asked myself as I looked around.

There was a roll-up flex vanner. It had images of nurses working and tagline that said, *Nurses exchange program*.

“That was easy,” I said to myself.

It still felt unreal that nothing bad had happened yet.

“Hey there,” I greeted the lady who sat there, attending to people.

“Oh hello,” she said, “I’m Olivia Collins. I’m here for the nurses exchange program.”

“Really? What country?”

“United Kingdom, London. From Dr. Helen William’s hospital,” I replied.

“Oh...” she sounded worried.

“Is there a problem?” I asked. “Am I at the right hospital? I heard there were three.”

Was my bad luck finally here?

“Oh there’s no problem at all. You’re at the right hospital, and you’re still viable for the program,” she explained. “But you have to speak with our boss first.”

“No problem.” I let out a sigh of relief.

Whatever Lady Luck was doing that day, I was grateful and promised to offer a sacrifice as soon as the day was over. Maybe sacrifice a big pizza by eating it on her behalf. She deserved it. I made my way upstairs, following the receptionist.

“Aren’t you supposed to welcome other nurses?” I asked.

“No, you’re uh... kind of the last one,” she answered.

Great, I was late. But Einstein said time was relative, so the other nurses got here early.

“Here,” she said as she knocked on a door and opened it.

A woman stormed out, pissed as hell.

“Stacy?” the receptionist lady called after her.

She didn’t answer and just headed straight for the elevator. The receptionist and I exchanged glances, and I shrugged. We went into the office and found the boss leaning back into his chair, a confused expression on his face.

“Sir? Is this a good time?” she asked.

He let out a long sigh and sat upright. He kind of looked like Ben in a way but younger—not a lot of muscle but still worked out. Even with his frustrated expression, his eyes seemed to have a hint of playfulness in them. He had brown hair like Ben’s, but it wasn’t combed back. He kind of let it be, but it looked kind of sexy and messy.

“Who’s this?” he asked.

“Olivia Collins, United Kingdom, London, here for the nurse transfer program,” I introduced myself.

“Oh you’re here, Stacy would you...” He stopped speaking as he tried to call the lady who had just left the office. He

cleared his throat and looked for some files on his desk. "Sorry, give me a minute."

"Sure, take your time," I said.

It took him time to find what he was looking for; it was the receptionist who had pointed it out.

"Ahem, I'm Dr. Ethan Sullivan," he introduced himself. "I created this program to train my nurses on how to handle situations better by learning from outstanding nurses in different parts of the world. So, while we bring in nurses, ours are sent to replace the incoming nurses positions. Does that make sense to you?"

"Yeah, it does. But I don't remember any nurse coming to take my position," I replied. "Are they supposed to come when I've already left?"

"Actually, they are supposed to be there *before* you leave," he explained. "And I guess that's where we have the problem with you."

"Huh?"

"Due to a mistake on my part, I asked for an extra nurse when we didn't need one," he continued, "Unfortunately, that was you."

"Oh, I see," I said.

"You're relatively calm about this," he said.

"What good is panicking going to do?" I asked.

He let out a sigh of relief, "Stacy and I... I mean, *I* was worried that you'd be disappointed."

"Disappointed?" I asked. "Well, I am a little. But I'm doing okay, I still have the return tickets so I'll be on my way then."

Damn you, Lady Luck!

I knew something was definitely off considering how everything was going well. I was actually anticipating something worse. Being told to go home after coming a long way not only was embarrassing, but it was frustrating.

I managed to grin, but I wasn't going to sacrifice any pizza for Lady Luck. My luck had probably caused Dr Sullivan some troubles. I needed to apologize and leave.

"Wait, you aren't leaving, you're still a part of the program," he said.

"But you said, there's no nurse transfer for me," I reminded him.

"Yes I did say that, but there's no way I'd let you leave empty handed," he said. "I'll be transferring you to another hospital not too far from here. My brother owns it. You can rest here for a bit before leaving. I can get you a meal or something."

I looked at the document he handed me. I was being transferred to The Good Heart hospital.

"They do..." I started to ask.

"Mostly transplants, but it is basically a normal hospital," he answered my question.

"Alright then," I sighed. "Thank you, Dr. Sullivan."

"Please, there are three Sullivan doctors. Just call me Ethan," he said.

"Thank you, Ethan," I said and smiled.

"Much better. Stacy, could you take her to where she'd get her lunch?" he asked but turned and she wasn't there.

Awkward.

"I know where she's going to go," the receptionist lady said, nervously.

"Nah, it's okay," I said with a smile. "Let me get to the hospital quickly. I'm assuming there's no hotel room?"

He looked at the receptionist and back to me. He signaled for me to come closer. He whispered into my ear, "You'll be sleeping at his house. Just for a week until we can get an available hotel room. Don't let anyone know."

"Is he okay with this?" I whispered back.

“Yes, he is,” he assured me, returned to his sitting posture, and spoke in a normal voice, “Sorry about the stress, but I’ll make up for it in whatever way I can.”

“Thank you,” I said before turning to leave. “Good luck with whatever it is you’re going through.”

“Thanks,” he said as the former expression returned to his face.

I felt bad for him but I needed to leave as soon as possible. Whenever my bad luck started, it had a way of going on a roll.

I found the hospital. I was exhausted and hungry, wondering why I didn’t take Ethan’s offer and had some food.

“I don’t even know who I’m going to meet,” I said as I looked through the document.

The only lead I had was a name: Dr. B. Sullivan. I decided to just go in there and ask to see the boss, wave the documents around, and demand to be fed.

“Will Daddy let me hold a syringe?” a very familiar voice asked.

A voice that I had never forgotten. A voice that had called me mama several times. Everything froze and I could hardly see anything or anyone else.

“But what if I say please?” the voice asked again.

I looked around me. “Sophia? Sophia?”

I started to call for my daughter. It was her voice, a little grown up, but it was her voice. I had found her. She was with a teddy bear and a look of pure bliss.

I dropped my documents and bag.

“Sophia? Sophia?” I couldn’t hold back the tears that fell.

She stopped and looked at me then waved. I ran towards her, falling to my knees to hug her. “Sophia, Sophia my angel.”

What was going on? She was dead. I knew that but this size, this voice, it was my baby.

“Oh my goodness, I missed you so much,” I said as I continued to sob.

Her tiny hands reached for my head and patted me gently, “Are you okay, ma’am?”

Ma’am?

“Don’t cry,” she said. “Daddy can help you if you’re hurt. I’ll tell him for you.”

So sweet. She wasn’t my daughter. I knew she wasn’t my Sophia but she felt like it. She continued to console me as she continued stroking my hair. Someone placed a hand on my shoulder.

“Leave her alone, Grandma, she’s hurt,” Sophia said.

“Oh if you say so, Chloe,” the lady who was her grandmother said.

“Call Daddy,” the little girl said. So intelligent and responsible. I felt ashamed of myself, unable to let go of her.

Lady luck definitely deserved her pizza sacrifice. This was the most bittersweet kind of luck I had ever gotten. I wanted to abandon my job as a nurse and beg whoever her parents were to let me be her maid or something. That’s if I didn’t get arrested for harassing a child in public first.

Chapter Six

We Meet Again

B^{en}

I yawned and checked my wristwatch. Chloe and Mom had not yet arrived. The nurse was yet to arrive as well. I felt like I hadn't done anything that day. I was surprisingly less busy, so I decided to leave the office earlier.

"Maybe I'll take her to the park as I promised," I said to myself.

My leaving early tethered on whether the nurse finally arrived or not. I called Ethan but he didn't answer his phone even after three tries.

"Strange," I frowned and tried calling Stacy instead.

She answered on the second try, but her sniffling sounds told me she had been crying, "Hello, sir?"

"Are you okay?" I asked. "Ethan isn't answering his phone. Did something happen?"

"He forgot his phone," she said in an annoyed tone but a sob managed to slip through.

"Why are you crying?" I asked.

"I stubbed my pinkie toe," she replied.

It was definitely a lie but I didn't bother trying to find out.

“I see. Be more careful next time,” I said.

“Thank you,” she replied before hanging up.

A lover’s quarrel?

Ethan was kind of a playboy. So I don’t think he would actually want to involve Stacy in that life.

Plus, Stacy hated that part of him.

“Shit, I should have asked her when the new nurse was meant to arrive,” I facepalmed. “On second thought, I don’t think she would want to answer.”

There was a knock on my door and the person entered.

“Ben?” Mom called.

“Oh you guys are finally here,” I said but Chloe’s wasn’t next to her. “Where’s Chloe?”

“That’s the thing, someone has her,” she replied.

“What?!” I got to my feet and walked to her, “How??!”

“Sorry, I didn’t word that properly,” she said as I walked past her. “I meant to say that the person has her in an embrace, and Chloe doesn’t mind.”

“Is it her teacher?” I asked in confusion.

“Surprisingly no, I don’t know her and she kept calling Chloe, Sophia,” she replied.

“Oh, I understand,” I said.

I wasn’t a psychologist, but I had a rough idea of what was going on. Some people saw me and mistook me for my dad. It happened a lot. I had also mistook some people for others I once knew.

“Was she hostile?” I asked.

“No, she seems hurt,” she replied. “I haven’t seen a woman shake so much since the last time I heard your father died.”

“I just hope whoever she is, she isn’t causing a scene,” I sighed.

We got down the elevator and Chloe was standing there. The woman wasn't hugging her anymore but just touching her face. Chloe was helping the woman dry her tears. They... they looked like how Selina and Chloe would have looked if she was alive.

"What the hell?" I asked as I touched my chest.

"What is it?" Mom asked.

"My heart is pounding," I replied as I clutched at my chest.

"Isn't it supposed to?" she asked.

"No... I see Selina," I replied.

"Oh... I guess they do look like mother and child," she remarked.

There weren't a lot of people around, but people were looking at them as they walked past. I didn't want to stop them. Chloe opened her arms and offered the lady a hug, and the woman accepted.

"See what I'm talking about?" Mom pointed out.

"She never does that with anyone," I remarked as I walked up to them.

"Daddy!" Chloe called, then turned to the woman. "Daddy's here, he's going to help."

"I don't think..." the voice sounded so familiar.

As she turned to look at me... I recognized her immediately.

"Miss Olivia, this is Daddy," Chloe introduced her to me. "Daddy, she was crying. I think she's hurt."

It was her. Olivia was here. What was she doing here? She shared the same shock that I did.

"What the hell?" she muttered.

That explained the heart pounding.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

She looked at her feet and rubbed her arms nervously, unable to answer my questions.

“Is something wrong? Do you know her?” Mom asked.

Olivia looked at the both of us, and the worried look on her face increased.

“Remember the girl from London?” I whispered to her.

“Oh, my,” Mom said. “What is she doing here?”

“I don’t know either,” I said.

“I’m... I don’t... I...” Olivia looked like she wanted the ground to open and swallow her up. She stopped and looked around her. “My things.”

I turned and saw a traveling bag and a folder on the floor along with a purse. Chloe let go of me and went to pick up the folder and brought it to Olivia.

“Thank you, Soph- ahem, Chloe,” Olivia said, then turned to me. “I was sent here by Dr. Ethan Sullivan. Are you Dr. B. Sullivan?”

She was going to act like nothing happened.

“Do you want me to go with Chloe?” Mom asked me. “So you two can talk?”

“No,” Chloe and Olivia objected.

I understood Chloe’s rejection but not Olivia’s.

“You promised I could stay,” Chloe whined.

Olivia didn’t give a reason but she didn’t look like she wanted Chloe leaving. I don’t know why, but I had a good feeling about leaving two of them together.

“Well, if Ethan sent you, then you must be the new nurse,” I said.

“Yeah I am,” she replied. “I’m an auxiliary nurse, from the Dr. Helen William’s hospital.”

She was nervous. I was too. Even as I spoke to her with a straight face. My mind was recalling everything that happened that night. In her case, I could tell she was worried. Why wouldn’t she?

She had abandoned me in that hotel and left nothing but a note that didn't make an atom of sense.

She had every right to be worried.

"Let's talk in my office," I said as I walked over to her traveling bag and picked it up.

"What about me?" Chloe asked.

"You're coming too," I replied.

"Yay!" she exclaimed then held Olivia's hand. "Let's go. Daddy's office is cool. He has mints."

"Mints are cool?" Olivia asked with a warm smile.

"Yes, when you take them, aren't they cold?" Chloe asked as she tried blowing air on Olivia's hand.

"Yours is warm, looks like you really need the mints," Olivia said as she playfully bopped Chloe's nose, causing the latter to giggle.

It was a beautiful sight.

"Ben... hey, Ben," Mom called, interrupting my thoughts.

"Hmm? What is it?" I asked.

"I see what you're talking about," she said. "They look like mother and child, and Chloe likes her. Don't you think it's a sign? Maybe you should actually..."

"Mom, what happened in London was a momentary weakness, a one night stand as she said." I cut her off, "Right now, she's just someone who is here because of Ethan's mistake."

"Try saying that again. But this time, without the look of joy on your face," she said. "She's back. I told you she would come back. Besides if she hates you or doesn't want to see you, she'd actually be stomping out of here. But she's still standing. Maybe think of it as a good thing."

Mom was right. Olivia could have chosen to leave. She looked like she wanted to leave the moment she saw me...but something else kept her back.

Chloe.

Could it be that she had a sibling that Chloe reminded her off? Anyway, I wasn't going to waste an opportunity like this, nor would I want her to disappear again.

"I understand what you mean, but this is a completely platonic work relationship," I said.

"Whatever you say son," she sighed and walked past me.

"Olivia right?" Mom called.

"Yes, ma'am?" Olivia replied.

"It's rare for Chloe to like someone. I take it that you must be very special," Mom remarked with a smile.

"What? No no..." Olivia chuckled nervously and looked at Chloe who still held onto her hand. "Chloe's the special one here."

"She is isn't she?" Mom agreed as she tussled Chloe's hair and took a glance at me, then back to Olivia. "Enjoy your time at work."

"I will try my best," Olivia said.

Oh she's indirectly agreed to work here then.

"Alright, Chloe don't cause any problems for your father and the nice lady, okay?" Mom requested.

"Are you going home?" Chloe asked.

"Yes. But you'll be going home with your father, isn't that right Ben?" she asked.

"Yeah," I replied.

"There you have it," Mom said as she stood upright. "See you some other time, Olivia."

"You as well, ma'am," she said.

As Mom left, Olivia and I stared at each other both of us unsure of what to say first.

"For starters, let's get to my office and discuss your role," I said as I took the bag along.

“Okay,” she said softly as she followed behind me into the elevator.

As I pressed the button, there was another length of awkward silence.

The only thing stopping it from being completely silent was the sound of Chloe humming and gently tapping her feet. As the doors opened, we continued our silent march to my office.

“Told you daddy’s office was big!” Chloe announced as she made her way to the sofa and started jumping on the cushions.

“At least take off your shoes,” I said.

“Oh, sorry, Daddy.” She stopped her bouncing and sat down, hurriedly taking off her shoes.

“Have a seat?” I offered Olivia as I showed her the chair opposite my table while I made my way to my own seat.

“Thank you,” she replied and got seated immediately.

We stared at each other. I didn’t know where to begin.

Why did you leave that night? Did you feel anything when we were together? Do you hate me now? Who’s Sophia? Do you like Chloe enough to be her mother? Are you happy to see me again? Are you going to disappear again?

All these questions.... I wasn’t sure if I was going to ask them.

I needed to be sure that she wanted to talk about it as well. But... she looked so beautiful. She tied her hair in a ponytail and wore an off shoulder top and a pair of black pants with flats. I honestly thought she’d wear at least a one-inch heel or something.

“You look good,” she broke the silence.

“Thank you,” I replied as I adjusted my glasses. I didn’t expect the compliment. “You look stunning yourself. I was just wondering why you didn’t wear heels.”

“I have terrible luck. Wearing heels will always end up causing me some trouble,” she explained.

I couldn't tell if she was being serious or trying to lighten the awkward tension between us. Either way, it made me relax a bit.

I still had my questions, but it wasn't the right time to talk about them. Chloe was still in the office, and there was a chance that Olivia didn't want to bring it up if possible. I respected her silent decision and decided to act like nothing happened. If need be, I could always bring it up another time. Time to digress and keep it solely business.

“So, how have you been?” I asked.

She looked at me and raised a brow.

“With work and all that,” I emphasized.

“Work has been alright. Dr. William always had my hands full,” she replied. “I'm grateful because I got to meet a lot of new patients and was able to learn how to handle kids better.”

“That's amazing,” I said. “Helen is hardly a woman to praise someone, but when Ethan told me she put in a good word for you, we were both convinced it would have been a shame to let you go back just like that.”

“Oh did you already know I was coming?” she asked.

“I didn't know it was you specifically,” I replied.

“If you did... would you have sent me back?” she asked.

“I would have asked him to make you work with me permanently,” I replied instantly.

“Don't say that with such a straight face,” she chuckled. “Well it feels nice to know I'm wanted.”

I've always wanted you. I still do now.

Some words were best left unsaid.

“We'll make sure your stay here is as educational as it would be anywhere else,” I assured her.

“Thank you, Dr. Sullivan,” she said.

“Please, there are three Sullivans. I’m sure my brothers would be okay if you call them by their names,” I said.

“Won’t that be disrespectful? You are my boss, after all,” she pointed out.

“I think... that doesn’t really apply to you and I,” I said.

She raised a brow wondering what I was talking about. Her cheeks turned a slight shade of red as she realized.

“Oh, yeah,” she said softly as she looked down.

She was adorable.

“Miss Olivia, here’s the mint,” Chloe said to her as she pointed at the bowl and struggled to climb the table.

“I want to seat her on the table, is that okay?” Olivia asked.

“No problems,” I replied and watched her lift my daughter and placed her on the table.

Chloe reached for the mints and handed some to Olivia who accepted her offer.

“Why do you have so many mints?” Olivia asked as she put one in her mouth.

“Who doesn’t like a breath of fresh air?” I asked as I stood up. “I needed something healthy to offer patients that came in with children. My creed won’t let me offer them candy that would rot their teeth.”

“But won’t that big business for your dental department?” she smirked.

“That’s a devious scheme,” I remarked, “Don’t tell me...you did the same thing at Helen’s?”

“How do you think she became so successful?” she asked with a sinister smile.

“Nah, you don’t have the heart to do so,” I remarked as I adjusted my glasses.

“What makes you think that?” She pouted, “I’m quite heartless.”

“Children don’t like heartless people,” I pointed out as I stared at Chloe, who was trying to open another mint.

“I see,” she said softly; as she looked at Chloe as well, the latter smiled. “I guess they don’t.”

“More mints?” Chloe asked as she offered Olivia some more.

“I think I’m good,” Olivia smiled.

Chloe nodded and started smuggling them into her little pockets for later.

“Well, I would like to introduce you to the department heads,” I said. “I understand that Ethan’s program is to let you get better understanding of your field in a different environment. But we don’t have a lot of children in this hospital.”

“It’s okay, I’m trained for general auxiliary nurse activities. I just like taking care of children,” she said.

“Any particular reason why?” I asked.

She kept quiet as her expression changed, replaced with a forced smile. “Does anyone need a good reason to do good?”

She didn’t want to talk about it.

“No one does,” I replied. “Do you want to see the team now?”

“I’ll be honored to,” she said as she got up, put Chloe down, and followed behind me.

“This is Dr. David Solomon, head of ER and practically in charge, if I’m not around,” I introduced him.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Olivia Collins,” she introduced herself.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I hope you’ll enjoy your time working here,” he said with a warm smile and looked down. “I see Chloe is attached to you now.”

“Hi David,” Chloe greeted but she hid behind Olivia, wrapping her tiny arms around Olivia’s leg.

“I don’t mind the company,” Olivia said as she caressed Chloe’s hair.

“If you’re less busy you’ll help Dr. Solomon watch over patients who just finished operations,” I said. “There are other nurses, so you don’t have to do it alone. And to make it effective, ask him first so he can easily assign you to a patient.”

“I understand,” she said.

“I heard you’re good with children. We don’t have a lot of kids doing surgeries or in the ER, thank God, but I’d love to have your help,” he said to her.

“Understood, sir,” she affirmed.

“That went well,” I said to her as we made our way to children’s ward.

“He reminds me of Helen, but calmer and wiser,” she explained.

She was carrying Chloe in her arms.

“Isn’t she too heavy?” I asked.

“Nah,” she shook her head.

“Daddy, carry me!” Chloe stretched her arms to me.

I took her and Olivia let out a sigh of relief.

“I thought you said she wasn’t heavy,” I smirked.

“Oh shut it hulk.” She punched my arm playfully, but didn’t pull her hand away. She opened her fist and touched my biceps.

She swallowed and looked up at me. I didn’t say anything.

“Ben, I…”

“Good afternoon, sir,” a voice greeted causing Olivia to pull her hand away.

I turned and another doctor was standing behind us.

“Olivia, this is Martha. She’s a nurse in charge of the children’s ward,” I introduced her. “Martha, Olivia is going to be working closely with you.”

“Hi, Martha!” Chloe waved at her.

“Hello, Chloe,” Martha waved back with a smile. “Nice to meet you, Olivia.”

“Nice to meet you, Martha,” Olivia shook her hand. “I can’t wait to meet the angels.”

“Most of them are asleep,” Matter replied with joy. “Afternoon nap after story time is kind of automatic.”

“You have story time here?!” Olivia’s eyes sparkled.

“Shh, not so loud,” Martha giggled. “We have story time after we give them lunch.”

“The hospital provides free meals for the kids?” Olivia asked.

“Provides free meals for all patients,” Martha corrected.

Olivia turned to look at me in awe. I shrugged... but I was feeling a little proud of myself for adding that policy.

“I think I’m going to like it here,” Olivia said with a smile.

“I’m glad to have you here,” Martha said to her. “It’s good to meet someone who shares the love of children. I like that.”

“It’s good to meet a comrade as well,” Olivia said.

“See you soon,” Martha said, “I’m going to check on my babies.”

“Have fun,” Olivia said.

We watched Martha disappear from sight.

“Ben, thank you for the opportunity to work here,” Olivia said. “I know things happened, but I’m glad it won’t affect my work here.”

“You’re welcome,” I said.

Well, her work area was settled. The only problem was her living area.

“Daddy, what are we having for dinner?” Chloe asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied, “Do you have any requests, Olivia?”

“Hmm?” Olivia raised a brow.

“Ethan didn’t tell you?” I asked, “you’re living with us.”

“Yayy,” Chloe cheered, “I’ll show you my room.”

Chapter Seven

The Makeshift Family

*O*livia

I was born in London. When my father was still alive, dinner was our time to bond. If he had work to do that night, he'd stop by around seven pm and go for his night shift by eight. Well, as he died, I had to spend dinnertime alone.

When I started dating my ex-boyfriend up to the point when I was pregnant, he made sure he had dinner with me so I wasn't alone. It wasn't a lot, but it meant something; he made sure I felt warm. When Sophia was born, I thought that I had gotten a dinner partner for life. Even when she was confined to the hospital, I spent most of my time watching over and sleeping next to her.

The hospital I worked for didn't bother me with a lot of work, just so I could spend more time with my daughter. It was after Sophia died and there was no one else to spend or have dinner with, that I realized that I was alone.

I got to know about that pub because I enjoyed the atmosphere. Chaotic, yes, but it didn't make me feel lonely. I played my snooker alone though, except when I had those Lady Luck moments where guys would try to pay for my drinks with a free game.

I would win all the games, and they'd call it quits. Sure I never went home with any of them, but I did enjoy their company. Going back home to my apartment and falling asleep all alone to the sound of the water dripping in the sink was my only comfort. Until Ben happened.

When Dr. Sullivan... the Ethan one, told me I'd be spending the nights at my new boss's house, I was worried that I would make them uncomfortable. When I realized I'd be staying with Ben, my worries shifted from *Will they be okay staying with me?* to *Will I be able to last staying with them?*

We didn't say anything about that night, but it wasn't like keeping silent would make it like nothing at all had happened. So, when he reminded me that I was going to stay with him... the memories came back. As I touched his arm, before Martha interrupted, I was reminded of how it felt to be held.

I wanted to tell him I was sorry for disappearing that night. I could just sleep at the hospital because staying anywhere near him, even comfortably dressed, was a dangerous move and would cause me to pounce. But then Chloe seemed excited about the idea of me spending time at their home.

"How about I cook you both something?" I asked.

"You can cook?" He raised a brow.

"Rude," I frowned, "When you stay alone for as long as I have, you automatically pick up cooking as a hobby."

"I don't know if I'm to feel bad for you or feel impressed," he said.

I realized what I had just said. He had a point.

"Just do the latter," I said.

"I don't think so, I already feel sorry," he said with a smirk. "To think you're also company-deprived."

"Hey, don't make fun of people's misfortune." I crossed my arms.

"Is Daddy making you upset?" Chloe asked.

“Yes he is, and he’s being a big meanie,” I replied. “Tell him off.”

“Off! Daddy off!” Chloe repeated as she poked at his face. “Bad Daddy, bad Daddy.”

“Ouch, okay, fine. I’ll stop,” he gave up then frowned at me. “Turning my daughter against me.”

He was so cute.

“I didn’t do no such thing,” I said. “She just knows you’re a *bad Daddy*.”

“I’ll let you cook, but I swear if you make my angel’s tummy to hurt, I will hurt you,” he warned.

In a way I could tell he was joking and not joking at the same time. It was nice to know I wasn’t the only one with daughter complex.

“And Olivia, if your loneliness is your misfortune, Chloe and I will make sure to turn it around,” he promised me.

I looked at him; the serious look he had on his face was the same one he had when he told me I was beautiful. My heart started to pound again. I wasn’t going to tell him, but the both of them kind of looked like a family I never had, or the one I had lost.

“Thank you Ben,” I said.

“What about me?! I told daddy off,” Chloe reminded.

“And thank you too Chloe, I don’t know what I would have done without you,” I said to her.

Chloe giggled and stretched her arms to me, “Your turn.”

I took her and boy was she heavy. Sophia lost a lot of weight during her last months. I was carrying her a lot and watched my baby become lighter and lighter unable to do anything to help.

Chloe gave me a glimpse of what it would be like to have Sophia still alive at that time. My stomach growled interrupting the little moment of peace the three of us had.

“Was that your tummy?” Chloe asked.

My cheeks changes color as I looked at Ben. He was amused by what happened but didn't say anything. He looked like he was on the verge of laughing, a vein forming on the side of his head as he tried his best not to laugh as my tummy stupidly growled a second time. I had completely forgotten about food.

He let out a deep breath, and asked Chloe, “Sweetie, are you hungry?”

Clever move to ask her so we could all get something to eat together.

“Yes I am, but Miss Olivia is hungrier. Her tummy is making a funny sound,” Chloe said ruining the plan.

“Pfft,” Ben broke but quickly regained himself. He maintained a straight face as I frowned at him, “Olivia are you hungry?”

“N... no..” My tummy rumbled in opposition.

Chloe was the first to laugh, then Ben followed suit.

“You two are so mean!” I pouted as embarrassment overtook my body.

“Don't worry, Olivia, I'll get some food for your tummy,” Ben said with a warm smile as he poked at my stomach tickling me a little.

Not good. You shouldn't be this good to me. Not after what I did.

I wanted to apologize again, but I didn't know how nor did I know if it was necessary. He took us to a nearby fast food because Chloe insisted on burgers. I watched him try to make sure she didn't soil herself. He seemed more like a soccer mom than a dad.

“Why do you keep staring so much?” he asked.

“I'm sorry. Is it that bad?” I asked.

“No it isn't, I just wondered why you did it so much that's all,” he explained.

“Well, that’s because I’m a scientist, it’s our jobs to observe,” I replied.

“Funny,” he smirked and turned his attention to Chloe who was getting a bite out of her burger.

I had ordered a chicken wrap, while he went for a burger. We ate in silence, only breaking it to answer the questions Chloe had about life or whatever her five-year-old mind could think about.

This was nice. I felt like I was part of their family... well, only temporarily. I was the only one thinking about it, but it felt like I belonged and that was all that mattered.

As we returned to the hospital, I met with the other team members and got to better understand my role once I started my duties. At the end of the day, we had to devise a way for us to go back home together without anyone else at the hospital noticing.

I had more or less caused a scene by hugging Chloe in front of everyone. We easily chalked it up to my love of children. And some of them saw us leave for the fast food, but they ignores it as I was just traveling in. They figured their kind benevolent boss wanted to just get the newcomer fed. But if they saw the both of us going home together, it would be a problem.

Ben told me to walk straight ahead for five minutes towards one of the nearby hotels, and he’d come get me. It was a solid plan because everyone would know I left. If they saw him pick me up, they’d assume he was just dropping me off at the hotel. When he told me the plan, I was at a loss for words as to how he had so easily came up with it.

I walked, I pulled out a photograph of Mom from my purse.

“Mom, looks like I found him again. And I’m going to be a part of his family. No, he didn’t say that, I’m jumping to conclusions,” I laughed. “I’m glad nothing is awkward between us. I know how it felt to have the last lover run away

from me. I can't even imagine how it must have felt for him. I think he has forgiven me, I hope he has actually."

A Mercedes drove up to me and the window went down.

"Going my way?" Ben asked.

"Took you long enough," I said as I got into the car.

"Hi Miss Olivia," Chloe greeted from her seat.

"Hi there Chloe," I returned her greeting and reached back to tickle her tummy.

"You have such long legs," Ben remarked. "You covered a lot of ground in a short time. Both impressive and scary."

"I walk a lot," was all I could say in defense.

"That's a lot of waking," he said as he started to drive.

"How were you able to come up with this plan?" I asked. "You didn't tell me you were such a player with the backup plans and all."

"Not my idea," he said. "My brother Ethan mentioned something like this once. I didn't know if I was to be impressed or not. I don't fool around."

Then what happened in London...wasn't fooling around?

I didn't ask that. Instead, I remembered an important question I should have asked in the first place. It wasn't safe to assume.

"About my staying at your place, will your wife be okay with it?" I asked.

"Daddy doesn't have one," Chloe replied and continued humming.

"Oh, I... I didn't," I looked at Ben and he didn't seem fazed about what Chloe had just said.

"It's alright, she's been... gone since Chloe was born," he finally said as he came to a stop sign. "Chloe didn't know her so it's not much of a problem."

"But you knew her," I said.

“Yeah... I did,” he replied as his hands tightened around the steering wheel before returning to his hand to the gear stick.

I shouldn't have asked that.

“Hey, don't feel bad. If anything I would think there was something wrong with you if you didn't ask,” he said.

“Oh makes sense now,” I smiled. “I'm still sorry if it caused any bitter memories.”

“It didn't,” he assured me.

We arrived at his house. For someone who was a billionaire, he lived rather minimalistic. The house seemed like a simple home. That's if you ignore how big the compound was. There was a playground, a separate house just to keep his cars. A lot of expensive-looking sport cars and some luxury ones. He had a security man, but I didn't see any other staff.

“Chore day must be difficult for you,” I teased.

“Oh, I have a gardener,” he said. “And I hire cleaning services. I'm mostly not home so I don't usually hire them often.”

“But they do a good job right?” I asked as he unlocked the front door and opened it.

“I'm sure they do,” he said as he put on the light.

The living room was spacious, and the furniture had a luxury feel. I noticed the surround system from the home theater. The TV was the biggest I have ever seen. From the living room was an open view of the kitchen and dining area. There was a mini-bar as well

“Was this your idea?” I asked.

“My wife's. She wanted to be able to keep her eye on the kids if they were playing, or offer me some entertaining view of her cooking form,” he replied. “The bedrooms are upstairs. One belongs to Chloe, one is mine and the last one is the guest room, where you'll sleep in for now.”

“Daddy, I want to sleep in your room, you promised,” Chloe reminded him.

“I know and you can sleep in my room, let’s get you changed and ready for dinner,” he said to her, then turned his attention to me. “Let me show you to your room.”

It was bigger than my place, and I didn’t feel like going back home, nor going to the hotel if Ethan had secured me a place.

“If you need anything, let me know,” he said. “I know you planned to make dinner for us, but let me do it today.”

“Thank you for everything,” I said.

“Don’t mention it,” he said and left.

I had a shower. My habit of worrying about wasting hot water almost kicked in but I remembered he could afford it, so I just continued anyway. When I was done, I looked for something to wear but realized I hadn’t packed any sleepwear.

I had to improvise.

Ben’s POV

I worked on a simple dinner of Mac and cheese. I was oddly excited. Although we were acting like nothing happened between us, she was still at my house. My phone started to ring.

“Daddy, I want to help too,” Chloe said.

“Alright here,” I gave her the cutlery.

She dropped them on the table but not the right way. After dropping them, her job was done and she went off to the living room to watch some cartoons.

“Thanks for the help Chloe,” I said.

“Okay!” she replied without a care.

I answered the phone, “Hello?”

“Hey big brother,” Ethan said. “I saw your missed calls what’s up?”

“Yeah I wanted to know if the nurse had arrived at your hospital,” I explained. “Did something happen? Stacy seemed like she needed the company.”

“I don’t... I said something stupid,” he said.

Normally I’d make a joke and go, “Tell me something I don’t know.” But that was the last thing he wanted to hear.

“Have you seen the nurse?” He changed the topic. “She’s a very chill person. I almost wanted to keep her at my place by all means.”

“I’m glad you didn’t,” I said, “Chloe loves her. She’s at my house now.”

“Chloe loves her? Damn, looks like I’m the only one she doesn’t like yet, and I’m family,” he sighed.

“Don’t beat yourself up; her birthday is coming up, so just bribe her with another cake and don’t screw it up, butterfingers,” I teased.

“You seem in a good mood,” he said. “You hardly tease me.”

“Well I haven’t spent the night with Chloe in a while, and...”

“Daddy, I want some water,” Chloe requested, cutting me off. I got her a cup and she made her way to the water dispenser.

“Don’t play with that,” I warned. “What was I saying Ethan? Yeah, I haven’t spent a lot of time with Chloe recently, so getting to come home early and be with her is a lot exciting.”

“I don’t think that’s the only reason your excited,” he said.

“And what makes you say that?” I asked as I brought out the plates and started plating the meal.

“Well, a healthy man and a healthy woman in one house,” he said. I could picture his goofy grin.

“You really know how to switch back to normal, considering you just broke a woman’s heart some hours ago,” I brought

him back to earth.

“I don’t... fine you win,” he sighed, “...just hang in there for six more days and we’ll get her a hotel room. As for her duties, there’s a logbook document I’m going...”

I stopped hearing him as I heard footsteps descending the stairs. I looked up and noticed that Olivia was on her way down. She wore a baggy t-shirt that stopped at her shorts. She wasn’t wearing a bra, at least that’s what the imprint on her chest showed me. Her nipples were stiff as well. She had a refreshed look, and her hair seemed damp. She had her finger in her left ear, trying to get water out.

“Something smells good,” she said as she switched to the right ear. She paused and looked up at me then at her outfit. She covered her chest rather bashfully. “Look I forgot my nightwear, okay? Don’t stare too hard until I’m used to your gaze.”

I couldn’t speak, too stunned to say anything. She was still wearing clothes and covered everything perfectly, but I was still being affected.

“Hello? Did he go into a tunnel? Earth to Benjamin Sullivan!” Ethan called for my attention.

“Huh, what?” I asked.

“Did you even hear a thing I said?” he asked.

“Ethan just send me a mail,” I said before hanging up.

“You’re still staring,” she complained.

“No it’s just... wow,” I sighed as I looked at her from head to toe. “You’re stunning.”

“Beautiful? Now stunning? Looks like all men do is change their words.

I knew she was teasing me but it stung a little. If she was going to stay dressed like this every night... then I was in for trouble for the next seven days.

“Dinner is ready,” I said as I tore my eyes away.

Olivia

I was worried when I came down wearing this outfit. But he looked at me just the way he did during the hotel stay. It felt good to hear him praise my looks again. The dinner he made was nice. I could have made it better myself, though. He had more cheese less Mac.

After dinner, Chloe felt sleepy as expected. We were seated and watching a show she wanted. I wanted to go to bed but she insisted that we all watched it together.

“She’s asleep,” I said.

“Hmm?” Ben was almost half asleep as well.

“Do you want to go upstairs?” I asked.

“Too tired,” he replied groggily.

“I see,” I sighed.

“Olivia...”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t disappear.”

“I won’t,” I replied.

“You disappeared the last time,” he reminded me.

“Yeah I can’t do that this time,” I said, “I have a job to do and all.”

He didn’t say anything. The gentle snore came through. He and his daughter looked so peaceful.

I kissed Chloe’s head, and then planted a soft kiss on Ben’s lips. I wanted to go to my room, but I decided to sleep right next to them.

I wasn’t in London. I wasn’t with my dad. I wasn’t with Sophia, but I wasn’t alone.

Chapter Eight

You Remind me of Someone

B^{en}

I woke up to the sweet smell of eggs. I looked around me, and I was alone. Chloe wasn't sleeping on my arm and Olivia wasn't next to me. I fell asleep while sitting, but woke up laying down.

"Can I try it now?" I heard Chloe ask.

"Okay sweetie you can," Olivia said.

I sat up and made my way to the kitchen. It was a mess. Chloe had pancake mix on herself and was struggling to mix a bowl that Olivia had handed to her. Olivia didn't look so clean herself with the egg stains on the shirt she wore the previous night.

"Not so hard," Olivia warned as Chloe tried stirring the mix faster. "Alright let me have it."

"I did it," Chloe giggled as she gave the mix to Olivia.

"Indeed you did," Olivia smiled and started mixing the pancake again before putting it in the pan.

It smelled delicious. They hadn't noticed me, so I crossed my arms and watched the two ladies cause more chaos in my kitchen.

“Can you flip it?!” Chloe asked as Olivia turned the pancake with a spatula.

“I don’t know, I can try,” Olivia said.

She took in a deep breath and flipped the meal and it landed perfectly.

“I did it!” Olivia seemed more excited than the person who had requested for the pancake to be flipped.

“You did it!” Chloe cheered.

I was impressed too.

“Again, Again!” Chloe demanded.

“Alright stand back and watch the master chef work,” Olivia said as the pride got the better of her.

She flipped the pancake too high, and it ended up landing on her head. Chloe screamed in delight, while regret was written all over Olivia’s face. I covered my mouth to suppress my laughter.

“You know what Chloe? It’s not really a good idea to play with your food,” Olivia said.

Of course, she would have sounded a lot more mature if it wasn’t for the pancake on her head.

“Okay,” Chloe managed to calm down.

The both of them continued to prepare breakfast: Eggs and pancake.

“What would dad like to drink?” Olivia asked.

Dad? The last time anyone called me that besides Chloe was... Selina when she was pregnant.

“I don’t know,” Chloe sounded sad. “Daddy doesn’t have breakfast with me.”

My shoulders dropped. I really have been neglecting this kid. She didn’t even know what I would have for breakfast.

“Don’t feel bad sweetie,” Olivia said as knelt in front of her. “My God, you’re a mess, we need to get you cleaned up before dad sees you.

“Okay,” Chloe said.

“Tell you what? What would you like?” Olivia asked.

“Cocoa,” Chloe said.

“We’ll make cocoa for dad too,” Olivia said. “Then I’ll have cocoa. It’ll be a cocoa breakfast!”

“Cocoa!” Chloe jumped in excitement.

It’s a little weird they both haven’t noticed me with this view of the living room. At least, it made me to see a new side of him that I had never seen before.

They started to set the table, so I returned to the sofa.

“I’ll go wake daddy!” Chloe said, and I could hear her little feet scurrying towards me.

“No wait let’s get you cleaned up first! Ah Chloe!” Olivia called.

Chloe had gotten to me. I had lain down and was pretending to be asleep.

“Daddy, wake up, breakfast,” Chloe said as she tapped my face repeatedly.

“Hmm?” I faked a yawn. “Is that a Chloe ghost?”

“Noooo, it’s just Chloe,” she replied with a giggle, “Let’s have breakfast. I made it!”

“You made breakfast by yourself?” I raised a brow.

“Mm hmm,” she nodded, “but I had to ask Miss Olivia for help.”

“That’s very good,” I praised as I kissed her forehead. “You look like a mess.”

I got up and followed her to the kitchen. The food was already set, and Olivia was trying to tidy up the kitchen.

“Oh you can get started without me,” she said. “Good morning, Ben.”

“Good morning Olivia,” I greeted.

“Oh, Daddy, good morning,” Chloe greeted then sped off to the dining table before I could even reply.

“How long were you awake?” Olivia asked.

“What makes you ask? I just woke up if you must know,” I said.

“Yeah, right,” she rolled her eyes, “...with an open view like that, It’s not that hard to notice you.”

“You could notice me, but you still couldn’t remember to get the pancake off your head?” I asked as I saw the meal still on her head. Her eyes widened in shock as she touched her head and brought down the pancake.

“I meant to leave it there,” she said as her cheeks turned red.

“Sure you did,” I smirked.

“Dad! Come eat!” Chloe called, “Miss Olivia!”

“The lady summons us,” I said.

“You go on ahead, I’ll eat in my room,” she said.

“You will do no such thing,” I warned. “She’s already asked you to join us, so don’t make her sad. We can clean the mess together when we’re done.”

“Oh... I don’t know...”

“Olivia, please join us for breakfast,” I pleaded.

She sighed, “You just had to use the magic word.” She got up and followed me to the dining table.

“I made yours,” Chloe said as she pointed at my omelet.

“I would be careful, I couldn’t remove all the egg shells,” Olivia warned in a whisper as Chloe started eating after saying a prayer.

“Wait what? What about yours?” I asked.

“Huh? No mine’s safe,” she replied. “I made mine and hers so there’s no shells. Just yours, enjoy.”

I stared at my eggs with uncertainty.

“You don’t want them, Daddy?” Chloe asked in a whimper.

“No, I do,” I chuckled nervously.

“Then why aren’t you eating?” Olivia asked with a smirk, causing me to frown.

“Yeah,” Olivia agreed.

“I just want to keep it for lunch, I’ll have the pancakes,” I said.

“Oh, okay,” Chloe said as she started to poke at her food.

“Nice going dad,” Olivia said. “If you don’t want it, let me have it.”

“But I made it for dad,” Chloe whined.

“Fine,” I groaned and started to eat the meal with gusto.

“Do you like it?” The sparkle had returned to her eyes.

“It tasted good... extra *crunchy* but good,” I said as I swallowed.

“We didn’t know what you’d drink so we all went with Cocoa,” Olivia explained as I picked up the cup.

“I actually have a sweet tooth,” I said before taking the cocoa. Perfectly made. “You did this as well, Chloe?”

“Only mine,” she said as she drank hers.

“Is it good, daddy?” Olivia asked in a baby-ish voice.

“Yes... it is actually,” I admitted, “You have a gift. This tastes just like...”

“Just like what?” she asked.

“The way I used to love it,” I said, although that wasn’t exactly what I wanted to say.

“Well, if that’s what you like, get ready to drink it so much you’d get exhausted,” she said with a grin as she rested her head on her hand.

What I wanted to say, was that it tasted just like *she* used to make it. She was clumsy and didn’t know how to cook. The only thing she was good at was making cakes and tea.

“It’s a Sunday, so what’s the plan?” Olivia asked.

“Daddy will drop me off at grandma’s,” Chloe said.

“About that, I won’t be working on Sundays anymore,” I said. “I want to spend some more time with you.”

“You really mean it?” Chloe asked.

“Yeah,” I smiled.

“Okay,” was all she said but the giggles she let out told me she loved the idea.

“Good job, Dad,” Olivia said. “Hearing that she doesn’t know your favorite breakfast drink set you on the right track, didn’t it?”

“I’ve actually been making plans to make sure that I get enough time with her,” I explained. “But it’s true that I’ve neglected her for so long as I desperately want to change it.”

“That’s good to hear,” she said as we continued eating our meal.

“So you don’t eat breakfast with her?” Olivia asked.

We divided ourselves into three. Olivia washed the dishes, Chloe wiped the table and any other thing that caught her attention, while I cleaned the mess on the floor.

“I just forget to,” I replied.

“How does one simply *forget to*?” She asked. “I mean you make her breakfast right? There’s always room for you to take at least a slice of bread. Kids need to know you’d be comfortable to eat with them.”

“How?” I wondered.

“For some odd reason, most of them eat better when they see an adult they trust eating,” she explained.

“I would have argued but I’m not an auxiliary nurse who has experience taking care of children,” I sighed.

“You’re damn right,” she said. “Anyway, now that I’m here, you’re going to change. For your daughter’s sake as well.”

“Why are you so fired up about this?” I asked.

“Because...you have no idea the gift you have,” she said as she stopped washing the dishes, “Many people pray for that gift but don’t get it. Some get it but don’t know how to handle it. And there are those who get it, can handle it and try their best to keep it, promising they’ll do better if they can get to hold it a little longer... but they still end up losing it.”

Something told me she was speaking from experience. An experience that hurt her badly enough that she would probably have been better off not remembering it...but I had reminded her.

I didn’t apologize. There were times when apologies were not needed. Just the need to listen instead.

“Anyway,” she sighed and continued washing the plates. “You’re going to be a good father, with my guidance at least. Until my stay is over.”

Those words were one I had heard long ago.

“I’m done,” Chloe announced as she made her way to us with a rag in her hand.

“Thank you for your hard work Chloe,” Olivia said as she picked her up. “Now let’s go give you a bath. Ben do you mind helping me with the rest of the dishes?”

“No problem,” I replied.

“Thank you,” she smiled and left with Chloe.

Barely two days and she’s already a mother. I didn’t mind it.

And there are those who get it, can handle it, try their best to keep it, promise that they’ll do better if they can get to hold it a little longer... but they still end up losing it.

The words repeated themselves as I pondered a time when those words meant something to me.

It was during the time I was still with Selina.

Selina Sullivan.

Before we got married, she was called Selina Bullock, a name not fitting for a beauty like her. She was the classic romance novel female lead. Country bumpkin, trying to follow

her dreams in the big city but a little sidetracked along the way. I met her seven years prior to the current time.

It was a cafe. I wasn't hungry and honestly I didn't know what brought me there. Oh yeah, Ian had asked for a chiffon cake. I came to the cafe because their flyer said they sold all kinds of cake there. So I waltzed in and rang the bell. The place was relatively empty, but at least there were enough customers to call it a busy day.

"Coming, coming," a beautiful voice announced as she made her way to the counter.

She had beautiful brown hair almost the same length as Olivia's. She was a little shorter and her physique was more lean supermodel as opposed to Olivia's thick supermodel form but she was beautiful.

"You okay? Stare at me any longer and I'll blush," she said with a smirk.

If there was any similarity between the two, it was their mischievousness.

"Oh I... you're just... ahem," I cleared my throat and tried to compose myself.

I was never the type to do something as cliché as fumble over my words because of a woman, but it was happening. I had just met her but my heart was pounding insanely fast and I didn't know how to stop it.

"Just go ahead and compliment me," she sighed.

"What?"

"'you're just'" she repeated, "You were clearly about to say something about me or my looks. Go ahead, let's hear it."

I regained my composure and adjusted my glasses, "Isn't that just fishing for compliments?"

"Fishing for, what do you think I am? Desperate?" she asked with a sigh as she shook her head negatively. "Let me ask you something instead. Were you or were you not about to compliment me?"

“I was,” I replied.

“And now he doesn’t hesitate,” she murmured. “So, if you think about it, it’s not really fishing for compliments when it was about to happen. Besides I am pretty, so I can understand if you wanted to compliment me.”

She was something else. If I heard anyone else speak like the way she did, I would have written them off as pompous or a pick me girl. But there was just something about the way she said it, like she was teaching me a lesson and at the same time confident of herself.

“Still dumbstruck?” She sighed, “I’m sorry, I come off as proud right? You just seemed fun to tease. What would you like to order?”

“How often can I come here and talk to you without getting kicked out and without you losing your job?” I asked.

The question caused a smile to form.

“So you aren’t put off huh?” She smirked, “Am I that irresistible?”

“Well I think you’re beautiful that’s all, although we need to fix your talking pattern,” I said, “I take it you’re not from Richmond?”

“Alabama, and please don’t make the jokes,” she groaned.

“What jokes?”

“Never mind,” she sighed. “Oh, and thank you for the compliment. I could tell it came from the heart. The next time you see a beautiful woman that catches your eye or heart, be sure to let them know they’re beautiful. They love that.”

“What about you?” I asked.

“Me?” She raised a brow and flipped her hair backward, “I’m your master in this. My job is to teach you the ways to a woman’s heart. The techniques I’ll teach you won’t work on me.”

“You’re something else.” I shook my head as the smile formed. “Where’s your hairnet? You serve food, you’re not

supposed to walk around with flowing her.”

She touched her head and realized it wasn't there. “I didn't wear it on purpose.”

She sped off into the back and returned with a hairnet on. “What will your order be?”

“One chiffon cake and your finest beverage,” I said.

“To go?”

“I'll eat here.”

That was how I became a regular at her shop. She'd teach me things, that I knew I would never use on any other woman but her. Within three months, she displayed the same feelings for me. We were... in love. I had never experienced anything so powerful, so moving like her love for me. She'd visit at my old place and spent the weekend with me if I didn't have anything to do at work.

I found out she was a terrible cook during one of her visits. She tried making pasta sauce from scratch and failed. She failed a lot of meals that day, and she never got over it. But she was good at her cakes, cookies, whatever involved baking in an oven. Then her beverages were heavenly. Her tea healed my fatigue, her coffee energized during work period, and her cocoa... made me feel like a child again.

I remember praising her pastries and she said, “Well, if that's what you like, get ready to eat so many pastries your belly would burst.”

Five months after we met I proposed and bought my new house that we remodeled according to her taste. One year later, we were married. It was a happily ever after set in stone. Then her health started to deteriorate, and I didn't know why. I consulted with various skilled medical doctors but none of us could do nothing. What made me panic a little more, was the fact that she was pregnant.

“Hey, Dad,” she greeted one time after I was done with work.

“Hey, baby,” I greeted and sat by her side, “How are you holding up?”

“He’s been kicking all evening,” she sighed as she touched her stomach.

“I’m telling you it’s going to be a girl,” reminded as I touched her stomach. I felt the little kick, “Ah she kicked again.”

“That one hurt,” she complained.

“You’ll get better,” I assured her.

“You’re so bad at lying, at least say it again without looking so sad,” she said as she touched my face.

“I don’t know if I can do this,” I said.

“You’re saying it like I’m going to lose,” she said. “Where’s the man who’s going to be an awesome father? Don’t you know fathers cheer on their wives and kids?”

The baby kicked again.

“See? He agrees,” she said with a smile.

“She,” I corrected.

“So stubborn,” she giggled. “You’re going to be a good father, with my guidance at least. I made you bag the best woman in the world. I can handle teaching you how to take care of our child.”

“You sure about that? I ended up having to learn everything else myself,” I said.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” she said. “This time you don’t have to buy anything. Just listen to all my instructions.”

“Whatever you say, ma’am,” I said.

When the time to deliver approached, she requested I not be part of the labor process. I sat in my office twiddling my thumbs as I wasn’t let anywhere near her. I believe she already knew what would have happened if I was there. After two long

hours that seemed to last like days, she was finally put to bed. When I went in the nurses were done checking the baby's vitals and everything, Selina was feeding the child.

"He?" I asked.

"You know if you actually went into gambling, you would have become a trillionaire by now." She said with a tired smile, "Come meet your daughter."

I picked her up. "She's beautiful."

"Has your hair," Selina chuckled. "Now we don't need a paternity test."

I smiled a little but the smile disappeared when I heard her coughing.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm fine, just a little tired," she said. "Who knew delivery would take that long?"

The nurses had changed the sheets, but my nose could easily pick up the smell of blood.

There was a chance that she wasn't going to be able to push. So they had done a caesarian section. That's why she didn't want me here.

I don't want to sound like a terrible father, but I would rather have kept her than the baby. She knew that would have been the call I would have made. She was just too intelligent for her own good.

"You're a bad liar," I said.

"That makes two of us," she smiled. "Hey, don't you think the room is too stuffy?"

I turned to the doctors and nurses present. They all understood and left us alone.

"Let me continue feeding her," she said. "Wouldn't want to fall asleep without giving her fill. What kind of mom would that make me?"

"A terrible one?" I raised a brow.

“Perhaps,” she said weakly as she fed Chloe.

I watched her feed our daughter until she was full.

“How do you burp again?” she asked.

“Isn’t she too little for that? Her neck structure might...”

“Ben... calm down, Dad,” she cut me short as she started her attempts to burp her.

After Chloe made the little sound, she put her down and let out a sigh.

“What do you think of me now?” she asked. “Are mesmerized? Stunned? Surely motherhood hasn’t made my beauty to dull.”

“You still look as beautiful as ever,” I said.

“Remember to tell whatever girl that catches your that. Girls love it when you tell them that,” she reminded me. “Oh, I don’t think it would work on me. I’ve heard it so many times that it has become boring.”

“Whatever you say ma’am,” I sighed.

“Could you hold her? Let me get a few z’s,” she said. “Motherhood is exhausting.”

“It sure is,” I said with a smile as I took Chloe.

“Oh, just in case I forget, don’t forget to tell her I love her,” she reminded me.

“I won’t,” I said.

The bile in my chest start to build up. My eyes started feeling wetter than usual.

“What else? Please don’t hate her for anything, nothing is her fault,” she added.

“I’ll never hate her,” I promised.

“And Ben, I love you, okay?” she said.

“I love you too,” I admitted.

“Ah, it pays to be the doctor’s wife, they gave me the biggest bed,” she said. “How about you and Chloe join me?”

“Sure thing,” I iterated.

The bed was indeed big for a hospital one. But Selina had asked to deliver on one big enough for three. I placed Chloe in between us as Selina laid on her side to get a good look at us.

“She’s so beautiful,” I said.

“Ah, you’re already practicing I see,” Selina smiled.

I didn’t say anything, I leaned towards her and gave her a kiss. It was a short, but a passionate one.

“I kind of want you inside me now,” she said, “but it’s a mess down there. So let’s do it in the morning okay?”

“Okay.”

“Goodnight, Ben.”

“Goodnight, Selina.”

That was the last word I ever said to her. I don’t know when she was gone. A rough estimate would be around two am when she slept around eleven pm. She was alive for three more hours.

As promised, I never one day looked at Chloe and wished it was her who had left. I did my best, but it wasn’t really the best nor could it qualify as good. She was turning six, and it felt like she was the one trying to make the father-daughter relationship work. Olivia was right. I needed to stop giving excuses and finally accept my role as a father.

“We’re done!” Olivia announced as she made her way downstairs.

She was dressed indoorsy and dressed Chloe in the same manner.

“We’re going to study and play,” Chloe said.

“You should come join us after you bathe,” Olivia said.

“Did Daddy brush before eating?” Chloe asked.

“Ben, what’s wrong?” Olivia asked. “You’re grinning too much.”

“Oh it’s nothing,” I said as I wiped the little tear on my left side. “You two just look so beautiful that’s all.”

She had six more days to stay here. Even if we had switched to a strictly platonic relationship, there was still a lot I could learn from her.

Chapter Nine

One Can Only Hold Back for so Long (part one)

*O*livia

Four days had passed since I came to Richmond, and I'd been crushing it. Martha had taught me so much that I felt inexperienced whenever I thought about handling the kids at Helen's.

The children at Ben's hospital were either waiting for transplants, suffering from serious injuries, or were survivors of the aforementioned. Each child was unique in her eyes and the way she treated them differed; but she didn't do it in a way that would make the other children left out. To be honest, she was wasting her time as a nurse. She should have been a pediatrician from the get go.

"What's with the look? You seem pissed, it'll scare the children," she said as she gave one of the kids his regular shots while I held the tray, holding the syringe and the drugs.

"I don't get why you're a nurse," I said. "Surely you could have become a pediatrician. You know so much that even the degree holders here ask you for advice."

"You sound like Ben," she sighed as she pulled out the syringe and put pressure on it with cotton soaked in methylated spirit. She gave the young boy a kiss on the arm. "Can you hold it for me, Isaac?"

He nodded and pressed the wound.

"I don't even like being in a position of power, but I've always wanted to be a nurse so I can provide support," she continued. "I like supporting people, that's all."

I understood her angle, but still felt that she could have done a better job as a degree-holding doctor. She wasn't the only selfless one here. I worked with Dr. Solomon in most of his emergency operations; he was skilled at what he did. He had efficient communication skills and knew how to assign whoever worked with him to their strength.

"How did you learn all that?" I asked.

We had just stabilized a patient who suffered from a knife wound to the stomach. And he pretty much had everything under control with the rest of us.

"Would you believe me if I told you, Dr Ben Sullivan and his brother Ethan Sullivan taught me?" he asked.

"Aren't they younger than you?" I asked.

"True, in terms of experience as well, but I am far older," he replied. "But what they lack in experience, they excel in skill."

"Skills? Like their specializations?"

"For instance, Ian the youngest, is adept in plastic surgery. Especially facial reconstruction. Then there's Ethan, who is very clumsy and careless, but has a 70% success rate in all his surgeries. No one knows how, and no one bothers to find out," he explained.

"Then what's Ben's?" I asked.

He stopped walking. There were other doctors with us, and they were listening in. They looked at themselves.

"Well, he is more or less a teacher," Dr. Solomon explained. "He's the oldest and can be stern, but he is the kindest. He prides himself on teaching everyone and bringing out our potential even when we don't want it. He does mostly transplants and most of them alone."

"Alone?"

"Yeah," a doctor chuckled nervously. "Most people come to watch him work to learn. People pay top dollar just to watch him work and extra to record his procedures."

"He's that good?" I asked in disbelief.

“There’s a transplant surgery going on right now; you can go take a look,” Dr. Solomon offered.

“But what about...”

“You’re here majorly to learn, so go,” he said.

I thanked him and made my way to the observation point. I was almost denied access but allowed through once I showed my ID card. I recognized some of the doctors, watching the surgery. They were all top players and yet here they were, watching one man work.

As I looked through the glass, I saw a different side of the man I knew as Dr. Ben Sullivan. His gentle smile was gone, covered by his mask. I couldn’t see his eyes but even at a distance, I could feel his laser focus. It was like watching a maestro at work. His fingers skillfully danced across the patient’s open body as he took out the damaged heart.

It was hard to keep track of his movements. It was like watching a one-man orchestra at work. Presto, he moved fast to put the new heart in place. Prestissimo, he went even faster to start the stitching. It was magic. There was someone assisting him, but it took me looking away to notice him. It was the man I saw that night in London. The man whose fingers and hands changed my life. It was the same man, using the same fingers and hands, to save someone’s life.

I couldn’t look away. How is it possible that he was so calm? Dr. Solomon said he was on his own, but there were clearly people with him. No. it’s not like Dr. Solomon was lying. When Ben worked, to everyone who watched, there was no other doctor present-just Ben.

My heart started pounding. He was the kind of medical practitioner I yearned to be like. Kind, benevolent, a hero, someone who could save a life without breaking a sweat.

“He’s almost done,” one of the doctors said.

“Already?”

“What a monster.”

“They’re all gods, the Sullivan brothers.”

The words of praise that came out from the doctors who watched were mixed, with envy and admiration. I understood their pain. If I had half the talent I was witnessing, maybe I would have been able to save Sophia.

He was done. He took off his face mask and gave a thumbs up to the people who worked with him and they got to work stitching the patient's body back while Ben went to the corner of the room.

"Outstanding work as usual, that Sullivan," one of the doctors sighed.

"You know people like that usually carry a curse," one of them teased.

"Like how the Ethan one is skilled with the blade, but unskilled in handling things in real life," another stated.

"Or the youngest can make anyone more beautiful, but people can't stand to be near him," the person who raised the topic said. "I wonder what Ben's curse is?"

"How about he is there for everyone but not to those who need him?" Someone asked, "I heard that with all his knowledge, connections and power, he couldn't save his wife."

"I was there," the doctor who was the first to praise his work said. "I remember being among the doctors who tried to cure her. But we couldn't find anything. Never have I felt so powerless. I heard he wasn't allowed near her, per her wishes. A broken man like him still remains kind."

I didn't know if standing there and listening was a good idea, but I had already heard enough to back out now. I did a good job of hiding my pain, and so did he. Enduring all these things and still able to be kind. Also trying his best to bond with his daughter?

I was moved.

"We can only wish that he continues to remain kind, if his spirit ever breaks..." one of the doctors sighed. "I don't even want to imagine it."

“Do you think we should congratulate him on a job well done?” one asked.

“Is there any need? He has probably heard that so many times that he has gotten bored of hearing it,” another concluded.

A moment that was supposed to capture learning was now filled with gloom. I left the room. Ben was always trying his best for everyone. On my first day at work, I helped out with a patient and did well. Ben was the first to tell me I had done a good job.

When Chloe showed off what she studied that Sunday, he sang her praises. I watched him do the same thing to Dr. Solomon, Martha, and most of the staff. Everyone, including me had become his beneficiary in one way or the other.

Even that time in London, I was actually the one benefitting majorly from his affection. When was the last time someone made him a beneficiary of their kindness?

I found him on his way to his office. He had changed out of his surgery clothes and wore navy blue scrubs.

“You looking for something?” he asked as he unlocked his office door.

“Found it,” I replied, “Or him.”

“Nice,” he smiled and opened the door. “After you.”

“Why thank you sir,” I smiled and went in.

“How may I be of service?” he asked.

“I came to praise you,” I replied.

“Praise me? Did they start another cult about me again?” He sighed.

“Again? It’s happened before?”

“No, but it should,” he smirked as he took his seat. “So, how exactly going to praise me.”

“You did a very good job today during the heart transplant,” I said, “I haven’t seen any surgeon move like that.’

“Oh you should see Ethan then,” he smirked.

“Nah, I’m more interested in Ben right now,” I said.

He smiled and the smile went down.

“What is it?” I asked.

“I know we’re trying to act like nothing happened, but I think we should properly talk about what happened in London,” he said.

“What made you want to talk about it all of a sudden?” I asked.

“Because, like I said, we’ve been quiet about it for too long,” he replied. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“Yeah,” I replied.

We both needed the talk.

“Why did you runaway that night?” He started with a difficult one.

“To be honest, I don’t know,” I replied. “I just had a feeling that you wouldn’t want to see me there when you woke up.”

“What feeling was that? And why did it win?” he asked.

“I don’t know the answer to both questions,” I answered. “It just felt right at the moment. But I ended up regretting it and wondering if I had made the right call leaving you alone.”

His shoulders dropped at my reply.

“I heard you looked for me, why?” I asked as I walked over to his side of the table.

“Because I wanted you again,” he replied. “You offered me a level of comfort that I hadn’t experienced in years. You reminded me how it felt to desire someone.”

“So you *desired* me,” I emphasized the word. “Looks like the feelings have completely gone away haven’t they?”

He was still seated and I was leaning toward him. Both my hands were on his.

“They were impossible to get rid of,” he whispered. “I held on to hope that you would return to me or something.”

“And you did well waiting for me,” I said. “Enough about the past. I actually came here to reward you for the present.”

“What did you have in mind?” he asked.

Our faces were few inches apart. From the first night I spent at his place, I knew he wanted me again, just the same way I desired him. There was nothing stopping us.

I kissed him. I was instantly taken back in time, to London a month before when these same lips kissed me. There was that sweet cool taste of mint in his mouth. He slightly opened his mouth and kissed me. The gentle sound of our lips smacking against each other turned me on.

“My God Olivia,” he murmured as he kissed my neck hungrily.

His hands went under my scrubs and touched my waist directly, causing me to shudder. I straddled him properly and kissed his neck, causing him to let out a groan. I had missed that sound of him groaning in pleasure; it was a pleasure that I could never get enough of.

I stopped kissing his neck and offered him mine. The feel of his teeth gently grazing on me made me shudder in delight. My pussy was getting excited. I was pressed against him and could feel a bulge pressing against me.

“Your tongue,” he demanded, pulling my attention away from the activity in his pants.

I stuck out my tongue obediently, and he licked it first before he started sucking on it. My eyes rolled into the back of my head. This was just kissing, and I was being offered one of the many pleasures my new dildo was unable to give. Big strong arms holding me in place and a mouth that seemed to feed on my life force by sucking on my tongue.

More...

I want more...

My cravings were getting the better of me as I slowly lifted my scrub's top revealing my breasts.

"I've missed them," he said with a sigh of relief.

I was still wearing my bra so just my cleavage was visible. He bit into it, causing more sparks.

"You know how attractive you are," he growled as he squeezed my ass and lifted me up.

I was startled and held his shoulders for support.

"You know how attractive you are," he repeated. "And you dressed in a sleazy manner. To tempt me or something?"

He was feeling a little grumpy and I liked that.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't know that," I apologized with a smirk. "You seemed so unfazed... I thought it didn't move you."

"You have no idea..." he started to say as he touched my stomach causing a wake in me. "How much willpower it takes... to hold back."

He slid his hand upward, easily pushing my bra up to reveal his prize. He sucked on my breasts hungrily. I was feeling even better than I did in London. Just a little more push, and I was sure that he would have been all over me.

But he stopped.

"If we go any further, we might cross that line," he said as he covered my breasts with my bra and top. "I'm sorry for stopping halfway."

"Don't apologize to me, apologize to every part of my body that felt the work you did," I teased as I got off him. "I'm not going to apologize for kissing you, though."

"Nor do I expect you to," he said with a warm smile.

I got down and adjusted myself.

"Ben, continue being a good person, okay? No matter what happens," I said to him. "You've already come so far while be

being good. If you stopped, it would be terrible.”

“I can’t stop being good,” he said. “Remember kids can tell if someone has a good heart. If Chloe realizes I’m no longer good, then I can kiss my relationship with her goodbye.”

“I see you understand that much,” I said. “If you ever need someone to sing your praise or call you a good boy, then don’t hesitate to call for me,” I added.

“I will, thanks,” he said as I left the office.

I felt a little hurt that he stopped halfway...but maybe he had his own reasons.

Chapter Ten

One Can Only Hold Back for so Long (part two)

B^{en}

I had tried my best to hold back. I wasn't kidding when I said I had endured enough. At one point, it felt like she dressed the way she did just to taunt me on purpose.

Imagine waking up in the morning with the sturdiest morning wood ever, and you see a beautiful woman with beautiful assets, wearing nothing but a wife beater and shorts like nothing would happen.

She trusted me too much and assumed that I wouldn't actually do anything. I was glad that we had finally talked about what had happened in London and we eventually... made up by making out. Although I wanted to cross that line like I did back in London, I decided to stop.

I knew I had desires for her and it was evident that she felt the same way; but the problem was, we weren't in London, anymore. In London, we were strangers.

There's no denying what I felt the moment I saw her there and even how I felt when she started staying with me in Richmond.

London didn't put us in a boss-employee relationship. We were just man and woman who wanted each other. But here in Richmond, I was her boss and she was my employee-technically, my brother's employee, but still.

It was already hard enough trying to ensure that no one found out that we were staying together; if there was any hint of intimacy between us, then... I don't know.

“I should have actually finished first before thinking about all this,” I sighed as I stretched out on my chair.

She had smiled and acted like everything was okay, but I knew that I had hurt her pride. My phone started to ring. Ethan was calling. Stacy had left his company, and he had become a totally different person. A good thing, or a bad thing, I don't know.

“Hey,” I answered.

“Hey. I've gotten a hotel available for Olivia to lodge in starting from tomorrow,” he said.

That was one thing that was different. No playful greetings, or anything. Just straight to business. He had become Ian.

“That's good and all, but are you doing okay?” I asked.

“I'm okay,” he replied.

“Define that, expand on what being okay means to you right now,” I said as I leaned back into the chair and waited for my little brother.

There was a long and heavy sigh, “I don't know.”

“And that's okay,” I said. “Just take your time and heal. I'd just find her if I were you.”

“I'm not sure she'd want that,” he said.

“You don't know that,” I said, “Go get her.”

“I'll try,” he said. “So you'll tell her about the hotel right? I forgot to take her number so I can't contact her directly.”

I'm sure her contact details will be part of her data she applied with.

I don't tell him that.

“Have you already paid for the hotel?” I asked.

“No not yet,” he replied. “Why?”

“I don't think she would want to go to the hotel,” I answered.

“What do you mean?”

“Chloe has taken a liking to her and having her away from me will only cause problems,” I explained. “I’ve already started bonding properly with Chloe and all.”

“Oh no,” he said.

“What?”

“You’ve fallen for her,” he said.

“What are you on about this time?” I asked.

“Don’t even try to bluff your way out of this one,” he warned. “You wouldn’t have hesitated to have her out of the house because you actually like your space. To think that you’d even use our darling Chloe as an excuse.”

It sounded like he was almost back to his cheerful self again.

“That’s not it at all,” I said. “She’s taking good care of Chloe. It would be a waste to have the both of them apart from each other.”

“There he goes again, with that excuse,” he sighed. “Just ask her if she wants to go. If she’s okay going, then that’s fine and if you manage to hypnotize her and make her stay, then that’s fine as well.”

Hypnotize?

“I’ll ask her,” I said.

“Let me know before the end of the day, so I can make proper plans,” he suggested.

Ethan planning something?

Maybe it was something surgically related.

“I will, and good luck,” I said before hanging up.

“You’ve fallen for her.”

For someone like Ethan who hardly notices anything, to notice that I had fallen for Olivia, then I had a lot of work to do. I decided to stretch my legs and maybe go for a break while I was at it. There was a cafeteria built outside the hospital. I didn’t want the smell of food to get overpowered by the smell of drugs. I ordered a malt and observed my

surroundings. Whenever I saw my staff eating together, it filled me with joy.

“What’s gotten you grinning like that?” a familiar voice asked.

“I’m just enjoying the view,” I said as Olivia stood by my side and watched the staff eating.

“You know, back at Helen’s, no matter how good she was to us, there were still people who found faults with her,” she said. “But everyone on your team loves you. Now if that isn’t wholesome then I don’t know what is.”

“I’m sure you’re just saying that,” I muttered.

“I wish I was,” she sighed.

“That reminds me,” I said as I turned to face her; that’s when I even noticed that she had ordered the same thing. “Ethan called and said he had a hotel room available for you. You’re free to move in tomorrow.”

I stared at her intently to see if there was any sign of her hesitating, and there it was. The look of dissatisfaction was clear on her face. But I needed to make sure.

“So, should I call him and tell him that you’re going?” I asked.

She was upset, “Do you want me to leave that badly?”

“No, I don’t,” I replied, “I would rather you stay.”

A smile formed on her face, and it turned into a mischievous smirk. “So you’ll rather me stay, and why is that?”

“Because I want you to,” I looked away. “Chloe likes you now and if you leave, she’d feel bad. So yeah.”

“I already know how Chloe would feel. I just want to know how her big strong daddy would feel if I was no longer here to disturb or tease him,” she said. “So, how would you feel? If you answer in a way that I like, then I might just reward you.”

A tempting offer to get me to talk.

“I don’t want you to go,” I admitted. “Your presence around the house is refreshing. I need you to stay.”

“Wow, I wish you could’ve said that in the office,” she said. “But it’s an answer that pleases me, so I’ll reward you.”

“Am I supposed to say thank you?” I raised a brow.

“Yes,” she replied and stretched, “It’s already three pm, so I’m clocking out. I’ll pick up Chloe from school.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“You’re welcome,” she smiled.

I watched her leave; maybe it was just me, but I could swear I noticed her swaying her hips a lot more than usual.

“Hello Ethan?” I called. “Yeah, she’ll be staying with me now.”

“Whatever it is you’re doing be careful,” he warned.

“The great Ethan Sullivan telling me to be careful,” I chuckled. “I might be in trouble.”

Olivia’s POV

“I don’t want you to go,” he said, “Your presence around the house is refreshing. I need you to stay.”

To think he would use want and need for me in one go.

“Did something good happen?” Martha asked.

We were in the changing rooms. For nurses that didn’t have their own offices, they had to change into their scrubs here.

“Oh, nothing really,” I replied. “Just thinking of going home and soaking my feet. Walking around the room more naked than usual.”

“That sounds awesome... wish I could do that,” she said.

“Why don’t you?”

“And have my husband pounce on me? Nah, I’m good,” she replied.

Would Ben do the same if I wore something a little more... revealing?

Some ideas had started to form, and I only prayed I could put Olivia to sleep early enough and he didn't spend the night in the office. Well, for the past four days, he hasn't broken his promise to his daughter and had been returning home earlier than he did before. I hoped it would be the same that night. Or else there would be no reward for him anymore.

"You really seem happy about this thing you're going to do at home," Martha said.

"I'm trying my best to contain my excitement," I sighed, "but this is the type that can't be contained."

I arrived at Chloe's school using an Uber; she was waiting alongside the teacher. Ben had already introduced me to the lady to make picking Chloe up easier. After four days, I was seeing less of my Sophia and more of Chloe.

There were moments I would call her Sophia, and she'd ask me who that was. I needed to find a way to stop calling her that. I always reminded myself that she was a different being. Aside that, it felt like I had become a mother of some sort.

"Miss Olivia, is Daddy coming home today?" she asked as we got into the car and started heading home.

"He better come home," I replied.

Chloe seemed sad. She was just staring out the window.

"Is something wrong?" I asked.

"No," she said.

"Chloe, you can talk to me," I said. "Tell me what's wrong."

"Today James and his mom come pick him up. He asked me where my mom was," she replied.

I winced.

"I'm sorry he said that," I said. "He didn't mean any harm."

"I know. But it's still hurting me," she said in a broken voice.

I understood her pain. I remember after Sophia died, not a lot of people knew that she was no longer with us.

So they'd come up and ask, "Is your baby okay?"

Or that time after my father died while I was getting ready to attend the school of nursing.

"You don't have to worry," I assured her and stroked her hair. "At least you still have dad."

"And you," she added as she turned to look at me.

"And me," I added.

It looked like Ben was right; if I had agreed to return to the hotel that Ethan had reserved, it would have hurt Chloe.

"What would you love for dinner?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied, "I'll love whatever you make for dinner, Miss Olivia."

"An open floor, huh?" I raised a brow. "Alright, I'll think of something."

Dinner was almost ready. I hadn't cooked rice in a while, but I found some in Ben's pantry so I figured, why not? And I made some fried rice.

"Something smells good," Ben announced as he arrived.

"Chloe, your dad's home," I called out.

She was upstairs, trying to read through her books.

"Did something happen?" he asked as she didn't respond.

"You might want to ask her directly," I suggested.

He went upstairs. Maybe his reward would have to wait.

Ben's POV

As I got to Chloe's room, I felt nervous. I opened the door and she wasn't in her room.

"Chloe?" I called out.

As I left her room, I noticed that my bedroom was slightly open. I went in and she was on my bed reading a story book.

“Hey my angel,” I greeted.

“Hey, Daddy,” she replied.

She wasn’t in her usual high spirits.

“Did something happen?” I asked.

“Can I get a mommy?” she requested. “Everyone in class has one.”

“Chloe...” I sat on the bed.

“Mother’s day, everyone made cards,” she continued and started to cry. “I was the only one with a card for Grandma.”

Ethan and Ian had warned about this. She had gained consciousness. It’s like that moment when as a kid you just wanted to play but all of a sudden, a lot of things didn’t make sense anymore.

“I’m sorry, Chloe,” I apologized. I hugged her while she sobbed.

“So... can I get one?” she asked again.

“I’ll try my best,” I replied.

“What about Miss Olivia?” she asked.

“What about her?”

“She makes yummy food. And she plays with me and picks me from school, like a mom,” Chloe explained.

“True she’s like a mom,” I agreed. “But you might have to wait a little longer for that.”

“Okay,” she agreed as she finally calmed down.

“Ben? Chloe?” Olivia called; she opened my door and saw us together. “There you two are. Dinner’s ready.”

“Okay,” we chorused.

Chloe was back in high spirits again.

“You seem better,” Olivia said. “Did daddy do something?”

“Maybe,” Chloe replied and giggled.

I joined them for the dinner. While we ate, I couldn't help thinking about Chloe's request. I know I was meant to keep the relationship between Olivia and me as platonic as I could. But I was desiring her again. Making out with her in the office wasn't supposed to happen, but it did.

Now it turned out that I wasn't the only one who wanted her to be a part of my life.

Chloe had given her the approval. I couldn't conclude with my assumptions. I needed to know what Olivia felt.

I had tucked Chloe in and Olivia had retreated to her room. I wasn't feeling sleepy yet so I decided to watch some late night shows. To think that I could feel lonely when there were two other people in the house.

“Can't sleep?” Olivia asked.

I looked over at her; she wore a crop top that didn't do much in covering her boobs, along with some shorts.

“Not anymore,” I said.

“What's on your mind?” she asked as she sat next to me then laid her head on my thighs.

“Trying to catch up on Grey's Anatomy,” I replied.

“A doctor watching a show about doctors?” She seemed amused.

“Don't you?”

“Nah, most of these tend to have practices or procedures that are medically incorrect,” she explained.

“Oh that. I just watch it for the drama,” I said.

“I see,” she said.

I looked at her, her eyes were focused on the TV.

I stroked her hair gently and she started to laugh.

“What?” I asked.

“It’s just like in London. So many places to look and you just settle on my face,” she replied.

“I’ve been meaning to ask, and don’t take this the wrong way, but do you normally want other people to look at you?” I asked.

“Actually no. I can’t stand lecherous gazes,” she replied. “Then again no one really looks at me. Your gaze makes me feel more confident about myself.”

“I see,” I said as my gaze moved across her body to the underside of her boobs on display, her stomach, and her ass that filled the shorts nicely. “Is this my reward for telling you to stay?”

“No,” she replied. “This is just me, trying to help you feel less lonely. Is it working?”

I left her face and touched her stomach, and her body tensed up. I moved my hands upwards and buried them under her top, squeezing her breasts.

“I guess it’s working a little,” I said.

She turned to place the back of her head on my thighs while facing upward. “Only a little?”

“Mmm,” I nodded.

I slowly lifted the top to reveal her breasts properly. My right hand touched them, while I combed her hair with my left fingers. She let out a relaxed sigh and whimpered as I gave her nipples a pinch and a tug. I left her breasts, and my hand descended into her shorts.

I touched her pubic area, feeling the warmth of her little bush before progressing lower. I touched her pussy and she looked at me. There was a wet sound coming from between her legs. I raised a brow questioning her, and she shook her head negatively.

“You’re not... going to have sex... are you?” she asked.

“I’m okay with seeing you writhe like this,” I said and started massaging her pussy a little faster.

She was getting wet faster than I expected.

“Mmm...mmm,” she moaned gently and started moving her hips.

She looked so beautiful. I bent down and kissed her forehead, moving my fingers a little faster. She started to grind her hips. I pulled out my fingers, and she grabbed my arm quickly.

“Relax, I wanted you to straddle me,” I said.

She let go of my arm and straddled me. Placing her hands on my shoulders. I returned my hand into her shorts and continued touching her pussy.

She fed me her breasts, and I accepted them, sucking on them gently as two of my fingers made their way into her. She tightened around my fingers and started to move her hips, gently fucking my fingers like it was her toy.

I kissed her. Our heads turning to match the other's pace as her tongue made its way into my mouth. Her moans escaped into my mouth as I moved my fingers faster and faster. She joined to make it happen as well stopping the movement as her body spasmed.

“You have no idea how long I've needed this,” she said as she raised her hips, releasing my fingers.

“I guess I'm the one who rewarded you this time,” I stated.

“Don't worry,” she said as she kissed my cheek, “I'll reward you properly next time. Both you and Chloe.”

“I can't wait,” I smiled.

Chapter Eleven

Will Bad Luck Always Return?

B^{en}

She had fallen asleep on the sofa and in my arms. I kissed her sleeping lips; she stirred a little but didn't wake up. For the past four days she had been with me, I had always worried about waking up and finding that she had left again. Seeing her asleep and not the type to be pretending was enough motivation to assume that she was going to stay.

Then other questions started to form.

She had taken care of Chloe and me without complaining or batting an eyelid. I wondered what would happen once the one month for the nurse transfer program would be over. What if she returned to London, permanently?

That was the last thing I wanted: abandoning or leaving me again. Not when she had also captured the heart of my daughter. The questions had to wait. She wasn't going anywhere. I carried her up the stairs and lay her by my side, before sleeping.

O^{livia}

After our little fiasco on the sofa, I fell asleep and woke up in his bedroom, sleeping next to him.

He was awake, reading a book. I hadn't seen him in his glasses for a while, so seeing it again after so long was refreshing. He looked really handsome.

"You're so beautiful," I said.

He turned to look at me and immediately looked away, the blushing on his face was enough to brighten my day.

"Most people would say good morning," he said. "But thank you, Olivia."

"That was enough to get you to blush?" I chuckled. "Good morning Ben. What time is it?"

He checked his phone on the bedside table. "Fifteen past six."

"It's Friday, I have afternoon duties today, but I need to report to Ethan," I said as I sat up and stretched.

I felt his gaze on my body and I smiled. I was still wearing my crop top from the previous night and shorts.

"You look beautiful as well," he said.

"Thank you very much," I said with a little bow and got out of the bed. "I'll go wake Chloe and help her get ready for breakfast."

"Would you leave when the transfer program is over?" he asked.

Judging by how low his voice was, I could tell he didn't mean to ask the question out loud.

"Did you ask something?" I turned to him.

"Hm?" He raised his gaze from the book. "No it's nothing."

As I thought. But it was a good question though. What exactly did I want to do immediately after this transfer was over? Go to London and never come back...or continue my job as a travel nurse and continue exploring the world.

What happens to Chloe and Ben?

I went into Chloe's room and she was still sleeping peacefully. I decided to wear something better than waking her

up to half my boobs spilling out. It wasn't the image I wanted her to see before leaving for school. She was still asleep. A part of me just wanted her to sleep a little longer, but it was her last day of exams, so she needed to leave as soon as possible.

"Hey sweetie," I gently shrugged her awake.

"Hmmm," she groaned a little and carefully opened her eyes.

Was this a life I saw myself adopting? Waking up to a loving family like this? Ben didn't say anything but we were practically living the lives of a man and woman who were married.

"Mom?" Chloe called out.

My heart stopped. My mouth was too heavy to reply. Did she mean me?

Is this one of those things where the child would mistakenly call an older female mom by mistake.

She rubbed her eyelids and opened her eyes properly, "Miss Olivia... morning."

"Good morning Chloe, ready to go to school?" I asked.

"Mmm... hmm." She nodded before yawning again. "I had a dream. I saw mommy."

"Oh... that's nice, did she say anything?" I asked, although I felt a sharp pang of pain.

"Hmm? She said I'm a good girl," she replied, got out of the bed, and started to remove her clothes.

"She's right, isn't she?" I asked.

"Yeah, I'm a good girl," she replied with a warm smile before yawning again.

"Let's go brush our teeth and bathe to get the sleep out," I said.

What was I thinking? I was the only one who thought of this as a proper family because I had nothing left. Ben at least had

a mother and siblings. He had a wife and a daughter.

Me? At that moment, I actually remembered that I was an orphan. I was unconsciously treating Chloe like my own daughter to make me feel better or even heal. But the reality was a different case.

I wasn't her mom. I would never be. That wasn't going to make me stop loving her though. Until my time to leave was over, I was going to continue watching over her. As I helped her get ready for school, Ben made sandwiches for breakfast.

"I'm meeting with my brothers this morning. There might be a little delay with your meeting with Ethan," he said. "You can come straight to the hospital or just stay home after dropping her off."

"Daddy, can we go somewhere after my exams are over?" Chloe asked.

"Sure thing," he said then turned to me. "You will come won't you?"

"If you'll have me," I replied as I continued eating my breakfast.

He took one of the sandwiches and kissed Chloe's head. He took a good look at me. I felt like he had mentally kissed my forehead too. I blushed at the thought. He wished us a beautiful day before leaving. After she was done eating, there was still some time before seven, so we did a quick review.

I dropped her off and watched her run to her friends. I wanted to find out who James, was but I decided to hold back and not say anything. This wasn't too good, though. I had been living well for the past five days without any issues.

My unlucky traits had not kicked in. Chloe was attached to me. Ben desired me. I loved both of them. I excelled at work. My colleagues loved me. I was doing well with the patients. I had learnt a lot. It wasn't thanks to me; it was thanks to Ben and Chloe for giving me a good home.

Chloe's birthday was drawing near - the 22nd of July - just seven days away. She wanted to go somewhere with Ben. Maybe I could pick a place for them and we'd make sandwiches and have a picnic. Together like normal families or friends did together. I wasn't familiar with Richmond, but there were lots of parks to visit as a family for recreation and pleasure. Work resumed by noon, and I had nothing to do.

Go home.

The thought came to mind. It felt like something bad was about to happen. All my senses were warning me, but I ignored it.

"I just need to check the nearby parks," I said to myself.

Most of them were stunning, but I had to settle for Byrd Park. I didn't go there physically but asked around, and someone showed me pictures. I had always wanted to try eating by the side of a body of water. It would be a good experience. The three of us could go paddling together so it was perfect.

I wanted to try fishing, but I wasn't sure if it was allowed. I made a note of my plans and decided to tell Ben once I got to the office. As I made my way back home, I felt the urge to take a taxi, but the house was just five minutes away, so there was no need to waste that money.

And then... it happened.

"Olivia?" a man called. His voice sent shivers down my spine. I almost felt the urge to vomit.

I didn't have to turn around to know that *he* was the one calling to me. The same man who had abandoned me.

"I'm sorry, you have the wrong person," I said. I tried walking faster but he held my arm and forced me to turn around.

It was his brown eyes, the ones that made me feel sick knowing that at a certain point in my life, I basked under their gaze.

“It’s me Jason,” he reminded me.” Jason Frank. How have you been?”

“Let go of me,” I said as I struggled to get free of his grip. “Let go or I’ll scream.”

“You won’t,” he said calmly; it sounded creepy in a menacing way.

“Just let go of me,” I said softly.

His grip tightened a little before letting me go. I crossed my arms fuming with rage.

“I guess you’re not that happy to see me,” he said with a chuckle.

“Oh gee, you don’t say.” I frowned.

“Olivia, I understand you’re upset, but I can’t talk with you if you’re this apprehensive,” he said, “I know a very good cafe shop around here, if you don’t mind I...”

“What are you doing here Jason?” I uncrossed my arms rubbed my face in frustration.

“Here? In Richmond? I live here now,” he said.” And what about you? What brings you to this part of the world?”

“Work,” I replied.

“I see, and uh...” His eyes darted to my stomach and back to my face. “How’s the...”

“Jason, don’t you dare even ask,” I shot at him.

“I think I deserve a right to know at least,” he said.

”*Deserve to...* who do you think you are?” I asked. “You made promises, made me feel special, knocked me up, and disappeared and now you deserve to know?”

It was taking every fiber of my being not to speak loudly. People walked by but many of them didn’t even bother stopping to find out what we were talking about.

“I understand that I made some mistakes,” he said.

“Some mistakes? You only made one as far as I’m concerned,” I stated.

“You won’t even let me speak,” he complained.

“Why should I?” I raised a brow. “You know what? I’ll give you a chance. Try and smooth talk your way out of this one.”

“You’re so cute when you’re being aggressive,” he smiled.

But the compliment felt like he had splashed vomit over my face. Sorry about the gross graphic.

“I know I made some promises, and I didn’t keep them, but I want you to know that I’m different now,” he offered. “When I heard you were pregnant, so I just panicked and left. Then I heard you kept the baby, and I felt like scum. I changed countries to make better earnings and told myself I’d come back and make things right against.”

I stared at him in complete disbelief.

“I don’t get what you’re saying,” I shook my head. “You’re scum that ran away and you’re still a scum because you can’t buy our way back.”

“Olivia, I’ve changed,” he insisted. I wanted to slap him or something. “I want to make things right between us. Can I at least see our child?”

“Don’t say that, don’t call her *our* child, she’s mine,” I corrected.

“I understand, can I see her?” he asked.

“No, you can’t. Not anymore.” I replied as I rubbed arms in frustration.

I was being reminded of Sophia and her last moments in my arms. I didn’t like how I was feeling anymore, and I couldn’t stand to be around him.

“That’s all, I’m leaving,” I said and turned around to leave but he held my arm again. I didn’t budge.

“She died, didn’t she?” he asked.

I started to tremble as I remembered how she started failing.

“It’s my blood isn’t it?” he asked. “I always had a feeling that might happen.”

“If you always had the feeling, then why didn’t you stay?” I asked. “You could have at least waiting till I gave birth before disappearing to chase your pointless dreams or excuses or whatever it is that small brain could think of.”

“Would that have changed anything?” he asked.

“It wouldn’t have changed a damn thing, but it would have shown me that you cared and only ran away at the last minute, and not before the race began,” I answered. “Nine months Jason Frank. Nine months, I had to go to work to earn extra to fend for myself and the growing baby.”

His shoulders dropped as he looked away, “I’m sorry.”

“I should at least thank you. You made me more careful in my dealings with men,” I said. “You also made me take my career in nursing more seriously, and I got to take care of so many children. So yeah, thank you for that.”

He was too stunned to speak; that was completely my intention. The last thing I needed was to hear any more lousy things from his mouth.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized. “I know I can’t take back what I did, but I want to change all that. I want to use this opportunity to get back with you.”

His eyes started to scan my body, and I felt weird at the way he did it.

“I’ll be a better boyfriend this time. Well, a better husband, I just need you to take me back,” he said. “Please?”

“I don’t want you,” I started trying to free myself from his grip. “Just get away from me before you draw attention to us.”

“At least let me get you something to drink,” he offered. “Just one meal or something. It’s not much, but it can be enough to catch up.”

“Stop trying to pester me,” I said.

“You loved it when I used to pester you repeatedly like this,” he said.

“Keyword is *loved*; now it’s just disgusting,” I insisted. “I’m gonna to give you till the count of three to release me, or I’ll scream... One.”

“Why are you being so unreasonable?” He asked and frowned.

“Two..”

His grip slowly loosened.

“Three.”

A hand came out of nowhere and slapped Jason’s arm off me. My savior stepped between us and pushed Jason away, causing him to stumble and fall on his ass, almost comically. The man standing between us wore glasses and had muscles like he was bulking. And the man had the angriest expression I had ever seen.

“Who do you think you are?” Jason asked. “And what the hell are you doing.”

“I’m Dr. Ben Sullivan, and this woman, is my staff member,” Ben said. “I should be the one asking you what the hell you’re doing.”

This was bad. While I was glad that Ben had stepped in to save me, there was still a chance that Jason was going to say something. Ben would find out that I have been a mother before.

In most stories, the female lead is supposed to have her first child with no one other than the protagonist...it was real life and all. What if he started look at me differently? Like the way the others did when they found out I had lost a daughter?

Those eyes of pity. The ones of doubt that I could properly bear children. The ones of disappointment that expected me to have done better while trying to save my daughter. I didn’t want Ben to look at me like that.

“Listen man, you don’t have any idea what you’re getting yourself involved with,” Jason said.

“By all means, enlighten me,” Ben said.

I held Ben's sleeve and gently tugged at it getting his attention.

"Ben just leave him be, let's go to the hospital," I said.

"Did he hurt you? Any bruises?" Ben asked as he tried to inspect my arm.

"Let's just go," I said as I pulled him along.

"Olivia?! Where do you think you're going?" Jason asked. "Who is this guy?"

"Look sir," Ben wanted to engage him, but I stopped him.

"Please let's just go," I pleaded.

"You two are together?" Jason asked.

"Jason stop," I frowned.

"Stop what? I just need to know if you're happy, that's all." He flashed a wicked grin; he had something to give him a slight edge over me.

"Are you alright Olivia?" Ben asked, as he led me to his car. "Maybe I should call the police."

"No don't," I said.

"Oh, he has a nice car and all," Jason continued his taunting. "I guess this is what you ended up replacing me with."

Shit.

Ben stopped walking and turned to look at him.

"Ben, please don't listen to him," I warned.

"Come on Olivia, don't allow my successor to be left out of the loop. I'll feel bad for him," Jason said.

"What is he talking about?" Ben asked me.

I couldn't say anything to explain myself. I just glared at Jason so hard that I wished he would drop dead.

"Oh, I'm assuming you don't know..." Jason sighed. "Alright, I'll end your ignorance."

"Jason stop it. Just stop taking," I warned.

“You see Olivia here and I were lovers. Good lovers back in London,” Jason started.

“And what of it?” Ben frowned.

“That didn’t get your attention, right? Of course, it didn’t. After all, everyone has had a lover in the past and broke things off.” Jason seemed like he was having so much fun. Here’s the thing. Olivia and I were special... so special...”

I felt like throwing up. Earth, please open up and swallow me now.

“That she gave birth to my daughter,” Jason dropped it. “Now isn’t that special.”

“Olivia had your daughter?” Ben couldn’t believe his ears.

The shock on Ben’s face was understandable. He slowly turned his eyes to me, almost like he was asking me to deny it. But I couldn’t do anything. Nor could I say anything. I hung my head in shame instead.

If only I had listened to my thoughts and gone back home, then none of this would have happened.

Chapter Twelve

From The Horse's Mouth (Part One)

Ben (before the Jason incident)

I had gone to Ethan's hospital for two reasons. One, he needed to know about Olivia's work experience. The transfer program didn't just need the feedback from the nurses, but that of the doctors they worked with. Now, I know what you're thinking, *Isn't this something that could be discussed over the phone or email?* I asked myself the same question, but that led to the second reason I was going there. Ethan and Ian had asked to see me.

Things didn't seem to be going properly in their lives; but that's a good reason to check on them. I don't care how old they are, they are still my little brothers.

"And that concludes her report, and my feedback," I said as I leaned back in my chair. "Olivia has truly been a wonderful asset and everyone at the hospital loves her."

"To think she's talented enough to work in different departments," Ethan remarked as he rubbed his eyelids.

He didn't look so good.

"Is there a problem, Ethan?" I asked. "You don't look so good."

"He's missing his overgrown babysitter," Ian said. "Guess he finally realizes what he had."

There's something about the way Ian makes that statement that bothers me.

I ignore it and focus on my other brother. "Do you want to talk about it? Maybe about Stacy? Have you tried calling her?"

“That’s not important right now. We’re not here to discuss my woman issue; we’re here to talk about yours,” he said, completely shifting the topic.

“Mine?” I raised a brow.

“It’s concerning how things have been with you recently,” Ian replied.

Lately?

Besides the fact that they knew Olivia was staying at my place, I made sure that they weren’t too suspicious about us. Then again, they never really called, and not much has happened between Olivia and I, so I let down my guard. From the looks of things, Ethan was the one who had organized the meeting, so I pretty much had a general idea about what they wanted to discuss.

“We... I mean, *I* have been thinking about Chloe,” Ethan started to say. “Mom has been the mother figure in her life, but there is still the primary need for Chloe to have a real mother figure.”

“Am I not supposed to be in love with said mother figure?” I asked.

“That’s the thing you’re not trying,” he replied. “Be honest when did you last actually show affection for the opposite gender?”

My mind flashed back to a certain beautiful woman in London, who currently lives with me. I could feel Ian’s gaze.

That’s right, he knows about the London situation. But he doesn’t know that Olivia is the one at my place.

“Exactly my point,” he says. “I know for a fact you’re not homosexual, so there’s really nothing keeping you back. Selina was a good woman; we all loved her. She was the sister Ian and I never had. I understand why it may be hard, but you need to put the happiness of yourself and your daughter first, even for a bit. That’s all I’m saying. And it’s what I’m helping you do.”

Hearing Ethan, the clumsiest and most immature of all of us, sound so serious was strange. I understand his angle. I didn't know if I should tell him about Olivia; but it might have caused some problems if I did, so I chose to remain silent.

Ian let out a sigh. "Stop dragging this on longer than it needs to be, and tell him why he's here."

"Why am I here?" I asked, turning my attention to Ethan.

"I set you up on a date," he replied.

"Oh my goodness," I groaned as I rubbed my forehead. "Why would you do that? I'm not..."

"Interested, I know," he cut me off, "Just see her. *Try* to talk to her and see if anything clicks."

"You can't be serious," I frowned and turned to Ian. "He's not serious."

"I'm sorry, I have to side with my evil twin on this one," Ian shrugged. "Even Mom is worried about you and Chloe. For all our sake and hers especially, just try."

It's not like I don't want to try; I already have someone I'm interested in. In fact, I'm already involved with said person.

"Fine, I'll try," I agreed, "Where is she?"

"You'll find her in the restaurant, just across the street," he replied. "Best Eats. She's a waiter?"

"Have some dignity," Ethan frowned. "She's a nurse as well. But she'll be there in about..." He paused and checked his watch. "Ten minutes. Blonde hair, green eyes, you can't miss her."

"Fine," I said, making sure they heard the displeasure in my tone, as I got up and made my way to the door.

"And if you're going to let her down, be gentle," Ethan advised, "it's a short blind date. Not an arranged marriage."

"I know," I said before shutting it behind me.

As I was about to get into the restaurant, I noticed the blonde hair woman arriving as well. Ethan was right when he said she wasn't hard to miss.

She looked at me and tilted her head to the side, in a questioning manner, "Dr. Sullivan?"

"Call me Ben," I replied. "I'm sorry Ethan didn't tell me your name."

"He... didn't?" Her shoulders slumped.

"No, it's not... I should have asked," I defended quickly.

"It's Dr. Natasha James," she introduced herself. "Shall we go in?"

"No problems," I replied.

Natasha was a dermatologist and only visiting Richmond because of Ethan.

From what I was able to pick up, she wasn't really interested in the blind date; she only came along because it was something he asked of her. Although she never said anything personal about her feelings, I could easily tell she wasn't here for me.

Normally, I would feel offended if the person I was talking to showed disinterest. But, I wasn't. To be honest, I wasn't interested, either. I was thinking about what Olivia was up to at that moment. She wasn't at my hospital yet... if things were according to the schedule. In fact, I considered going home and picking her up. Or maybe, continue where we stopped that night.

My thoughts didn't stop there, however. While Natasha and I talked, I realized that Olivia and I had never been on a date. I thought about picking her up and stopping a date spot before we get to the hospital.

"I'm really sorry," she apologized as we exited the restaurant. "I must have been a terrible blind date."

“I don’t think so. If it was someone else, maybe they would have loved your company,” I said.

She gave a forced smile and uttered, “I don’t think so.”

I let out a sigh and focused my attention on Ethan’s hospital building. She did the same as well.

“Looks like you had your mind on someone else throughout the date,” I pointed out.

“Was I that obvious?” she chuckled. “Don’t tell him anything though.”

“I could help you,” I said.

“That’s the thing, you’re not supposed to *help* love,” she said. “It’s something if your serious about, you talk about it to the person involved.”

“Shouldn’t you do that?” I asked.

She turned and looked at me, and I just shrugged.

“I guess you’re right,” she replied. “Maybe, I should take it seriously as well.”

“That’s the spirit,” I smiled.

“What about you then?”

“What?”

“Don’t play dumb. You’re clearly in love with someone else,” she said.

“What makes you say that?” I asked.

“Instinct. Besides, I can also tell that I wasn’t the only one imagining the date was with someone else,” she replied. “I hope you take it seriously as well.”

“Well, I can’t just be the only one giving advice without doing anything about my own personal life,” I admitted.

“That’s the spirit,” she beamed.

After we parted ways, I called and told my brothers that it didn’t work out. Their response was as expected; both of them weren’t even surprised. I decided that I would tell them about

Olivia. But first, I wanted to tell her how I felt about her. It was a little late considering what we had already done, but better late than never.

I needed it to be on a special occasion. Recalling that Chloe had mentioned wanting to visit the park, I decided to check some out and pick up Olivia.

On my way home, I called ahead to know if she was already there, but she didn't answer. My security mentioned that Olivia had not returned since she left to drop Chloe at school.

I was a little worried, considering that she hardly wanders around. I kept my eyes open, hoping to see her or something. I noticed a man struggling with a lady. It didn't look like a robbery, and I almost wrote it off as a lover's quarrel. Then I saw Olivia's face and stopped my car, stepping in between them.

(After the Jason incident)

"That she gave birth to my daughter," Jason dropped. "Now isn't that special."

"Olivia had your daughter?" I couldn't believe his ears.

There was no way Olivia could be a mother. Or could there? Is that why she has been able to handle Chloe? I turned to her for answers, expecting her to deny or defend herself. But as she hung her head in defeat, it gave me all the answers I needed.

I had only one problem: if the child was with this lunatic.

"Yes, she had my daughter, and now she doesn't even want to listen to what I want to say," he replied. "I can see you're clearly pissed off at her having found out what she has been up to in the past."

He seemed amused with himself thinking that he had won because of my expression. He had no idea that the anger on my face was aimed at him. If he was so special, then why wasn't he there for her.?

“So where’s her daughter now?” I asked.

“She also didn’t tell you that?” He frowned.

“Look, sir, if you have her daughter, I’d ask that you leave Olivia out of it. You can go to court or whatever,” I replied.

“I don’t have her, and neither does Olivia,” he pointed out.

It made a little sense as Olivia was living with me’ probably the child was staying with a relative. Or so I thought.

“Then leave the both of them alone,” I said.

I couldn’t help the feeling that there was something I was missing.

“I can’t leave them alone, at least both of them. Not anymore,” Jason said.

I turned to look at Olivia for backup; she was silent, but her eyes were already letting out tears.

“She’s... she’s... my daughter is dead,” she said with a broken voice.

“What did you do?!” I growled at Jason.

“What are you getting angry at me for?” Jason asked. “I just found out too.”

I could hear the sobs from Olivia getting louder as she hugged my arm tightly. I started to regret staying here when she already asked that we leave. I was really a fool. Crying didn’t suit her at all.

“Let’s go,” I said to her. “I’m sorry.”

“Mmm, hmm.” She nodded while covering her mouth.

“What about me then? I just want to talk to her,” Jason said.

“You’ve talked enough,” I said as I opened the back door and let Olivia get inside.

She didn’t sit and just lay across the seats.

“Stay away from her or else,” I warned him before getting into the car.

I gave him one last intimidating glare, causing him to step back. I drove my lady home, while she let out all her clogged emotions. I started to think about everything.

Seeing her hug Chloe and call her Sophia while crying was beginning to make sense now.

I didn't even ask her why she did it. I didn't care enough. All I was chasing after was a memory in London. I watched her take care of my daughter, completely unaware of how much pain it cost her. I was really a fool.

As we got home, I didn't want to leave her alone, nor did I want her coming to the office that day. She was with me in my room and asked to lie by my side. As I lay down, she placed her head on my chest and listened to the sound of my heart.

"I'm sorry," she apologized.

"Don't apologize," I said.

"But you had to engage with Jason," she said.

"Please Olivia," I pleaded.

She gave a momentary silence before continuing, "Do you hate me now? Or find me less appealing now that you know?"

"I would never find you less than appealing," I replied.

"But you were angry."

"Not at you," I said as I stroked her hair. "I was angry at the fool who made you suffer."

"I don't think he made me suffer. Everything is my fault anyway," she said.

I looked at her only able to see the top of her head and nothing else. I relaxed myself and let out a deep breath. "What do you mean by that?"

"I have bad luck," she said.

The hint of seriousness in her claim threw me off.

"That can't possibly be true," I said.

“It is,” she insisted; and although I was still wearing my dress shirt, I could still feel her nails digging in.

“Tell me,” I said, “Tell me everything.”

“It’s not a big deal,” she said.

“While I do not want you refusing me, and calling your past less than a big deal, I’ll respect the fact that you don’t want to talk about it,” I said. “But I would really love if you told me everything. Not knowing enough about you, hurts me.”

“What if my bad luck rubs off on you?” she asked.

“I don’t think it’s possible. The days I’ve spent with you has proved otherwise,” I replied. “Please, Olivia, tell me what hurt you? I’m a doctor. I can fix it.”

“So arrogant,” she chuckled. “But thank you.”

“It’s no problem,” I said. “Just let it out when you’re ready.”

“This is going to take a while,” she warned.

“I own the hospital, I can skip today,” I said then reached for my phone. “I’ll have my mother watch Chloe just for today.”

“Okay.”

I texted my mother and asked her to take care of Chloe. She didn’t question me and agreed to. A lot of Chloe’s things were at her place so it wasn’t going to be a problem.

“I’m ready if you are,” I said as I put down my phone after I received the news that Mom would watch over Chloe.

“Here goes nothing,” she said.

Chapter Thirteen

From the Horse's Mouth (Part Two)

Olivia

I had never really told anyone my story besides Jason. Although Jason wasn't there for the majority of it, he was a good listener. But seeing how he turned out, I was worried about Ben going the same way. His pleading voice and his fingers gently stroking my hair made me relaxed. I wanted to tell him.

It was better letting it all out than carrying it on anymore.

I never knew my mother. When I was born, she died, and that was all. The story goes that she has Stickler Syndrome and constantly sick. My dad's AA genotype caused my birth, albeit an AS.

He loved me. He loved me so much that most people thought that he didn't care that my mother had died. Most of my warm memories, involve my father. I don't know how he did it, but I never saw him grieve Mom one day. Even when we went to visit her grave, he still had a warm smile on his face and would tussle my hair telling me how much I looked like her.

"Did you not love, Mom?" I asked.

I was around seven, that time. I found his behavior odd. We were both having a quiet dinner when the question came up.

"Of course I did, and still do mind you," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"I mean... you don't seem sad when you talk about her," I explained. "So, I thought you don't miss her.

"Oh, I understand," he sighed and put down the pizza he had ordered. "Do you miss her?"

I shrugged, "I don't know. I didn't know her. But I feel sad when you talk about her. She sounds like a great mom."

"She was," he said, "to me."

"So, why aren't you sad when you think about her?" I asked.

"I am sad. I miss her all the time, and I'm sad I don't get to see her anymore, except in pictures or memories," he answered. "But I guess that doesn't really answer your question, does it?"

I shook my head.

"I promised her that I'll always remember her and be happy for your sake and hers," he explained. "So I'm happy while I look at you because you remind me of her and how much she loved both of us."

"But that means you cry alone," I pointed out.

"Intelligent as her, aren't 'ya?" he chuckled. "Yes, I do cry alone."

"Cry with me then. It's not fair you miss her secretly," I said and frowned.

He wanted to say something but stopped and looked at his food, "Like mother, like daughter."

He never explained what he meant by that statement and to this date, I still don't know what he meant. All I know, is that he was a good and kind man who loved me. What did Dad do? Everything.

I can't remember how many times I struggled to say what my dad's profession was. He was a construction worker, sales attendant in a convenience store, a handyman. Anything. People regarded him as Superman. He was mostly absent throughout the day and sometimes at night but never failed to come back by seven pm, to talk to me about my day, take a nap, and be out of the house.

I understood his sacrifices; and when I was done with high school, I wanted to work part-time to help him out as well. He refused - the stubborn man that he was.

I had graduated top of my classes and got a scholarship to study wherever I wanted. I was happy that Dad didn't have to work so hard anymore. I had yet to figure out what I wanted to do. It was going to be in the sciences, but I needed something that would give me the opportunity to watch over my father. Unfortunately, I didn't have enough time for that... I mean he didn't have enough time.

Dad had worked himself to exhaustion, trying to raise enough money for my education, but his body was failing him. I was seventeen and still bothered about what school to attend when I got the news. He had collapsed and was rushed to the hospital. It was at that time, I noticed my superhuman Dad was just a normal man.

He looked so tired but was still smiling. He had suffered a lot for my sake and still smiled for me.

"You got a scholarship, so I guess your college funds will be enough to help you out," he said with a smile.

"What do you mean? You sound like you're..."

He managed to shrug and his smile weakened a little.

"Oh no," I covered my mouth, "You're just... you're just saying that. You just need a little rest."

"I. I remember telling your mother that," he said weakly. "Well, now I think I understand a little how funny it sounds. But my body is really tired, my angel."

"Then you just need to rest a little then," I said, trying to lighten him up.

"True... that's right... have you decided what you want... to do?" he asked.

"That's not important right now," I replied. "Just save your strength, and we'll discuss it in the morning."

He looked at me, "Now, I understand why... your mom said... I'm unreasonably stubborn."

"Of course, you are. If you let me help you with work...."

“Olivia, I did this because of you. It’s what your mother would have wanted,” he explained. “To have you not to work hard on anything else besides your academics and other skills.”

“But Mom wouldn’t want you to work yourself to exhaustion, would she?” I asked.

“True... but consider it... a father’s pride,” he replied.

“Dumb pride,” I muttered and frowned.

The next smile he gave wasn’t so tired as he touched my face and settled on my right cheek, “Like mother.... like daughter.”

“What do you even mean by that?” I asked. “Just rest, Dad.”

“Is this a good time to miss her together?” he asked.

I looked at him and that was the first time I saw him crying.

“She made such a beautiful girl,” he said. “I don’t know if I did a good job taking care of her creation.”

“You did too much,” I said.

“Perhaps...” he said as he let go of me and placed his hands together on his stomach, while turning his attention to the ceiling.

I didn’t know what else to say. I was on the verge of bursting into tears, but Dad had once told me that my tears hurt the hearts of those who truly love me. His heart was already tired... I didn’t want to do anything else.

“I’m thirsty,” he said softly.

“I’ll call the nurse,” I said. “Nurse!”

“No, I want you to go get it,” he said.

Oh...

“Coward,” I bit my bottom lip.

“I can’t sleep if I’m thirsty,” he said while smiling again.

I got up and walked to the door and paused, “I love you, Dad.”

“I love you, Olivia my angel,” he said. “Take care on your way.”

“I’ll do my best,” I said.

“Now get me the water,” he insisted.

I stepped out of the room to look for the bottle of water. I asked a nurse to look after him while I left. I was already crying on my way back to the room. The nurse was with the doctor and the look on their faces said it all.

I brought the water to his side and thanked him for his hard work. After he was buried, I couldn’t overcome the guilt. My mother had died giving birth to me, and my father had died raising me. I was clearly the problem and my relatives made sure I was aware of that.

I hadn’t expected any help from them. Deciding to study nursing because it was a shorter paramedic course, I made full use of the scholarship and the huge sum of money Dad was able to raise. At twenty-one, I was done with nursing and went on to practice at a hospital. The owner of the place knew Dad as one of the construction workers who helped build the place.

Why he decided to take me in, or what my father did to gain favor in his eyes, I’ll never know. But even after death, dad was still taking care of me.

Relationships... were a problem. The amount of men ignoring me or not paying any attention to me made me wonder if something was wrong with me. I decided to focus on my career instead, hoping I would find someone. And I did, in the guise of a patient.

Jason had come to the hospital for a checkup. I was the nurse who assisted the doctor attending to him. Jason was a good person. At least when I first met him. He made me comfortable in my skin and made sure I always felt beautiful.

I wasn’t so lonely anymore. I’m not sure I should tell you this, but the sex was okay, although it pales in comparison to our night in London. The point is, I felt wanted. He wanted

what was best for me and worked so we could have a future together as a family.

Unlike Dad, Jason let me handle my part in making ends meet. I became a travel nurse and everything was going uphill for a bit.

Then it happened. I became pregnant.

“I’m pregnant Jason,” I announced to him while beaming with joy.

When he heard the news, I could have sworn that I saw a look of disappointment on his face and fear, but it switched to a smile.

“Are you keeping it?” he asked.

I was surprised at his question, but I maintained my smile. I just assumed he thought I still wasn’t ready for a baby.

“Of course I am,” I said. “We’ve been talking about having kids.”

“When we’re married,” he reminded me and held my hand. “I’m still not ready, financially, for a wedding. Are you okay with giving birth before we get married?”

“Well...” I thought about it. “I didn’t plan to give birth first before marriage.”

Again, I was sure I mistook it but there was a look of relief on his face.

“I hear a but,” he chuckled nervously.

Maybe he was worried about me waiting for the marriage to actually happen?

“I don’t mind waiting,” I said with a warm smile. “This is our first kid. I want us to enjoy this. Marriage can wait. I can wait. You’ll be able to pull through.”

“You’re something else, Olivia,” he said with a smile that made my doubts vanish instantly.

“You love me that way,” I teased.

“I do, don’t I?” he said and hugged me.

I was worried. I don't know why, but I was. The next day, Jason didn't come. It was normal, although he'd text me if he was unable to visit. I let it be because I was busy with work and all.

The second day passed, and the third, and then came the fourth. Not a single word from Jason. I didn't know a lot of his friends. Just like me, he hardly made friends. I'd never heard him call or take calls from anyone else while he was with me.

He worked remotely from his apartment. went there and the house was empty. From what the owners said, he had left two days after I had told him about the pregnancy. To think he had probably planned for this to happen.

I started to wonder if I had done or said something wrong. Was it because of the baby?

It definitely was. But why would he leave? If he didn't want the child he could have said so.

Maybe he already knew that I would refuse getting rid of the baby. I mean come on, this is a child and something we were eventually going to have together. Was I the only one thinking far ahead? It didn't even make sense because he had also talked about it too.

I felt so alone. Honestly, the thought of abortion came to mind. But this was my baby, and my first. He or she did nothing wrong. It's not their fault that their mother chose poorly. If I were alone, wouldn't my kid be a perfect companion?

Dad had told me a similar thing as well...that my birth didn't make him feel alone one bit. I wanted to keep the baby. I didn't really have a lot of support from my colleagues at work at first. Most of them smiled, but it was easy to tell pity and disappointment from genuine kindness...until I transferred to Dr William's Hospital and found new support there.

It was a new family. Balancing work, and pregnancy was no easy task, but I was determined to make it work. Throughout the course of nine months, I hoped for Jason to return but was disappointed. When I had my daughter, my joy knew no

bounds. She had no semblance to Jason, and I was grateful for that.

She was the sweetest thing I had ever seen and I named her Sophia. The joy was short-lived a few minutes after she was born. After the nurses had done their vital checks, their happy expressions turned to worried ones.

“Olivia, your daughter is healthy but her genotype.... It’s SS,” Dr. Williams announced to me.

“It can’t be possible. Jason is AS, and I am too. I thought the geno pairing would...” I started to find something to give me hope.

“You know it doesn’t work that way all the time,” she reminded me, her face grim from having to deliver such news to me. “Unfortunately, this is one of the moments where it didn’t work out the way you’d expect. You’re a medical practitioner, you should know this.”

“I know...” I admitted as I bit my lower lip. “I’m sorry, Sophia. I didn’t do better.”

“Don’t apologize to your daughter. Just make sure she lives and grows up comfortably,” Dr William advised. “It’s your responsibility as a parent.”

“Dad said something similar,” I chuckled softly.

“Then listen to him and do your best,” she said.

And boy, did I do my best. Or my definition of my best. I made sure she got the drugs she wanted. I even stopped traveling to take care of her and watch her. She was so full of life that it was hard to believe she had Stickler. At seven months she stopped suckling, and started walking by fourteen months.

When she turned two, I took her to school. The image of my daughter beaming with smiles as she made her way to school is still burned into my memory. These were the next happiest days of my life: leaving work early to pick her up from school. Checking on her health and administering drugs, I was confident that my daughter would grow up strong and conquer this just like Mom did.

But one day, I got an emergency call from the school. Sophia had collapsed. The teachers were aware of her condition and made sure she didn't do any strenuous activities. For her age, she was very strong and obedient, giving me and her teachers less to worry about her health. But hearing that she had collapsed, I panicked.

Dr. William had to go herself to pick her up, as no one wanted me on the road. Sophia's health worsened. She started falling sick more often, and the drugs just seemed to be prolonging her pain.

I didn't like my powerlessness. I had helped other children get better, but it seemed that no matter what I did; I wasn't able to help my daughter. Sophia, just like Dad, remained smiling. The doctors and other nurses let me work lesser shifts without cutting my pay, so I could look after her. Dr. William covered the medical expenses.

I had enough help, but I could do nothing. When Sophia died, I felt alone and overwhelmed with guilt. My mother died because she had me. My father worked himself to death, just to make sure I lived comfortably. My boyfriend left me because I was willing to keep our child. My daughter died because I made wrong decisions in choosing a partner, and I was powerless to help her. The problem was obvious. I had bad luck.

It became more evident. Besides my work at hospitals as an auxiliary nurse, everything else in my life was going downhill. I started losing things and became more careless. People were moving on with their lives, celebrating the birthdays of parents and children, getting married, among others, but I remained alone, committed to my work.

I know it sounds like I didn't do anything, but I tried. No one was looking my way, no matter how hard I looked at them. But you looked at me, Ben. From the moment you paid attention to me, I knew that I could finally move on with my life and stop wallowing in guilt.

I thought wrong and let the fear of my bad luck chase me away from you. I thought the hit-and-miss moments with my

bad luck were over, but Jason came back and, well, you had to find out this way. I just wish I could have told you sooner. I was worried about what you'd think...and thus ended my sob story.

Chapter Fourteen

I Will Take All Your Bad Luck

Olivia

I had never told anyone this much about myself. The only exception was Dr. Helen Williams, but I didn't even tell her everything. I was convinced that Ben would be upset and understand that my being around him and his daughter would only cause problems for both of them, but he was quiet.

"I'm sorry," I apologized, "I probably bored you to sleep, anyway."

Still, no response, save for a heavy sigh that sounded labored. I tried to sit up and look at his face but he held me in place.

"Don't..." he said.

"Are you that upset at me?" I asked, although I expected something like this I didn't expect it to hurt.

"No..."

I sat up as his hold loosened. I noticed his cheeks were wet with tears.

"Why?" I asked.

"Nothing," he replied with a frown as he wiped his face.

“I know it was a sob story, but you don’t have to actually sob you know?” I teased. “You don’t have to cry for little old me.”

He sat upright and embraced me, “And you don’t have to act so tough.”

“I’m not...”

“Shut up,” he said softly as his embrace got tighter.

His embrace was so warm. I could feel the genuine concern and love he had for me just by being held by him.

“All these years, you’ve been carrying this guilt for things that nature caused to happen,” he said. “You’ve carried them, unable to move on, blaming it as bad luck.”

“But I have bad luck,” I insisted. “Things keep going downhill... and no matter what I do, it doesn’t last. Anytime I find something that would guarantee my happiness, it would always end. I have no control of it.”

He held my shoulders and looked into my eyes. “If you’re that convinced that you’re cursed, then what do I say about myself? Or my brothers? I’ve saved countless lives, but I couldn’t save the love of my life. I’m sure Ethan and Ian have been in similar situations.” He paused and held my face in his palms. “I know this strong look you have is to hide the powerlessness you actually feel.

I know what it’s like having to suppress how you feel, but you have to accept that it has happened. It’s not your fault. I’m sure your mother was happy to have you because you proved she was able to give birth despite all odds, and your father died peacefully, knowing that he did his best to make sure you didn’t struggle for a thing. And Sophia...”

He took in a deep breath and exhaled. “I see how you take care of Chloe. My daughter doesn’t know what it’s like to have a mother; yet she’s so comfortable with you. Sophia knew you were a good mother. To your family, simply by giving birth to you, showing off paternal instincts or being taken care of, you were their good luck charm, despite all they had to go through.”

I was in tears. I had never really thought about it that way. I was convinced that this was my fault, and I was cursed with bad luck. But as I thought about what he said, I had never seen any of these people complain. Dad did mention that Mom was happy when I was born. And Dad was happy too. Sophia never complained about the pain she was in.

It was all in my head.

“If my words still aren’t enough to convince you,” Ben continued as he wiped the tears away. “I want you to know that from the moment I met you in London, and when we reunited up to this moment that you’ve been nothing but a source of joy for me and my daughter. You’re my good luck charm.”

“What’s that? That sounds so cringe!” I burst out laughing.

“Don’t laugh,” he said. I could see his cheeks redden as he was embarrassed by my outburst.

“Cringeworthy it may be, but...” I started to say as I touched my chest and felt my heart get lighter and warmer. “But It’s making me genuinely happy.”

“That’s all I wanted to hear,” he said.

I smiled at him and he returned a warmer one. I was happy. The guilt had lightened, and I felt a little more confident in myself and my abilities, all because he had helped me clear my thoughts.

If I wasn’t so sure before, I was certain now. I had fallen in love with Ben.

“Thank you,” I said.

“There’s something else I want to tell you,” he said. “And I don’t know how it will make you feel; it’s poor timing considering you just finished telling me everything you’ve been through.”

“What is it?”

“I went on a blind date today,” he replied.

I felt glass shatter in my mind.

“Oh... really,” I said.

Why tell me?

“It made me realize something important,” he said.

You probably want someone else to be with you?

“That I might actually be falling for you,” he said with a grin. “I think... no... I’ve been thinking about you in London... and since your arrival in Richmond. Seeing you... having you cohabit with me and my daughter made me realize that I have gotten used to having you around. I still worry you’ll disappear.”

I didn’t expect the words.

“You’re quiet... I thought...”

I cut off his words with a kiss, and he didn’t hesitate to kiss me back. As I broke the kiss and stared into his eyes, there was no doubt, and no lies - he was falling for me. While he was still in the process, I was already done and had come to a conclusion concerning my feelings.

“Wow, that kiss...”

“It’s different isn’t it?” I giggled.

“Stronger and more passionate,” he added as he brought his face closer to mine and kissed my forehead. “I love it, good girl.”

His voice was made to call me that. My gaze went lower, and I noticed the bulge in his pants.

“You’re trying to console me, but hiding this?” I asked as I poked at the swelling. “You get turned on hearing sob stories?”

“I swear this was after the kiss,” he defended, although he could tell I was teasing.

“Liar,” I whispered as I kissed his neck.

I left my lips planted on his neck. His gulping motion against them was a new sensation, one I wouldn’t mind getting

used to. My hands rubbed his erection gently over the protection of his pants while I continued the neck kisses.

“You want me to cum in my pants?” he asked as he held my hair and pulled me backward.

“Maybe,” I bit my lip in defiance. “But I don’t want you to have issues with laundry, now do I?”

“You definitely wouldn’t,” he said before kissing my neck.

I unzipped his pants and pulled everything off, along with his underwear. It was still afternoon, and I just realized how thick he was. In London, it was nighttime, and the lights were dim, so I couldn’t fully see it. But right there, bathed in the rays of sunlight feeding into the room, I gazed at his dick in awe.

The girth seemed bigger than last time, and his length too. The veins that formed several lines, pumping blood, ensuring his hardness remained strong and proud was like cake on the icing... or the other way around.

My two mouths were watering. I started to take off my clothes, so I wouldn’t let it become a hindrance once we fully got into it.

“Wait,” he said as I was done.

His left hand held my right breast, and he squeezed it, causing me to gasp. I watched his dick twitch in excitement as he marveled at the voluptuous texture of my breast. I licked my left palm thoroughly, then held his dick and started stroking.

His mouth made contact with my breasts, and he sucked gently at first, then it became faster. His tongue flicked against my nipples furiously; he even started grazing me with his teeth, just the way I liked it. When he was satisfied with the taste of my breasts, it was my turn to get a taste of him.

I lay down between his legs, held his dick, and pressed it against my face. The warm, pulsing member was excited to meet me, and I was glad to see him after so long.

I kissed his tip, not a light one. It a sloppy wet kiss. I looked up at Ben, visibly surprised about my change in approach to his member. I continued the kiss, this time involving my tongue, lacing his dick with the saliva dripping from my mouth.

“Oh, my God,” he groaned as he held my head but didn’t force me to go any lower; rather he was trying to get me to stop. But the way his hips slowly lifted and dropped told me he enjoyed this torture.

With his tip held captive in my mouth, my hands kept busy: my right hand stroking the rest of his magnificent dick with my left teasing his abs. The sensations and pleasure caused his body to shudder under my touch. His gasping, the smile on his face as I controlled him, the gentle caressing of my hair - everything told me I was doing a good job.

“Stop... no more...” he pleaded as his dick started throbbing harder.

He hit his climax, sending spurts of warm cum into my mouth. I swallowed, not missing a single drop. I let his dick free and licked whatever was left on him.

“That was so good,” I said as I stroked his dick. It still seemed hard for some odd reason. “Why is it still hard? Have you checked yourself at the doctors recently?”

“What was that for?” he asked and frowned.

“Did you hate it?” I smirked as I got into the cowgirl position, hovering above his dick, getting ready to impale myself.

“I... I actually enjoyed it,” he admitted as he watched my hips dangle above his dick.

“So you like me to focus on the tip. Then, how about I just focus on the tip during the actual penetration?” I asked as I lowered my hips, guiding his member into me, but just the tip only.

He held my hips and forced me down, sending his entire length in and reaching my cervix instantly.

“Fuck!” I didn’t expect the immediate pain to pleasure sensation that sped through my body. I hugged him and blurted out, “What did... what did you do that for?”

“Did you hate it?” he asked; although I wasn’t able to see his face thanks to the way I held him, I knew he was grinning.

“Dummy,” I pouted as I slowly moved my hips in a circular motion, making sure my insides were able to adjust to him.

“You good?” he asked.

I nodded, and he held my hips and started to thrust upward.

“Ah...” I moaned as he held my hips and leaned backward, moving faster and faster.

I started to move my hips, letting him relax a bit. Bouncing on his dick, I couldn’t get over the fact that he had gotten bigger since the last time. His length and thickness seemed to be pulling my insides the faster I moved.

He kissed me, letting his tongue into my mouth, allowing me to suck gently on him. I sucked him, enjoying his taste, but I wasn’t able to focus properly. My mind was focused on what he was doing. He lay me down without pulling out his dick. “I see you’re getting a little slower.”

“It’s not me, you’re just bigger than I remember,” I said and frowned.

“It’s my fault then,” he said. “I’ll take responsibility.”

“You better,” I whimpered as he slowly pulled half of his length out.

His thumb massaged my clit as he started thrusting slowly.

“You’re making such a beautiful expression right now,” he said as he touched my face before sliding two fingers into my mouth for me to play with.

His pacing gradually increased, sending more of himself inside me. His thrusting was turning me on even harder. The sounds of our bodies slapping against each other, the wet sloshing sounds of my pussy getting fucked, and our grunts and moans made a divine symphony.

I wanted more.

Ben's POV

She had said I had gotten bigger than the last time, but I'm of the opinion that she had gotten tighter. She was magnificent. Her breasts seemed to have new meaning in my eyes. She had been a mother before. How could I have not noticed that considering how big her areolas were. There was the sensitivity and size of her nipples as well.

Watching her breasts jiggle with each thrust I took was something I would never get tired of viewing. I pulled out of her... the urge to cum was there, but I didn't want to stop.

Not yet.

"On your fours," I commanded as I got down from the bed.

I watched her bend over on the bed raising her beautiful ass, slowly shaking it to arouse me. I spanked her ass.

"Mmph!" She whimpered as ripples gave feedback on just how soft, yet thick she was.

I got down and held her hips, burying my face in her pussy. I took in a deep breath and exhaled as my nose made contact with the pink flesh. I spread her open and watched the strands of her wetness separate to reveal her vagina properly. Using my tongue, I licked her entire pussy like one would with an ice cream cone.

"Ooh," she moaned and moved her hips backward to get a better feel of me tasting her.

Her juices mixed with my saliva made her taste even better than I had hoped. I moved lower and focused on her clit. As I kissed, licked and sucked on the little bean of pleasure, I moved a thumb into her pussy to stir her up a little.

"Oh, just like that..." She reached for my head from behind and started rubbing her pussy against my face, ensuring that I gave her enough satisfaction.

Her wetness increased, and I almost drowned, but it was worth it. She was hungry for more - and I was as well. I stopped eating her and got to my feet.

She turned to look at me, “I’m sorry.... Your face, it’s covered.”

“I see no problem with it,” I said as I stroked my dick against her slit, while slapping my tip repeatedly against her clit.

“Stop teasing me already!” She whined as she rocked her hips, hoping to entice me into sliding into her.

As I did, it was a new sensation. Her pussy tightened around my dick, and I couldn’t help but want to cum instantly.

“Loosen up a bit,” I said to her.

“I... I can’t...” she replied. I felt her insides slightly loosen but tighten almost as quickly. “Try moving... please.”

I moved in the rest of my dick and groaned, while she moaned in pleasure. This was different from the other times. I could see her body fully, so I could admire her properly as well. I moved faster and deeper. My dick was hitting against her cervix furiously, while I enjoyed the arching of her ass each time it made contact with my hips.

“Ha.. ha.... More, Ben, more...” she demanded as I continued to fuck her.

I leaned over kissing her back and the nape of her, before returning to my position and moving faster.

“You feel so good,” I said as I continued.

“Thank you....”

“But my hips are getting tired,” I smirked. It was a lie.

I stopped moving.

“Oh no... no no no....” She groaned and started moving her hips hungrily.

I watched her throw it back, while she turned to look at me, her pleading eyes befitting a puppy that had been denied a treat.

“Please, I’ll move too,” she pleaded. “Just don’t stop... please.”

“You’re a spoiled greedy girl, aren’t you?” I asked as I stroked her hair. “You don’t even care if I’m tired?”

“I’m sorry... I’m sorry for being greedy,” she apologized but didn’t stop moving her hips in a greedy manner.

I leaned over and kissed her mouth. She was so perfect. The whimpers she left in my mouth caused me to feel a little sorry for depriving her of satisfaction. As I pulled away from the kiss, her eyes switched from pleading to lust as she licked her lips, batted her lashes, then bit her lower lip.

“You don’t seem sorry at all,” I said as I felt my dick get harder.

Judging by the look of surprise in her eyes, she could tell the change in the size and hardness of my dick. My left hand held her hips for support, while I wrapped her hair around my right hand and started to pull. At the same time, my dick went deeper into her.

“Oh, my.... fuck!!” she exclaimed and raised her upper body, kneeling while I let go of her hair and fucked her harder and faster. “It hurts... It hurts... so goooooood.”

Although she complained, she didn’t make an attempt to push me away, or stop me.

I continued mating with her, kissing her neck and lips.

“Ben, Ben.... Ben...” she called repeatedly as her right hand held my head from behind. “I can’t... I’m almost there...”

“It’s okay... just hold on for me a bit,” I said. “You can do it... you’re a good girl.”

I was almost there as well, but judging how she tensed up and tightened, I could tell she was nearing her limit.

“I’m sorry.. I’m sorry,” she apologized as she reached her climax and stopped moving.

I didn’t stop, even as she limped over and laid flat on her stomach on the bed. We were in the doggy style position. I held her head down and continued my movements.

“No more...” she pleaded as her body shook a little, and her hands held onto the bedsheet. “Oh... oh my... oh my fuck.... Mmmm.”

For someone protesting and had already orgasmed, she seemed to be enjoying the spasm fuck. I was getting close.

“I’m about to cum...” I warned.

“Don’t... don’t pull out,” she said, “it’s safe... I think...”

I couldn’t go with an I think, but I couldn’t just stop now... not when she felt this good.

“Ha... ha... ahh...” I continued my thrusting until I came inside her.

“Oooh... finally,” she said as she panted heavily.

I remained inside her, until every drop had gotten into her. I pulled out and she placed her hand there to catch some of my cum that spilled out.

“That’s.. a lot more than I remembered,” she chuckled. “I’m sorry I can’t move.”

“It’s alright,” I lay beside her, and stared at her face. “Are you okay?”

She blushed. “God don’t stare at me like that!”

“I can’t help it,” I said and placed my hand on her face.

She closed her eyes as I touched her. I was tired as well. Enjoyable sex like this always had a way of draining my energy. But it looked like I wasn’t the only one drained. Her soft breathing showed that she was about to fall asleep. I kissed her lips softly, and she returned the kiss in softly as well.

It was bliss.

She smiled as we stopped the kiss but didn’t open her eyes. “Thank you, Ben. For listening to me... and doing more than listening.”

“I’m always here,” I said. “Promise you’d rely on me, from now on.”

“Promise...” she murmured.

It was good enough for me. I enjoyed stroking her hair, as she started snoring softly. My eyes were heavy. I had told her that she could rely on me for her insecurities, but I still had one concerning the both of us. What if she disappeared when I wake up?

Maybe I should try and stay awake? I thought to myself, until my eyes closed.

When I opened my eyes, she wasn't there. I sat up in a panic and looked around. The sun was gone, and it was a few minutes past seven. I looked in the bathroom before going to her room. She wasn't there either. I went back to my room and called her number. It wasn't going through. Then I noticed a note on the bedside table.

“Not again,” I groaned as I looked through my closet and found a pair of joggers and a t-shirt. I grabbed my car keys and went downstairs to look for her outside. I didn't bother looking at the note because I knew it was just London all over again. As I went downstairs, she wasn't in the living room; neither was she in the kitchen.

Why?

I raced towards the door and opened it; she was standing there with a plastic bag about to open the door. She was wearing one of my shirts and her shorts.

“I didn't know your doors were automatic,” she said. “I borrowed your shirt. I hope...” she paused and took a closer look at me. “Are you okay?”

My heart was still pounding from the thought that she had actually left. She was still here.

“Where were you?” I asked.

“Popcorn,” she showed me the bag. “You don't look so good. Are you going out?”

I let out a sigh of relief and held my chest as the pounding reduced and reverted back to normal.

“I thought... I thought you had left,” I replied.

“But my things are still in there,” she said.

I didn’t even notice.

“Your phone,” I said.

“I forgot to charge it,” she said. “I left the house and it powered off. I guess I still have a long way to go with the bad...”

I hugged her, and squeezed her tightly.

She hugged me back, “I’m sorry. Did I worry you?”

I nodded.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized again. “But can we go inside?”

I had forgotten that she was still standing outside. I let go of her and she made her way in. I closed the door as she was in.

“You were still asleep, looking like a baby,” she said as she made her way to the kitchen. “I didn’t want to disturb you. Plus, I was worried that you’d pounce on me once you woke up.”

“What kind of man do you think I am?” I asked and frowned.

“I remember, a certain someone not stopping, no matter how much I complained that I was hurting or couldn’t hold my climax,” she reminded me. “Now I’m ruined for marriage. No one would have me.”

“Maybe it’s better that no one would have you,” I said.

She raised a brow, and I shook my head negatively.

She smiled and looked away. “By the way, I left a note that I was going out to get popcorn. You didn’t see it?”

“I did,” I recalled the note I had found on the bedside table. “I didn’t read it. I assumed it was something else.”

“Oh, well,” she said as she opened the microwave. “I turned this off and forgot my lasagna. Join me for dinner?”

“I will, please,” I replied.

“I’ll be working full time tomorrow,” she said. “I did skip work today.”

“It’s okay. I already know what happened,” I said.

“Well, you still need to punish me for it. Your staff don’t know we’re staying together,” she reminded me.

“Oh right. Forgot about that,” I sighed. “You can work the day.”

“I look forward to the rest of my days here,” she said with a smile as she plated our meal.

“You say it like you don’t have an entire month here,” I said.

“Well Ethan texted while you were asleep,” she said. “I don’t think I’ll be up to a month here, due to how peculiar my situation is.”

“Oh,” I said and my shoulders dropped.

That’s right, she was leaving soon. Ethan had somehow mentioned it during our feedback meetings. Before I started helping her with her insecurities, I needed to work on mine.

The two of us had crossed a line together and that was definitely going to cause a change in our relationship as employer and employee.

Chapter Fifteen

The Subtle Yet Obvious Changes

Olivia

“Everything’s been going great over here, Dr Williams,” I replied.

Five days had passed since I had told Ben my story. I felt freer, and the moments I spent with Chloe and him were wholesome and comforting. I had gone to see Ethan about my performance review. He had been meeting with Ben, but both of us hardly met to talk.

Ever since the Stacy lady left, he seemed a lot different. There was this serious air around him. That playful charisma he had when I met him was almost gone as well.

We were on call with Dr Helen William to discuss my next course of action.

“You know, when this knucklehead told me that he had made a mistake regarding your role there, I was worried,” she sighed. “But at least you’ve adjusted.”

“Indeed I have. The Good Heart hospital has been one of the best places I’ve worked,” I said.

“Better than mine?” she asked.

“Yes,” I smiled.

“You seem different,” Ethan cut in.

“What?” I raised a brow.

“I was about to say the same thing,” Dr Williams agreed. “You’re calmer and should I also add that you seem more mature? Did something happen? Love interest?”

Ethan’s eyes settled on me suspiciously at Dr William’s last question.

“Uh no... I just had to change. Dr. Sullivan has a lot of experienced staff that make me feel like most of my work as an auxiliary nurse these past years have been mediocre,” I said. “I guess I had to change to become a staff member that wouldn’t give him a lot of trouble.”

Ethan’s gaze relaxed. He smiled, satisfied with my response.

Although I had said we had to hide the truth about what was going on between us, it was also the truth. While watching Martha and the other nurses take care of the kids or any other patients like they were family members they didn’t want to see die, I had been taking care of patients like they were friends that I didn’t want to see hurt.

I guess the death of Ben’s wife taught all of them such a lesson.

“Well, I’m a bit jealous that you’ve found somewhere better than my lonely old place,” she said. “But I’m a little worried about you when you have to leave. You have just around five days left, you know?”

“Oh that reminds me, I haven’t told Ben yet,” Ethan said. “Let me put him on the call.”

“No! I’ll want to tell him myself,” I said.

I didn’t want him to know at all.

“Okay? You do it then,” Ethan said.

“Are you going to tell her the other news?” Dr. Williams asked him.

“Other news?” I raised a brow.

“Well, because I made a lot of mistakes concerning you, and now you’re not even staying for the full course of one month, I was hoping to sponsor your traveling nurse career,” Ethan replied. “Dr. Williams here told me that you’d love to visit another state here in the US.”

“Are you serious?!” My eyes lit up. “What state?”

“Maryland,” he replied. “Today’s Future Hospital.”

“The popular and biggest children’s hospital!” I almost stood up.

“Wow, Helen, you weren’t kidding,” he chuckled.

I’ve always wanted to visit it.

Maybe I should ask Ben if I should...

I stopped the thought, and my shoulders dropped. It was a work opportunity of a lifetime, but it would mean leaving Richmond... leaving Ben and Chloe.

“Is something wrong?” Ethan asked.

“What happened?” Dr. Williams asked.

“Her mood made a 360°,” he replied.

“Olivia, you don’t want to go?” She asked. “You know you’ve always wanted to volunteer there.”

“No it’s not that,” I said, “I just...”

“It’s not set in stone,” Ethan cut in. “If you want to remain in Richmond, or take the opportunity and go to Maryland the choice is yours. Just let me know what you come up with.”

“Can I stay in Richmond? Is that allowed?” I asked.

“Technically, you are a travel nurse. And since you aren’t in London, which is your base, this is a perfect example of being on duty, so don’t worry about it,” he said with a smile. “Once again, I need to be sure this is what you want. So just take your time and decide.”

A new work opportunity or the chance to stay here and bond a little longer with Ben and Chloe. Although the choice was obvious, there was a difficult case.

Jason had started texting me again. I kept that fact away from Ben. It wasn't anything creepy, just him asking for forgiveness.

The past five days, Chloe was done with her exams, and I even got to attend the graduation party with Ben. Chloe sang *Heal The World* along with her classmates. From what the teacher said, Chloe wanted the song because her dad was a doctor, and he helped heal people.

She didn't really understand that the song wasn't talking about doctors, but innocence; the fact she thought about her father was heartwarming.

It definitely got to Ben. He tried to hide it, but his proud grin was visible. The truth was, she had told me about it, and I had helped her practice as well, hiding it from her dad. When I would drop her off at school, I would use a cab, both going and coming back. I didn't want to risk running into Jason again.

I had gotten closer to Chloe, and I felt closure with Sophia as well. Although they weren't the same person, it felt good to be a mother again. Jason could be a little irrational at times, so I was a little worried about what he would do if he found out about my new happiness.

Ben had said that he would take all my bad luck, but... what about the repercussions of everything? I promised to trust him, but what if something bad really happened, not just to him, but Chloe as well?

Was my staying really not a selfish option? But still... on the glimmer of hope that everything would be okay, I thought about staying in Richmond.

"Thank you for the offer Ethan, I'll think about it," I said.

"That wraps things up then," he said. "Anything else, Helen?"

"Nothing to add. Olivia, call me later when you're less busy," she said before hanging up.

"That's that I guess," Ethan said then turned his attention to me. "You'll be going to his hospital right?"

“Yes, I still have a shift to cover,” I said as I got to my feet. “Thank you once again.”

“It’s no problem. Take care of him for us,” he said with a knowing smile.

“What?”

“You’re not the only one who’s changing,” he said as he relaxed into his chair. “Thanks for helping him want to move on.”

“Oh...” My cheeks turned red as I realized what he meant.

He nodded and offered, “Good luck.”

Ian

Ian Sullivan was youngest of the Sullivan brothers, the younger twin.... And a plastic surgeon. He was honest to a fault. I’m a straight forward person and tend to say things as I see it. It’s a trait many do not like, and they prefer my brothers over me. I don’t mind the lack of attention, but this isn’t about me.

I took a drive to clear my thoughts. After another successful surgery, I wanted the peaceful drive that the road offered. Passing by Ethan’s hospital, I noticed a woman coming out, wearing blue scrubs but holding a handbag like she was going somewhere.

I stopped the car in front of her; she looked at me, as the windows went down.

“Ethan?” she asked. “Didn’t we just... oh yeah, twin brother.”

It wasn’t that easy to tell both of us apart. No matter how hard we tried to develop a different feature, like more muscle than the other or something, we would always look alike. The thing is, I had to get used to people calling me Ethan a lot.

“I don’t recognize your face,” I said and went straight to the point. “You came to see someone.”

“I’m a transfer nurse, but I work at Ben’s place,” she explained. “I’m Olivia Collins.”

“The one from London?” I asked.

Her cheeks flushed as if she remembered something.

“Yes, London,” she replied hesitantly.

Ethan had told me that there was an extra nurse for his program who came from London. But judging by how she flushed when I mentioned London right after she said she worked with Ben, there was more to the story.

“If you’re going that way, get in then,” I offered. “I’m going to pay my brother a visit, anyway.”

I had originally planned to just take a drive, but now that something had caught my interest, I figured I’ll just get to the bottom of it. It was a quiet ride, and since I have problems striking up conversations with people I didn’t know, the quietness continued.

“So how has working with Ben been?” I asked, deciding to use something - or someone - who was common to the both of us.

“It’s been amazing. I don’t get to work with him most of the time,” she replied, “as I’m usually in the children’s or women’s ward while he performs transplants.”

“Have you ever seen him work?” I asked.

“Yes,” she smiled. It felt like I was looking at a fan who had seen her idol in person. “I wish I could be that level of skilled or talented and still remain humble and kind. He asks his staff for medical advice and sometimes even asks me for my input. He’s just so... wonderful.”

“I understand the feeling,” I said.

I was a skilled surgeon and so was Ethan. Ben could be stubborn, but he was a very humble man, besides having a large frame. The very first time Ethan and I saw him work, we were reminded how far above us he was in terms of skill and expertise.

We strived to arrive at that image of perfection he projected. And then... Selina happened.

“I heard you live with him; have there been any problems?” I asked.

“None at all. If anything, I feel like I’m the one causing problems. I can’t elaborate on that, however,” she replied.

“I’m surprised. You don’t find my questions problematic?” I raised a brow. Normally, this was the part where they stopped me from asking questions.

“You’re a curious person, that’s all,” she replied. “There’s nothing wrong with that. As someone who has worked with a lot of children, you get used to hearing so many things.”

“Are you saying I’m a child?” I raised a brow.

“What? No, no. I was saying you have a childlike curiosity,” she defended quickly.

“Right, like that helps,” I sighed.

“No I...” she sighed. “I guess it runs in the family.”

“How’s life been with Ben? What do you think about him?” I asked.

She’s a grown lady, living with a grown man. There’s bound to be some interest.

“He’s been amazing. Chloe too,” she replied. “What do I think about him? He’s too kind. From the moment I met him, and even when we ran into each other again, that’s one telling feature he has. I hope that I don’t ruin it for him.”

She looked a bit down after giving that reply. Something was odd...first her reaction to when I mentioned London and when she mentioned she ran into him again.

Was she the lady Ben talked about?

“You don’t ever have to worry about ruining Ben’s kindness,” I said. “As long as he cares about you, he won’t stop being kind.”

“Even if I’m going to cause him problems?” she asked.

“You seem really invested in this. Are you in love with him?” I asked.

“No, no, no,” she insisted. “I just want to know as a staff, that’s all.”

As a staff huh?

I held back the urge to laugh. “You don’t have to worry about that really.”

“You’re a nice person Ian,” she said.

When was the last time I was called nice? If this was the woman Ben met in London, then I understood his attraction.

You’ve found a good one, haven’t you, Ben?

Ben was a simple person after Selina’s death; although he continued his kindness, most of his smiles were forced, and you rarely see him being genuinely happy. When Olivia and I entered his office, he was walking to his desk. He stopped and turned around.

I remained at the door as I closed it behind me.

“You’re back,” he said to her.

That was the first time in five years that I had seen him smile so effortlessly with someone else.

“Did you miss me?” she teased as she stood in front of him and stared up at him, with that fangirl look in her eyes.

“Maybe,” he replied as he stared down at her.

I watched his hands itch to hold her. I had never felt so out of place. Was this really my brother? There were a lot of changes. He had visibly gained a little weight, his complexion got better, and he was happier.

Just by looking at this woman? When was the last time I saw an image like this? Right, when he was with Selina.

“Oh, hello, little brother Ian,” he finally noticed me.

“Little brother Ian? You really are in the best of moods,” I remarked.

“Ian helped me out with a ride,” Olivia reported then turned to me. “Thank you.”

“It’s no problem,” I said.

“Oh, well, Ian is here to see you. I can come back later,” she said and excused herself, leaving my brother and me alone.

As the door shut, I turned to my brother and smirked.

“What?” he asked and went to his desk.

“I’m assuming that’s your London Cinderella,” I said.

“What? Did she say anything?” he asked.

“No, not anything in particular, I just figured it out myself,” I replied. “But what are the odds? Mom was right after all.”

“I guess she was,” he said with a sigh.

“Judging by the tension, I just observed, I would advise that you tone it down a little. You wouldn’t want a relationship scandal spreading around your hospital,” I advised.

“I honestly thought we were being subtle,” he said.

“If that’s subtle, might as well just tell everyone that you’re sleeping with her as well,” I said.

“Blunt and too direct, little brother,” he said, but he didn’t look displeased by my statement.

“My apologies,” I said and watched him work, smiling to himself. “You’re not going to deny sleeping with her?”

“Is there any need?” He raised a brow. “You’re already aware about my involvement with her.”

“How is she?” I asked. “Does Chloe like her?”

“Chloe loves her.. And she’s been sweet to me too,” he replied. “I’m afraid I’m becoming addicted to having her around.”

I remembered how bummed he looked when she abandoned him in London. Had I forgotten that her stay here was temporary? It didn’t matter.

“You’ve really changed a lot,” I remarked and turned, making my way to the door.

“Aren’t you going to stay a little longer? I thought you came to visit me?” he asked.

“I just came out of curiosity,” I replied.

“And?”

“My curiosity has been satisfied,” I smiled. “Take good care of her.”

“I will.”

I nodded and left. I don’t really understand love. No one has really been that interested in me, romantically. But seeing my brother being all happy and moving forward with his life, I couldn’t help but feel envious.

Ben

It was around five pm. For me, work was almost done for the day, and Chloe was with my mother. My mother wanted to be the first to wish her a happy birthday as Chloe’s birthday was the next day. Olivia had to work until eight before she could leave. I decided to wait for her.

I used the opportunity to go through the itinerary that Olivia had prepared. Just like she had told me, Chloe had mentioned to Olivia that she wanted to visit a park for a picnic. Thus, the latter had chosen a park with a lake, along with some activities we would do together.

I was impressed. I couldn’t recall the last time that I actually got to hang out with my daughter properly. I was a little excited... okay, I was *a lot* excited. Ian was right. I had changed. To think that Olivia could put this much thought into making the day of a child who wasn’t even hers. I was moved by her kindness.

There was a knock on the door.

Olivia’s head peeked, “Busy?”

“No actually,” I replied. “Aren’t you?”

“I was allowed to leave early,” she said as she entered the office and shut the door behind her. “I wanted to tell you we were clear for the usual escape tactic.”

“I don’t think we’d need that today,” I said. “I’m sure no one would actually mind a boss dropping off his employee at a hotel.”

“You’re right,” she sighed. “What’s that you’re looking at?”

“The itinerary you made for Chloe’s birthday tomorrow,” I replied.

“Oh. Do you think she would like it? I don’t know how to celebrate birthdays,” she said.

“It’s a simple birthday.”

“She’s a billionaire’s daughter,” she reminded me. “It might be too simple.”

“I don’t think she would have any problems with it,” I insisted. “She just needs the company, that’s all. I’m sure she would be grateful. I’m just happy you were able to come up with something that would let me spend time with my daughter.”

“I’m glad I could be of help,” she said, then gave a smile that seemed to be demanding for something.

“What’s with the weird smile?” I asked.

“Oh, *this*?” She pointed at her mouth. “It’s nothing really. I was just thinking that maybe there would be a reward for being so helpful.”

“What did you have in mind?” I smirked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said as she walked to the door, swaying her hips seductively, before locking it and turning to face me. “I was thinking about a little kiss on the lips, nothing much.”

“Just a little kiss? I’m sure I can handle that,” I shrugged.

She made her way to my chair and sat on my lap.

“I thought this was going to be a little kiss?” I raised a brow.

“Don’t I get to be comfortable, for a little kiss?” she asked rhetorically as she wrapped her right arm around my head to touch my right ear.

“I guess you’re right,” I agreed as I held her waist and pulled her close.

She leaned in and kissed my lower lip, then she bit it gently and pulled it to her. I opened my eyes and saw her smiling as she held my lip captive. I didn’t know if this makes sense, but as my lip was trapped between her teeth. I could feel her tongue flicking against my lip.

Her fingers lined against my outer ear. She opened her mouth and took me in an open-mouthed kiss. Little kiss, my ass. She clearly didn’t want anything. My dick was already getting riled up due to her teasing.

She let in her tongue, and I accepted it. Her tongue was small; the organ made its way to clean my teeth, and I did nothing to stop it. I started to suck gently on it.

“Mmm...” she moaned as she let go of my head and, instead, cradled my face in her hands as my sucking became intense.

She pushed her face close, and our teeth hit against each other; we both chuckled at the shock. But it didn’t stop our kiss. We pulled away from the kiss and stuck out our tongues, circling each other before I let mine into her mouth.

“Hmmm.” The gentle groan of relief came as she held my tongue in her mouth and sucked just as I had done for her.

The suction power from her mouth reminded my dick about the time she had its tip at her mercy. I wanted that again. I wanted to be inside her. But first, I focused on tasting every inch of her mouth. As we pulled apart, a string of saliva connected our lips, and she kissed me again briefly. We were both panting after the kiss, and she was satisfied.... As for me, I wanted more.

“Alright, that’s my reward, we can go now,” she said as she stood up.

I held her hips and sat her down on my bulge. “Just where do you think you’re going?”

“Home? I’ve gotten the little kiss I wanted and I want to go home,” she replied but pressed her ass against the bulge,

slowly grinding her hips.

She knew what she was doing.

“There’s no way you’d leave me like this,” I whispered in her ear, and she shuddered.

“I thought there was something menacing in your trousers that kept poking against me,” she said.

“Maybe there is,” I said as my left hand touched her stomach and went lower into her pants.

I touched her pubic area.

“Shouldn’t we wait until we get home? Is it a good idea doing it here?” she asked, then whimpered as my fingers made contact with her slit.

“I would have taken your words seriously if you weren’t so wet,” I replied and kissed her neck. “We both can’t leave each other like this, can we?”

“I... I suppose...” Her words were hesitant as my middle and ring finger gently rubbed against her pussy. It seemed a lot meatier than last time.

Maybe it was just me, but anytime I touched her or did anything sexual, her body would adjust to a brand new experience for both of us. I slid in my middle finger and moved it in a circular motion, an attempt to loosen her up a little.

“Ah!” she moaned as I bit into her neck, causing her pussy to tighten immediately; and her wetness increasing slightly.

“You’re absolutely fascinating, Olivia,” I said before licking her neck and biting her shoulders through her scrubs. “Maybe I should intern with the gynecology department so I can understand how your body seems to keep getting better whenever I touch you.”

“You’re just saying that. I’m not anything special,” she protested. Her defiance earned her another finger in her pussy. “Mmmm...”

My middle and ring finger were inside her. I pressed against the upper wall of her insides and placed my thumb on her pubic area at the spot I suspected the fingers in her would be. I rubbed my fingers together, my thumb outside pressing against her and my two other fingers in her. She was slowly soaking my fingers with her juices.

“Should we stop now?” I asked.

“No...”

“Good girl,” I said as I pulled out my fingers and showed them to her. “Clean it.”

She started to lick my fingers, replacing her juices with saliva. Her tongue, warm yet wet, seemed to set fire to my skin.

“Done,” she said and kissed my hand.

I lifted her and pulled down her pants. She was wearing very cute underwear, with a print of clouds.

“I didn’t expect this,” I chuckled.

“Stop staring so hard, I didn’t plan to do this in the office you know?” she complained.

I touched her ass, letting my fingers sink in how soft she was. I pulled down her panties, and a trail of her wetness followed. I figured my dick wasn’t going to get any mouth service. I pulled down my pants as well and slid into her. The warmth, slippery yet tight texture of her insides had been registered in my upper and lower brains as home.

“I will never get tired of this,” she said as she moved her hips backwards to take me in properly.

Watching her jiggle as she took in the rest of me was a sight I wasn’t going to get used to either. I started to move. I couldn’t go as hard as I normally would; we’d risk people hearing us. Going slow wasn’t so bad. I could relish how good her insides felt.

But...

“Faster...” she asked.

“We’d risk being exposed,” I warned.

“I’ll be quiet I promise,” she said.

It was risky but who am I to refuse a woman’s promise? I held her hips and moved faster.

“Mmph!” She covered her mouth with her left hand as she held the desk with her other hand for support.

I was more worried about the sounds of our bodies colliding, but I hoped that no one came to check on me for an emergency case. She was doing a good job, keeping her voice under control. With my dick still, inside her, I turned her slowly to place her back on the table.

“Oh my...” Her eyes widened as her twisted insides returned to normal after the turn, “That was... I don’t think I want to do that again.”

“Alright then,” I said as I held up her legs and hugged them because her pants were still below her knees.

I continue my penetration, and this time she was rubbing her clit furiously while covering her mouth with her other hand to suppress her moans. Although I didn’t get to observe her body in full the way I normally did, this wasn’t so bad. She looked so sexy as she tried her best not to let out her voice.

As I approached my climax, I was sure it was no longer her safe day. I pulled out and replaced my dick with my fingers, as I released on her stomach - although some of them shot to her face and shirt. She picked them up and licked her fingers, waiting for me to bring her to climax. When we were done, we kissed again.

“Next time, we’ll do it at home,” I said.

“By next time, you mean tonight, right?” She raised a brow.

“Of course.”

Ian... I have changed a lot.

Chapter Sixteen

The Park of Doubts and Hope

Olivia

As I woke up early that sunny Saturday morning, my heart raced with excitement.

Today was going to be a special day; it was Chloe's birthday. I never really got any opportunity to go anywhere with Sophia for her birthdays, due to her health. The thought stole the excitement I had woken up with and I shook it off.

Ben was still asleep, so I went downstairs and got started. I got ready, packed the picnic basket with delicious sandwiches, fruit, and Chloe's favorite cupcakes. Chloe had said she'd make the sandwiches with me, but her grandmother had changed the plans by having the young lady spend time with her. My grandmother was somewhat like that as well. Telling her "no" was difficult for both me and Dad.

I heard a yawn and turned to find Ben in the kitchen, "Good morning, Olivia."

"Good morning," I greeted. "Go brush and bathe. We have to go pick up Chloe."

"Remind me who's birthday it is again?" He raised a brow.

I frowned at him and he sighed in defeat.

“Fine, I’m going, yeesh,” he turned and made his way upstairs while grumbling.

I felt like a mom again. But this time, with a... Dad...

I shook off the thought.

No negative feelings today. I just want to make Chloe’s day, I kept reminding myself.

I went to my room and looked for the dress I had bought for her as a gift. It was a little yellow sundress and a cute hat with a sunflower print. I thought it would look good on her. At the same time, I wondered if it was an appropriate gift.

She was not my daughter. Are strangers allowed to buy dresses for kids? I was worried that she wouldn’t like them.

“Stop the negative thoughts,” I said to myself and got ready to have my bath.

When I was done, I switched into a dress that would be easy to move around in. I went downstairs and found Ben seated on the couch watching TV while waiting for me.

The picnic baskets I had made were no longer in the kitchen. I assumed he had taken them out. He turned to look at me. He was wearing a short-sleeved shirt that hugged his arms perfectly. Three of the buttons were undone, revealing a white inner shirt.

“We’re going to a park,” I reminded him.

He pointed at his legs and showed off his shorts. “I hope there aren’t any mosquitos?”

“Doubt,” I replied then handed him the bag with the dress I had gotten for Chloe. “You can give this to her. I’ll wait at the park.”

“No,” he returned the bag. “You’ll come with me and we’ll pick her up together.”

“Won’t I be a bother? I don’t want your mother getting bad ideas... I mean I did give her the wrong impression the first time we met.” I explained.

“I’m sure you’re the only one who’s actually bothered about it,” he said. “Let’s go pick her up.”

As we arrived at his mother’s place, I grew nervous. I know we weren’t official, but it still felt like he was introducing me to his mother. Chloe was already waiting for us holding her teddy bear along with her grandmother.

“Miss Olivia!” Chloe yelled as she ran to embrace me.

“I’m jealous,” Ben pouted.

“Hi, Daddy,” Chloe smiled at him and embraced his leg while he rubbed her hair.

Do I give it to her? I held the bag nervously, trying to figure out the perfect moment to give her the gift.

“Olivia has something for you,” Ben said then turned to me. “Stop being nervous, she doesn’t bite.”

I swallowed and gave her the bag. I muttered, “Happy birthday, Chloe.”

“Thank you!” she said sweetly and looked at her father for permission. He nodded, before she opened the bag and took out the dress. “Wowww!”

As she showed that she loved it, butterflies danced in my stomach.

“Thank you, Miss Olivia,” she said as she hugged the dress, causing my heart to melt.

I could see my daughter doing the same thing.

Crap... this isn’t the time to cry.

“It’s a beautiful dress,” Ben’s mother said. “Her uncle’s shower her with toys or money, forgetting that she’s a lady. It’s good to have another woman who understands.”

“Oh, no, I...”

I just wanted to do the same thing I would have done if my daughter was alive.

“Daddy, are we going to the mall?” Chloe asked.

“Actually, we’ll be going to the park,” I replied.

Her eyes widened with joy as she squealed in delight, jumping too. She was a sweet and spirited six-year-old, and her happiness was always contagious. It got all the adults watching her to smile.

I was glad that I had chosen the park as a birthday event.

Arriving at Byrd Park, we set up our picnic spot under a big oak tree, the branches providing a cool shade from the summer sun.

“Happy birthday, Chloe!” Ben said, handing her a small wrapped present. She squealed with glee as she tore the wrapping paper, revealing a beautiful book about her favorite fairy tales. Her eyes sparkled with joy, and she thanked him with a heartwarming hug.

Daddy Ben looked so proud of himself. I couldn’t help grinning at the both of them.

“Miss Olivia, can I read it now?” She asked as she handed the book to me.

“Let’s have something to eat first,” I replied. “I got some of your favorite cupcakes.”

She gasped, “Chocolate!”

“Yes,” I put down the picnic basket and spread out the delicious food on the checked tablecloth. “Dig in,” I commanded

Ben and Chloe reached for the chocolate cupcakes, but I stopped them. “Let’s start with the sandwiches and get back to the chocolate cupcake after okay?”

“Okay,” they chorused and switched to sandwiches.

As they ate, their expressions told me just how much they enjoyed the meal I had made for the special occasion, filling me with pride. Chloe chatted animatedly about her adventures at school while we enjoyed our lunch. Her laughter was like music to my ears, and it brought a smile to Ben’s face, too.

After the meal, we strolled around the park, taking in the sights and sounds. Our first stop on my itinerary was Swan Lake.

“Daddy look! Real swans!” Chloe pointed excitedly.

“Really beautiful, aren’t they?” he asked.

“Mmmm, hmm.” She nodded and turned to me. “Miss Olivia, do you know about the ugly duckling story?”

“No I haven’t heard about it. What’s it about?” I asked.

“You haven’t?” She seemed surprised, but there was a smug expression on her face. “It’s about this ugly duckling that no one liked because it was ugly. But it turned out to be beautiful when it grew up. It was a swan!”

“Oh wow. What a beautiful story,” I said.

“I’ll tell you more,” she said proudly. “But I’ll have to read daddy’s gift to me.”

“I can’t wait to hear your stories,” I said to her.

She giggled.

“Daddy can I get one of the swans?” she asked.

There’s no way Ben would agree to that.

“You there,” Ben pointed at one of the staff. “Do you sell the swans?”

“Uh.. no... sorry, sir,” the staff apologized.

“There you have it sweetie,” he sighed.

“Oh that’s okay,” Chloe said.

Chloe wasn’t so bothered about the rejection, but her voice seemed to get to the staff.

“If it helps, there’s a pop up petting zoo that will be opening around here today,” he said as he pointed to a tent we had noticed them setting up earlier. “There are no swans, but there are baby ducks. If that would be okay?”

“Yes!” Chloe agreed, “Daddy, can we check it out?”

“Sure thing. Once they open,” he replied.

I may have imagined it, but Ben seemed excited about the pop up petting zoo. We came across a playground, and Chloe's eyes widened with excitement. She darted toward the swings. Ben and I followed, pushing her as high as we could. Her laughter echoed through the park; and for a moment, we forgot all our worries and responsibilities.

Next, we headed to the Japanese Garden, where colorful koi swam gracefully in the pond. Chloe was mesmerized by the vibrant fish. Ben and I sat by her side, admiring the tranquil beauty of the place.

"Can we eat them?" Chloe asked the guide.

"No, but you can feed them," the lady replied.

I had planned for us to feed the fish and found out the time beforehand. The lady handed us the fish food and told us what to do. Chloe was nervous feeding them, Ben was too.

"Are you sure this is okay for them?" Ben asked.

"Am I feeding them wrong? They aren't coming this way." Chloe seemed bummed out as well.

"Patience you two," I assured them.

Not sooner than I was done talking, the fish swam up to us and started eating. The look of satisfaction on both father and daughter was a wholesome sight for tired eyes like mine.

Would Sophia also be nervous? Would she want to tell me stories about an ugly duckling? Would she be okay that I was moving on like this? Replacing her with someone else, that is.

Am... I forgetting about my daughter?

No negative thoughts.

As the afternoon sun began to dip lower in the sky, we decided to indulge in one of Byrd Park's most famous activities: paddle boating on Fountain Lake. Chloe insisted on sitting in the middle, sandwiched between Ben and me, as we paddled along the calm waters. We made up silly stories about the ducks swimming nearby, and Chloe's infectious laughter filled the air once more.

Ben had laughed a lot as well, and even rocked the boat a little to scare us. Chloe just squealed in delight while I screamed with fright. The two of them found my fear to be hilarious, and they wasted no time in bursting into laughter at me while my cheeks went red as tomatoes due to the embarrassment.

“Let’s go check if the petting zoo is open,” Ben said as he walked ahead of us.

I knew it. He was more excited about this than Chloe.

“Does your dad like animals?” I asked.

“He loves them,” she replied. “Are you having fun Miss Olivia?”

“I am,” I replied.

“Are you sure? Because you’ve been happy-sad all this time,” she explained.

Did she mean the mood switching? To think I made a little girl worry about me on her special day. I was the worst.

“Don’t mind me Chloe. I am having fun watching you and dad,” I said.

“You’d be a good mommy,” she said.

I thought I heard wrong.

“Chloe, what did you...”

“Why are you two slow? There are hamsters here,” Ben called out to us.

Chloe let go of my hand and raced to her dad. She was just being a kid right? There was no way she was talking about me being a good mom for her, did she? Chloe and I petted the baby animals. There were ducklings, bunnies, kittens and hamsters. Ben looked like he wanted to pet them as well but did nothing.

“Why aren’t you petting any of them?” I asked as I showed him the duckling in my palm.

“I’m fine just watching,” he lied as he stared at me with obvious envy.

I took a good look at him. Ben wasn’t just the oldest of his brothers, but he had the biggest build and muscle.

Wait... it couldn’t be.

“By chance are you afraid that you’ll crush them?” I asked.

He didn’t even try to deny it, and he just nodded. The giant doctor who has handled delicate organs of different individuals during emergency surgery was scared he’d crush an animal?

I chuckled and asked him to open his hands. He obeyed. I placed the duck in his hands and gently closed it to make sure it didn’t fall out, but he had enough room to stroke its back. As he touched the duckling, it was like he reverted to being a child again.

“Daddy, let’s exchange,” Chloe said as she handed him a hamster and took the duckling.

The both of them continued petting the animals longer than I expected, but I didn’t mind.

Time flew by; and as the evening approached, we made our way back to our picnic spot. Chloe was starting to tire, but she didn’t want the day to end just yet. So, Ben and I decided to surprise her with one last treat - an ice cream cone from a nearby vendor. Her eyes widened in delight, and her smile grew even wider.

With ice cream in hand, we found a spot to sit and watch the sun slowly set on the horizon. The sky turned into a canvas of colors; and as the stars began to twinkle, we held each other close. The park was now quiet, with just the sound of crickets and our laughter breaking the serene atmosphere.

As the day drew to a close, I realized how much love had grown in my heart for both Ben and Chloe. But I couldn’t help wondering if this new feelings of love was pushing away the love I once had for my daughter. Chloe had fallen asleep so Ben had to carry her to the car, while I packed up our picnic items.

After loading everything in the car we started to make our way home. I kept turning to look at Chloe, who was asleep, strapped in her seat.

“I haven’t seen her have this much fun in a while,” Ben said. “You really did enough for both of us today. Thank you, Olivia.”

“It’s no problem. I’m just glad you two had fun,” I said. “I even got to see a new childish side to you. I think Ethan shows his childishness properly, but you and Ian seem to enjoy hiding it.”

“It can be inconvenient sometimes,” he said. “And make sure you forget everything you’ve learned about me today.”

“Right. I’ll try to forget,” I said as I brought out my phone and looked through some of the pictures I had taken of our outing.

I continued scrolling through, smiling at the new memories. I stopped at a picture I had taken of Chloe licking her ice cream. I exited the folder and went to my special one to take a look at Sophia with her school backpack.

“Now that Chloe is asleep,” Ben said as he stopped the car and parked properly. “You want to tell me what’s been on your mind all day?”

I showed him the picture on my phone, “That’s my Sophia.”

“If you didn’t tell me, I’d mistake her for... Chloe... oh.” He turned and looked at me as he realized the source of my despair. “It must have been so hard today. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. I actually had a lot of fun today,” I said, “it’s just... at first I thought that I was using Chloe as a replacement for Sophia. Then, it felt like I was betraying her by celebrating another child’s birthday when she didn’t get to live that long. And now... I feel like I’m forgetting all about her.”

He was quiet, then let out a sigh and leaned back into his chair.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know if I’m making any sense,” I said.

“You actually are. I can tell because I’ve also had the same thoughts today,” he said. “When I came down and found you preparing for the picnic...or when you presented the birthday gift to Chloe. Even when I ate your tasty sandwiches, I kept wondering how Selina would feel about this. Truth is, my siblings and my mother have been trying to get me married for the reason that Chloe needs a mother figure. But it’s easier said than done. Chloe doesn’t like a lot of people.”

He paused. “But now she has someone she likes. I’m sure she won’t feel any guilt, no matter the light she views you in, because she doesn’t even know who her mom is. But as for me... I’m a little worried about how little I’ve been thinking of Selina lately.”

He looked down about it after he was done talking.

“Are we bad people?” I asked. “Forgetting about the past people we’ve loved, replacing them with someone else?”

“I don’t think so,” he replied, “I think they would have wanted us to move on. Plus, it’s not really possible to forget entirely about them.” He paused and turned to look at Chloe. “We’ll always have something that will remind us of them.”

“I guess you’re right,” I agreed, feeling a lot better.

It was okay if Chloe reminded me of Sophia. It was okay to miss her too. I was never going to forget her.

Chapter Seventeen

Maybe, I'm Just Unlucky After All

B^{en}

I thought a lot about what Olivia had told me the previous day. It was true that I hardly thought about Selina ever since Olivia revealed her past. I had completed the process of falling in love with her to completely being in love with her.

Watching my daughter and her bond.... even how she took care of us like we were her kids. I was occupied with thinking about how much of a fit she would be if she were to become Chloe's mother. I was worried if that was the right thing to do.

Finding a new mother for Chloe always sounded like I disrespected Selina's death, and that was another reason I steeled myself to turn down advances of women who showed or indicated interest in me.

All but Olivia. She didn't sleep in my room that night, and I didn't ask her too. She needed time to fully process what was going on. And I needed to do the same as well. I picked up a photograph of Selina and I together. She was beaming with a smile.

"Have I visited your grave recently?" I asked as I touched her face. "I have been busy recently."

I made a mental note to visit her grave along with Chloe and... Olivia.

“Selina, I’m not betraying you,” I said. “I know you would want Chloe, and I to have the best of things life has to offer. Well, life has offered one of the bests. I didn’t know what else to say except that I have fallen in love with her.”

Rather than the crushing weight of guilt I was expecting, I felt relieved all of a sudden.

To think all I needed to do was talk to her about it. With Olivia’s departure still uncertain, I decided to tell her how I felt and convince her to stay in Richmond.

My phone started to ring. Ethan was calling. “Hey, what’s up?” I answered.

“Wow, you sound chirpier than normal,” he chuckled. “I guess you’re really enjoying the transfer program.”

“Did Ian say anything?” I asked.

“No, but I guess I’m the only one left out this time,” he answered. “What do you think about her?”

“Well she’s a good person, Chloe loves her too,” I replied.

“*Too?*” I could visualize him grinning on the other end.

“What do you want Ethan?” I decided to change the topic before her got any more annoying.

“I missed my precious niece’s birthday, so wanted you to pick it up, or I’ll drop it off,” he replied. “I’ll be dropping by your office to finish things up.”

“Finish things up?” I asked.

“Huh? Didn’t... never mind then,” he sighed. “I’ll see you at your place.”

He hung up.

“What was that all about?” I wondered.

I left my room and went to Chloe’s. She wasn’t in bed. I went downstairs to look for her and didn’t find her there,

either. I went upstairs and checked Olivia's room and found the two of them sleeping together.

Chloe had rested her head on Olivia's stomach, and Olivia had her right hand on Olivia's head. The storybook I had gotten Chloe as a gift was on the bed as well. I could assume what had happened. I took it as a good sign, and readied my heart to tell Olivia how I felt. I took in the sight, watching both of them sleep, before heading down to make breakfast.

Olivia

I opened my eyes and felt pressure on my stomach. I looked down and saw Chloe stretching while still there. It was a little uncomfortable but worth every second.

She yawned and opened her eyes, then turned to look at me, "Good morning, Miss Olivia."

"Good morning, Chloe," I greeted.

The blinds were shut, but I was already having a visible ray of sunshine staring at me with glimmering yet tired eyes.

"I take it you want to sleep some more?" I asked.

She nodded and got up from my stomach, lying on the pillow next to my head. She closed her eyes, and started sleeping again. I stroked her hair and sighed.

The previous night, as we returned from the picnic, she was still asleep, but we needed to wake her up to have a bath and change. I tucked her into bed while Ben watched.

"You've gotten used to this," he said.

"Well, I have had experience before," I smiled.

"Look how exhausted she is," he said with a satisfied grin. "I can't thank you enough for today. I'm sure she'd remember it for a long time."

"I'm happy I could give her something to remember," I said and turned to him.

His eyes seemed to have a lot they wanted to say to me but he held back. I guess he was wondering if I needed the space considering how the event had been a happy-sad one.

I was grateful he thought that way. As I lay down in my room, I started thinking about Sophia again. I missed my baby, and like Ben has said it wasn't going to be possible to forget her, not when there are things there to remind me of her.

Chloe was a strong girl, however. I figured she didn't really go out a lot with her dad, so this might have been the longest she had spent time with her father and on her birthday too. It felt nice doing something good for her. My daughter or not.

There was a knock on my door.

"Yes?" I called out.

The door opened and Chloe took a peek. "Hi, Miss Olivia."

"Hey, what's up?" I asked.

"Can't sleep," she replied, "Can I stay with you?"

"Sure," I agreed instantly.

She came in and closed the door behind her. She ran over to the bed holding the book that her father had gotten her.

"Can you read this to me, please?" she asked as she gave me the book.

"No problem," I said as I opened the book and read her the stories, though she flinched a little at one of the stories that involved a mother and daughter.

"Miss Olivia, do you have a nummy?" she asked.

"I don't anymore," I replied.

"Oh.... I'm sorry," she apologized.

She was like Ben in that regard.

"It's not a problem," I said. "I didn't get to know my mom at all."

"Me too," she said. "Grandma says Mom was a good person."

"I'm sure she was. My dad told me the same thing about my mom too," I agreed. "Did Jack... or was it James? Did he bother you again?"

“No. I guess he really didn’t mean it,” she replied. “But I still feel sad when I think about how I don’t have a mommy.”

She was laying on my chest, so I couldn’t see her face. I just touched her hair to calm her down.

“I used to feel bad about it too, I never got over it. But I had Grandma,” I said.

“At least I have you, Miss Olivia,” she said. “Thank you for the park. I had fun.”

She has me.

“I had fun too,” I replied.

She didn’t say anything; I figured she had fallen asleep. But those words she said, kept me up a little longer.

I left her in the bed and went downstairs. I remembered that I didn’t do the dishes. I found Ben at work on them already. He was wearing an apron and had some bacon and eggs going.

“Are you trying to have revenge on her for feeding you eggshells?” I teased as I remembered how the first time I had cooked with Chloe.

“I’m just trying to make sure she doesn’t end up doing it again,” he replied. “Good morning. I saw the both of you, looked too good to wake up.”

“She came in the middle of the night, asking me to read her a story,” I said. “We got to have some girl talk.”

“About?”

“Boys aren’t supposed to know about girl talks,” I replied.

“Stingy. Fine then, keep your secrets,” he pouted and continued making the breakfast.

“You’re so cute,” I teased.

He turned and looked at me, a warm smile on his face. I noticed his glasses.

“Have you been wearing that these past few days?” I blinked in realization, completely forgetting that he actually wore them.

“I’ve been on my contacts,” he said.

“Even when you sleep?” I raised a brow.

“I’m not blind you know?” He sighed. “I can do without glasses or contacts. For a nurse, you can’t ‘pay attention’.”

Sorry about that, head doctor,” I apologized as I rolled my eyes, then raised two fingers, “How many fingers am I holding up?”

“Two,” he replied with a smirk and adjusted his glasses.

I walked over to him and took them off. I raised one finger, “How many fingers?”

“Three,” he replied.

I placed the finger on his lip. “Wrong.”

He held me my waist and pulled me close. “I couldn’t see properly.”

He was obviously lying.

“Can you see this too?” I asked and leaned in close and kissed his lips briefly.

I could taste bacon.

“I couldn’t see it at all... did something touch my lips?” he teased.

“You can’t be helped,” I got back on my toes and kissed him, a little deeper this time.

We let go of each other, and he put his glasses back on.

“What a way, to start the day,” I said as I touched my lips, “with a bacon-flavored kiss.”

“There’s more of where that came from, ma’am,” he said as he tipped an imaginary hat.

I had really gotten used to having both of them in my life. With just two days left, maybe I should take Ethan’s advice and remain here in Richmond.

I wanted to tell him.

“There’s something...”

“There’s something…”

We both had something to say to the other.

He smiled, “Alright, ladies first.”

“Well, about…”

“Daddy? Miss Olivia?” Chloe called breaking our conversation.

“Good morning, Chloe,” I greeted but noticed she looked sad. “What’s wrong?”

“I can’t find my teddy. The one I went to the park with,” she said while sniffing.

“Oh, I don’t think I picked it up,” I admitted as I tried hard to recall.

“I can get you another one,” Ben suggested.

“Mmm… okay,” she said, but she still seemed sad.

“I’ll go look for it after work today, okay?” I promised her.

“Thank you!” She lightened up, “Did you make breakfast?”

“No, your dad did,” I said.

“Last night, you just called him, Dad,” she reminded me.

Chloe not in front of him!

“She did?” Ben had already heard it. “I guess that’s the girl’s talk that I’m being kept out of?”

“Oh hush,” I blurted out and frowned.

He smiled at us and finished setting up our breakfast, “I’ve already eaten, I need to get to the hospital. I think I’m already late.”

“I’ll drop Chloe at her grandma’s place then,” I offered, “I’m leaving later.”

“Can’t we go this morning to look for it?” she asked.

“I’m not going to be leaving that late,” I replied. “Just like an hour from now. But I promise I’ll get it for you.”

“Okay,” she sighed.

“Now let’s go brush our teeth,” I said.

“But the food will get cold,” Ben pointed out. “I think you two can make an exception this morning only.”

“Yay!” she exclaimed and went to the table.

“What did you want to say?” he asked.

“When we get home this evening,” I replied.

“I guess I’ll wait then as well,” he said.

I still had time. There was no need rushing it.

I wasn’t able to talk a lot with Ben as I got to the office. For some odd reason, we were very busy. Ethan was around to drop off his birthday gift for Chloe but had to help us out as well. I couldn’t tell Ethan about my new plans of staying, but he had given me the tickets. I guess it was his way of saying that it was up to me to leave or stay. As work came to an end, I ordered a cab to Byrd Park.

It was already half past seven, and there were little to no people around to enjoy the night’s activities. I went through every site we had visited but found nothing. I went to the oak tree where we had our picnic and someone was already there, bending over to pick up something.

“Excuse me, is that a teddy bear? It’s mine,” I said as I walked over to him.

“Is it?” the familiar voice asked.

He turned around. I noticed it was Jason holding the teddy bear.

Fuck.

Why did have to be moments when I was already feeling good about myself?

“Evening, Jason,” I greeted. “Could I please have that back?”

*I thought you said she died?” he asked.

“What are you on about this time?” I sighed.

“The girl you were with yesterday, and that guy from last week,” he clarified. “That girl looked a lot like Sophia.”

“You don’t even know what Sophia looked like,” I said.

“I may have not seen her in person, but she was your profile picture on your Instagram,” he explained.

I felt disgusted. “Were you... *Are* you stalking me?”

“What? No,” he shook his head negatively. “I know you don’t believe me, but I did feel bad for leaving. I kept watch over you two. You just stopped posting about her or posting in general. I didn’t know... anyway, who was this girl who looks like her?”

“It’s not Sophia. Sophia is dead.” I hated the fact he was making me remember. “I buried her myself.”

“Wait so this is her doppelganger?” he asked as he looked at the teddy bear. “The man... is her father?”

I didn’t answer, “Please just give me back the toy.*

“No wonder you were so close to him...because his kid looks like our late daughter,” he continued.

Was that it? No... I didn’t even know about Chloe when he visited London.

“You have no idea what you’re saying,” I rolled my eyes. “And don’t call Sophia, *our* daughter. She’s just mine.”

“No matter what you try to say to convince yourself, the fact remains that she was also my daughter,” he sighed as he squeezed the toy. “I’m trying to fix things between us, and you’re busy frolicking around with some guy who just wants a convenient baby sitter for his half orphan daughter.”

“I’m not a convenient baby sitter,” I frowned. “Ben doesn’t even think of me like that.”

“That’s the thing. You always doubt, even when the truth is staring right at you in the face,” he sighed as he ran his fingers through his hair. “Let me guess, you think he’s in love with you.”

“I... he is,” I replied.

“Has he said it?” he asked. “Or has he spent most of his time telling you how much of a help you’ve been in taking care of his daughter?”

Ben had never said it... his actions were enough. But, he did always focus on how I took care of Chloe.

No, Olivia.... Don't let him dissuade you.

“I can see the doubt in your eyes,” he said. “Does he know about your bad luck? Let me guess after you told him, he gave you some words of encouragement and said he’d take your bad luck. Classic thing any man would say to keep you tied to them.”

“Shut up! Ben isn’t like that.. he isn’t like...”

“Me?” He raised a brow. “I don’t know if that’s a good thing or not. But I just want to talk to you. My place isn’t so far from here. We can talk and if you still can’t forgive me, then we can part ways.”

There was no way he’d stop at just talking.

“Just so you know, if you refuse, I know where your new Sophia learns,” he threatened.

I turned around and attempted to leave but he held my hand, “Where are you going? Just wait.”

“Jason, let go!” I screamed, but he continued to struggle with me.

He pulled me close to himself and made an attempt to kiss me, but I hit his mouth.

“Ah!” He let go of me and the teddy, holding his mouth in pain.

I picked up the teddy and wanted to run, but he grabbed me by the collar and pulled me back. He hit me so hard that I stumbled and hit the right side of my temple against the tree, slumping instantly.

I felt so cold, unable to move.

“Olivia? Olivia? Oh my God, I didn’t mean to,” Jason tried shaking me, but my eyes were closing.

I'm sorry Ben. I know you said that you'd help me get rid of all this bad luck, but I don't think it's ever going to leave.

I blacked out.

Chapter Eighteen

The Emergency Situation

B*en*

“No more!” I groaned as I stretched my body.

I looked around, and everyone seemed exhausted as well.

“Why did I have to help with your work anyway?” Ethan frowned as he took a seat in the waiting area.

I sat next to him and watch patients enter and exit. The day was extremely busy, as we had an influx of patients requiring emergency attention.

“You didn’t have to help if you know you’d complain,” I said to him as I stretched my legs.

“I thought that I’d get to watch the new nurse of yours work, so I stayed around,” he admitted. “I honestly thought the both of you were working together.”

“I already have my team for that, besides if you said you wanted to work with her, I would have told you to help her out, so she could leave earlier,” I said.

“You’ll be comfortable with her working with me? What if I try to steal her away from you?” he asked.

“Pfft,” I scoffed and chuckled. “Good one.”

“What? You think I can’t do it?” He asked, offended by my response.

“I don’t think she’d listen to you anyway but you can go ahead and try,” I shrugged.

“Wow, so this is what it’s like to be couples?” He sighed. “When last was I in a relationship to understand this feeling?”

“Oh, we’re not a couple, or in a relationship yet,” I said.

“Oh, you two haven’t made it official yet,” he muttered, “but at least you’ve let your feelings known to her.”

“I haven’t done that either,” I chuckled nervously.

He stared at me in disbelief.

“What?” I raised a brow.

“Wait, if you haven’t even done any of that, and obviously you two have already crossed the line between employer and employee, what the hell is connecting you two as lovers?” he asked. “She doesn’t even know you love her.”

“She knows...” I derailed in my speech as I thought about it.

“The reverse is also the case. I guess she hasn’t told you about it either,” he said.

“I don’t think she minds, and there’s still time,” I said. “I was going to tell her today but Chloe interrupted. I’ll tell her this evening.”

“She doesn’t have as much time as you think,” he murmured.

“What’s that?”

“I said time is relative.” He seemed pissed at me for some reason.

“Whatever, you can get going now anyway,” I said as I got to my feet. “I’m going to pick up Chloe.”

“Chasing me away after you’re done using me. Men really are scum aren’t they?” He faked sobbing.

“You did good today. Thank you for your help,” he said.

“You’re welcome,” he said.

“Now don’t forget to give Chloe my gift,” he said. “Hopefully, it makes up for last year’s disaster.”

“A teddy bear that is almost the same size as her,” I said as I thought about the gift while we walked to the door. “Maybe if you had given it to her, she wouldn’t have lost it so easily.”

“She lost her teddy?” he asked.

“Yeah, during the picnic yesterday with Olivia,” I replied.

“Ah, he went on a family trip, and still hasn’t told her how he feels,” he grinned. “Are you sure you aren’t the youngest? Getting shy to tell a girl how you feel.”

“I’m not shy. I’m waiting to tell her tonight,” I defended.

“Right,” he smirked, “Oh, would you look at that, more work.”

I noticed the ambulance coming up. “Can’t, I’m closed for the day.”

We both stepped outside. Although we were done with work for the day, we still had a creed to save a life. I just wanted to be sure if it was something my staff should handle or I step in. As the stretcher moved past us, it was a lady in her late twenties. A lady we both knew, with a bandage on her head, first aid for a head injury.

Ethan tapped me. “Isn’t that...?”

“Olivia...” We followed after the stretcher.

“What happened to her?” I asked as I looked at her.

“Head injury. There are signs that she was hit very hard, causing her to hit her head against a hard surface,” the ER medic answered.

“I’ll take it from here,” I said as they got her into the room.

“Ben, I’ll handle this,” Ethan said.

“I can do it, it’s just an head injury,” I said.

Martha was there with us. “Sir, let us handle this.”

“I said I can handle it!” I yelled at her. “Out of my way.”

Ethan placed his hand on my chest, stopping me as the other nurses got to work. “I’ll handle this.”

“I said.. I can. Step aside,” I warned.

“You’re angry and scared, let us do this,” he said calmly.

“I’m not.”

“Ben.. look at your hands,” he said.

I looked down and noticed how hard my hands were shaking; they were sweaty as well. I was scared. It wasn’t a severe case. I was reminded about Selina. Ethan and the other nurses were aware of this, and that’s why they wanted me to stay out of it.

“Okay.” I finally calmed down.

“I can handle this,” he said and patted my shoulder. “Just watch me work.”

I stood next to him and watch my brother take charge.

“Martha, results?” he requested. “What are the extents of her injuries?”

“A moderate concussion and a small laceration on her scalp, which is the cause of the bleeding,” Martha replied.

“Alright then,” he said as he put on his gloves. “Let’s get this done.”

He opened her eyes and checked her vitals. She was out cold.

“Anesthetic,” he requested, and they administered it.

She may have been unconscious, but she could easily regain consciousness and experience shock from the operation. He took off the bandage and inspected the wound.

“Got some tree bits,” he remarked. “The ER has already gotten rid of most of them.”

He carefully cleaned and stitched the wound on her scalp, ensuring there were no signs of infection. It was fast and neat.

I guess he still remained the most skillful hands among the brothers.

“She’s going to be alright. Just a couple more hours rest and she’d be fine,” Ethan said to me as he was done administering some medication to help with her recovery.

“Thank you Ethan, and you too Martha,” I said to both of them. “I’m sorry I let my anger get the better of me.”

“It’s alright bro,” Ethan said. “I’ll run some more tests.”

“Thank you,” I said as I stood by Olivia’s side.

“Sir?” Martha called and handed me a teddy bear. “This was right next to her.”

I accepted the toy, and muttered, “Thank you.”

What the hell could have happened? The door opened and a man came in, I recognized him as the staff from the Swan Lake.

“Is she okay?” he asked then stopped as he noticed me. “Oh, you’re her husband, right?”

“Husband?” Martha raised a brow and looked at me.

“How did this happen?” I asked, ignoring the question from both of them.

“I don’t exactly know how it happened,” he said. “I was at the park and we were closing up because we didn’t have a lot of night visitors. I was taking a walk to help clear my head. Then I heard a scream and found two people arguing, or struggling with each other. The lady hit the guy, and he retaliated. She ended up hitting her head against the tree. As I made my way to her, and the man ran away. She had an ID card on her, so I called this hospital.”

“You didn’t get a good view of the man?” I asked.

“No, not really,” he said. “He was slightly taller than her, but somewhat lean. I couldn’t make out his features, but I can bet he’s in his late twenties.”

“Jason,” I said and frowned.

“You know him?” Martha asked.

“Yes.. he’s nothing to her anymore, and he can’t take the hint.” I was seething with rage. “I’ll find him.”

“Now hold on, Ben, don’t think about killing him. We can just call the police,” Ethan advised.

“I’m not going to kill him. And, of course, the police will be involved,” I assured him.

“That doesn’t really assure me,” he said. “Let’s just wait for Olivia to wake up; then she can describe the man to the authorities. We can decide what to do next.”

“I already know what he looks like,” I said as I started to leave. “Watch over her for me.”

“Don’t waste time, and please don’t do anything stupid,” he warned.

I didn’t answer him. I left the room, shutting the door behind me and focusing on finding Jason.

Ethan

“That idiot,” I groaned.

When Ben got like that, it was difficult to stop him. In fact, I didn’t know how I was able to stop him from attending to Olivia on his own. If he wanted to, he could have just moved me aside and did as he pleased. But at least he listened to me this time.

I placed my hand on Olivia’s forehead.

“And you haven’t even told him you’re leaving,” I sighed.

“I’m sorry to intrude or pry but are they a couple?” Martha asked as we both ran tests to make sure she was okay.

The other nurses had left before the witness had come in; they didn’t see Ben’s reaction.

“Why do you ask?” I asked as I checked Olivia’s pulse; it was normal.

“I don’t know, but the two of them have been fairly close,” she explained. “I was excited that the boss had finally moved

on. He was so happy...and now seeing him get angry, and even scared on her behalf, just adds the icing on the cake of my suspicion.”

“Well, they aren’t a couple,” I said.

I wasn’t lying though; neither had actually opened up to each other about their real feelings. I had given Olivia the tickets earlier that day as an opportunity to get her to become more serious about this relationship, or her career. I assumed that maybe Ben had already told her his feelings, and she was having trouble deciding. But to think this would happen to her...

I wasn’t a psychologist, but I know this accident had already caused her to make up her mind. The problem was, would her decision end up being the right one?

“It’s a shame; they seem really good together,” Martha sighed.

“I haven’t seen both of them working together, so I’ll just take your word for it,” I said as I concluded the vitals check.

Everything was stable. It looked like she would wake up sooner than expected. I stared at her chest, and pardon me, but her breasts seemed to have gotten bigger than the last time I saw them.

There’s this saying: if the person who loved you rubbed your breasts, they got bigger. Now, I don’t know if that’s true, and my brother was testing the theory, but medically, a woman’s breasts only get bigger if she’s ovulating or...

Oh no...he couldn’t be that careless, could he?

“Martha, I want you to run a pregnancy test,” I said.

Olivia

They say when you’re on the verge of death, you see your life flash before your eyes. I didn’t think they were kidding. Moments after I was knocked out, I heard Jason calling after me and apologizing. I didn’t care about his empty apologies; I was just worried about how much trouble this would cost Ben and Chloe.

Isn't that what my life had been about? Just being a constant burden to everyone.

For a Stickler like my mom, the amount of pain she had to endure. I remember Grandma saying she didn't move a lot because of pain. Then with a weak body like hers, she had to give birth. I was supposed to be proof of the love between her and Dad. But I ended up being the death knell that made them part. I was a burden to her womb and her life.

My father probably had other plans in life, but he dedicated it to smiling and living for my sake. He smiled so much, when in reality, I was actually causing him to suffer. I was his emotional burden. He never showed it, but maybe a part of him regretted having me. I stole the love of his life by simply being born; and he gave up his own life to make sure I grew up comfortable and safe.

Then there was Jason. Why didn't I see the signs that he wasn't ready for a child? I had originally told him I wasn't ready, either, but instead of aborting the child and allowing our relationship to become stable enough to father a child and take care of a wife, I chose to have it

I was a burden on his dreams. If I had been a little more patient, things would have been different. Aborting? Was that really a good option? Then came Sophia. I didn't want to say this, but if I knew she was going to end up late, maybe...

No..

I'll never regret giving birth to Sophia, but I still couldn't do anything about her health.

What kind of nurse was I if I could save everyone else but my own daughter? Did I actually deserve to be called her mother? I was just a burden - giving her a short-lived life. Now, I'm involved with Ben and his innocent daughter. Jason is stalking me and even if it was an accident, he injured me. This couldn't get any better or worse.

It really sucked.

When he said he knew where Chloe schooled, I worried for her safety. Then all those things he said about Ben's feelings

for me. I hated the fact that he almost made me believe them. Not almost... I did believe them.

I was creating a picture of our perfect family life together. I had never stopped to actually consider if what I felt was the same thing Ben felt. But I could be wrong... the way he touched me, the kisses, how he welcomed me easily into his family...how his siblings and even his mother treated me...

Wasn't that proof enough? Why was I almost convinced that he saw me as a convenient babysitter? The questions that continued rattling around in my mind - even when I was physically unconscious - continued to drag on, and there was no stopping it.

I needed to leave. I needed to stop involving myself with people who cared about me and just focus on my career. That way I would hurt people less and cause less of a burden, one they didn't even ask for. And I won't end up building false fantasies, such as replacing an innocent child with a mental image of my daughter, when she needs a woman who would genuinely love her as a daughter.

It hurt. The pain was supposed to remain in my head, but my heart felt like it was being twisted beyond recognition. I didn't want to leave them. But maybe... maybe if I used my career as an excuse. No, it's not an excuse. I had always wanted to visit the children's hospital in Maryland. I needed the experience too.

Yeah... this is a good thing. I just wanted to improve myself.

Chapter Nineteen

The News and Her Decision

Ethan

“Don’t tell anyone the result of this test,” I warned Martha.

“But what about Ben?” she asked.

“Not even him. This is something between them,” I replied as I looked at her asleep. “Besides it might not be his child.”

I even doubted my conclusion. Olivia didn’t seem like the kind of woman who’d be careless. I didn’t know where Ben was, and I knew calling him to tell him about this was going to cause problems. I needed Olivia to wake up.

“Martha, if you don’t mind, could you leave the two of us alone for a bit?” I requested. “And don’t forget what I told you.”

“No problem,” she said and left us alone.

I had noticed Olivia’s eyes twitching, a sign she was about to wake up. I needed to break the news to her. Her eyes opened, and she looked around her, trying to make sense of where she was.

“Ben?” she called as she looked at me, then shook her head negatively and squinted.

“Wrong, try again,” I smiled.

“Ethan?” She sat up and held her head.

“Correct,” I nodded. “You should not touch your head. I just stitched it.”

“Was it that bad?” she asked as she touched the spot and winced. “Owww..”

“I told you not to touch it,” I rolled my eyes. “I swear you and Ben can be a power couple based on stubbornness alone.”

“Ben? Where is he?” she asked.

“He went to look for your assailant,” I replied.

“What? He went to look for Jason? Why?” She didn’t seem too happy about that.

“I honestly don’t know,” I sighed as I stroked my chin. “Ah, a stubble. I need to shave.”

“That idiot, making this more complicated for me,” she groaned.

“Complicated?” I raised a brow.

She didn’t answer, but just stared at her hands.

“Speaking of complications, when was the last time you saw your period?” I asked.

I’m not normally this straightforward, that’s Ian’s forte, but I knew being straight with her would make things go easier and faster. She looked at me with a confused expression, but she slowly realized what I meant.

“Oh God, no.” She buried her face in her hands. “Where are the results?”

“Here,” I handed them over. “I would like to apologize. Normally, we would have the patient’s consent. But I figured that this was necessary as well.”

“No it’s okay,” she said as she looked at the results, “Does he know?”

“So it’s his then,” I said.

She nodded and exhaled deeply.

“Don’t worry, I haven’t told him. And from the looks of it, you don’t want to tell him either do you?” I asked.

She shook her head negatively.

“Because it would complicate or make things worse?” I asked.

She nodded.

“I’m sorry, among the brothers, I’m not really the brightest,” I apologized. “How is this a problem exactly?”

“Because it’s me. And I’m sure Ben isn’t ready for a kid,” she replied.

Ben? Not ready for another kid?

“Did he say that exactly?” I asked.

She didn’t reply. “Don’t tell him about this, please.”

“Sure,” I said.

“I also need a favor,” she added. “Can you keep a secret?”

“What?”

Olivia

Lady luck.

It’s been a while since I thanked her for anything. I could have thanked her for getting me into a good family like Ben’s. Or for giving me a good working environment. But maybe, due to the fact that I had neglected to thank her for anything, that’s why Jason had crept back up.

I never did sacrifice that pizza I promised her after all. Hmph. I amuse myself, sometimes. There I was dealing with a crisis, but I was making jokes in my mind. Well, not everything was a crisis.

Ethan explained that it had only been ten minutes since Ben had left to go look for Jason. A wild goose chase like that could take him an hour, or he’d give up after a few more minutes. Ethan said the latter wasn’t the case, unless Ben had a very urgent need to return to my side. I touched my stomach. I

was carrying a good reason. But I insisted that Ethan not tell him.

“So what’s the favor?” he asked. “And why does it have to be a secret?”

“I want to go to Maryland. Is the offer for the placement still available?” I asked.

“Wait? You want to go?” He was confused as he stared at my face and my stomach, then looked away. “But you have a valid reason to stay. Besides being a travel nurse. You’re pregnant.”

“I don’t need the reminder,” I said as I forced myself out of the bed. “Is the offer to work in Maryland still available?”

“Yes,” he replied. “And you should be back in bed, relaxing.”

“I have to leave now,” I said. “Can you send me the work files I’d need via email?”

“I still think you should talk to Ben about this,” he insisted. “It’s his child.”

“I can handle this myself. I’ve done it before,” I blurted out carelessly.

“You have?” he asked.

“Just forget that,” I sighed. “Ethan, I have to leave. I can’t keep causing problems to Ben and Chloe. Jason already knows where Chloe goes to school. Being with Ben and this.” I pointed at my stomach. “If it gets out, who knows what would happen to him and his reputation?”

“I didn’t.. I didn’t think about it like that,” he replied. “But Ben wouldn’t...”

“Ethan, please,” I pleaded.

“I can’t lie to Ben,” he said.

“You don’t have to lie,” I explained. “Just send me the work files. I can go home and get more rest. When Ben gets back, I can talk to him about this.”

“If you put it that way then,” he sighed.

“No matter the outcome, promise me you won’t interfere?” I asked.

“Alright, I won’t,” he agreed. “I’ll drop you at home. Just get the rest you deserve and think about this thoroughly. Your decision is going to cause problems, or give you a satisfying end.”

“You don’t need to tell me twice,” I said. “And please, don’t tell him about the transfer job.”

“Okay.”

As he dropped me off at Ben’s place, I got to work immediately.

“I’m not abandoning Chloe or Ben,” I said to myself. “I’m just taking the next step my career needs for my all-round growth.”

Trying to convince myself that I was doing the right thing was pathetic really. As I stuffed my clothes into the bag, I found a shirt that Ben had given me

“What’s the shirt for?” I asked.

It was two days after I had told him my story. We began to bond properly after he had heard my story. I still felt a little down, but he was always looking for ways to make me brighten up.

“Put it on,” he insisted.

I rolled my eyes and attempted to wear it, but he stopped me. “You can’t wear it with another shirt under it.”

“Pervert,” I frowned, but couldn’t hold it for long as the smile formed.

“I’ll close my eyes,” he said as he covered his eyes with one hand, but his fingers spread open slightly to reveal he was still looking.

I took off the shirt I was wearing along with the shorts, but I was wearing a sports bra underneath.

“Booo! Cheater!” he complained but didn’t move his hands away from his eyes.

“You’re not supposed to be looking,” I reminded him as I put on the shirt.

It was bigger than the one I had taken off, covering me properly and reaching below my ass.

“I like it,” I admitted, “Where did you get it?”

“It’s my old comfort shirt. Perfect for when you’re feeling down. Now I grant it to you,” he replied like he had given me some great treasure. Well... it was a shirt that helped him feel better when he was down, so it meant that he was trusting me with something that he held as very important.

A true treasure.

“Thank you,” I said as I inhaled the shirt

“It’s washed. Unfortunately, you won’t be able to get any of my natural manly cologne,” he teased.

I hugged him and took in a deep breath, “I just have to hug you, and I’ll get the cologne.”

“Smart,” he teased and kissed my forehead. “I’ll be here to provide you with as much Ben Naturale cologne you’d need.”

“Thank you,” I said as I squeezed him harder. “For the shirt and the natural cologne.”

“And thank you for being here for me and Chloe as well,” he said as he returned the embrace.

I stared at the shirt and processed the memories it brought to mind. I felt my conviction to leave, wavering a bit. I steeled myself and put the comfort shirt with my things. As I made sure that no other things were left behind, I noticed a teddy bear that Chloe had given me.

“What’s this for?” I asked as she handed me the Teddy Bear. “Are we playing with dolls?”

“No, I have two teddies that look the same,” she explained. “Dad got me a new one, so I thought I could give you the old one.”

“I haven’t had a teddy in years,” I admitted as I accepted the gift. “Thank you.”

“Now we match!” She said with a warm smile, “This means we’re good friends!”

“Good friends have matching teddy bears?” I asked.

“Yes, they do,” she said proudly. “I saw it in a movie once.”

I chuckled, “Well, then I’m honored to be your good friend.”

I hugged Chloe tightly, cherishing the bond we had formed. I looked at her innocent face, and a pang of guilt washed over me. She had grown so attached to me, and leaving her behind would be difficult for both of us.

Now I remembered why she needed the other teddy bear. She was thinking about the both of us. I needed to protect her no matter what. I took the teddy bear along. Would she miss me if she didn’t see me again?

As I was done packing my things, I went around the house. I wanted to write a letter, but I second guessed if that was a good idea. As I went to Ben’s room, I remembered when I told him everything. And what came after. I touched my stomach as this warm feeling of joy took over. I was pregnant with Ben’s baby. I was going to be a mother again.

“Are you sure you want to be a mother first before getting married?” Jason asked.

The warm feeling was replaced with anxiety as I remembered a similar situation with Jason. What if Ben said the same thing? He had never mentioned wanting another child. In fact, I suspected that I got pregnant due to me assuming that the day I let him cum inside me was a safe day after he had asked me.

A moment of lust had ultimately caused this. Besides, he had his hands full trying to take care of one kid, would he be

okay with another? I mean I would be there to help him. My phone rang, startling me. It was Dr Helen Williams calling.

“Hello, Dr Williams?” I answered as I pulled the suitcase along and picked up my handbag.

“Hey. Ethan told me you need a voice of reason,” she said. “What are you doing?”

“I’m taking the next step in my career,” I replied. “I’m going to Maryland.”

“I thought you weren’t going anymore?” she asked.

“I’m human, I can change my mind no matter the time,” I said.

“But we’ve talked about this before,” she said.

Indeed we had, when she had asked me to call her after my conversation with Ethan.

*“So tell me why you **really** don’t want to go to Maryland?” she asked.*

“I didn’t say I don’t want to go,” I said, “I kind of like this current hospital.”

“You’re in love aren’t you?” she asked.

“What? No!” I lied.

“I’m actually happy to hear that you’re finally moving on with your life,” she said. I could tell she was smiling from the other end of the phone.

“I didn’t say, I was in love,” I insisted.

“You don’t have to say it,” she said. “I’m sure Ben has been treating you well. He’s a kind person isn’t he?”

“Yeah he is,” I smiled.

“It’s settled then, you’re staying in Richmond,” she said.

“But...”

“I know it’s none of my business, but this new found happiness of yours needs to be taken seriously,” she explained.

“I guess you’re right,” I smiled.

She had advised me to take hold of my happiness. But what if, the happiness came at the cost of others?

“I don’t think chasing after my happiness would be a good idea,” I said.

“What happened?”

I explained everything that had happened while she listened in silence.

“I understand that you want to take this step in your career, Olivia, but you must remember the impact it will have on Ben and Chloe,” Dr. Williams said. “They care about you deeply, and keeping this secret might cause more harm than good in the long run.”

I took a deep breath, trying to steady my emotions. “I know, and I don’t want to hurt them. But I’m afraid of how Ben will react. What if he’s not ready for another child? What if he thinks I’m abandoning them?”

Dr. Williams paused for a moment before replying gently, “Olivia, you can’t make assumptions about how he’ll react. You have to talk to him openly and honestly. Trust in the love and bond you both share. Relationships are built on communication, and this is a crucial moment to strengthen yours.”

Her words resonated with me, and I knew she was right. I couldn’t keep my pregnancy a secret forever. I needed to face my fears head-on. But that was easier said than done.

“I don’t think I can,” I said.

She paused again, before asking, “Would focusing on your career help you make a better decision?”

“I guess so,” I replied. “But haven’t I already made the decision if I choose to focus on my career?”

“No,” she replied. “I’m sure that this decision you’re about to make isn’t the final one. You still have your doubts about Ben’s feelings for you. And your feelings for his daughter as well. If you go, you’ll finally understand what I mean.”

“So... I can go?” I asked.

“Yes,” she replied, “Good luck.”

“Thank you. But I have a favor to ask...”

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell Ben,” she said. “We don’t talk that often.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“It’s fine,” she replied before hanging up.

I was torn between my career and staying behind. Leaving without a word was going to cause a panic. I knew it wasn’t the best way to handle the situation, but I couldn’t bring myself to face them in person. I wanted to spare them from the pain of seeing me leave.

With trembling hands, I began to write:

“Dear Ben and Chloe,

I don’t know where to start, but I need to tell you something important. I have been offered an incredible opportunity to work in another part of the world; after a lot of thought, I have decided to take it. I know this decision will come as a shock to both of you, and I am truly sorry for any pain it may cause. Please know that this is not a decision I made lightly, and it’s not because I don’t love you both.

Ben, you have been a pillar of strength and love in my life, and I will cherish the memories we shared forever. You and Chloe brought so much happiness into my life. I will always be grateful for that. But I need to take this step in my career and focus on my professional growth. I hope you understand that this is not about running away from us or abandoning you; it’s about finding my own path and becoming a stronger person for our future together.

Chloe, my sweet girl, you have a special place in my heart that no distance can ever change. You brought so much joy into my life, and I will miss you more than words can express. I promise to stay in touch, and I will be back to visit whenever I can. You have made me a better person, and I will carry the memories of our time together wherever I go.

I know it's hard to understand why I'm leaving, and I wish I could explain it better. But please believe me when I say that I love you both deeply, and I will carry you in my heart every step of the way. I hope that one day, when the time is right, we can find our way back to each other. Until then, please take care of each other and know that I am only a phone call away if you need me.

With all my love and gratitude,

Olivia

With tears streaming down my face, I sealed the letter in an envelope and placed it where Ben and Chloe would find it. I knew it wasn't an ideal way to communicate my decision, but it was the best I could do at the moment. As I left the house and made my way to the airport, my heart felt heavy with sorrow and uncertainty. I was scared of the pain I had caused them and afraid that I had made a mistake.

I had written that this was for our future together without even thinking. Maybe my subconscious state wanted us to reunite again. I shook off the thoughts and tried to convince myself that I was going to be saving lives in Maryland. I was careful not to mention where I was going.

I didn't want Ben looking for me. It was better this way.

Chapter Twenty

Abandoned Yet Again

B^{en}

After an hour of searching for the scumbag, passing through the street where I first met him and asking people around if they knew any Jason Frank - even going to Byrd Park - I was convinced that I wasn't going to find him.

After almost giving up on my search, I noticed someone exiting a bar but looking around consciously. I parked the car and made my way to the man. He turned around and it was Jason. Immediately he saw me, he took off running.

Coward. I chased after him. I may have not jogged in a while, but it didn't mean I was out of shape. He kept making turns. I wasn't too familiar with this area so I couldn't find a shortcut that would let me overtake him easily.

He made a miscalculation and found himself at a dead end. I got him cornered.

"Jason, come with me," I said.

Like it was going to be that easy. I didn't want to do anything, but if he happened to attack me, wouldn't that be self-defense?

"Look, I didn't want any trouble with Olivia," he said as he walked up to me. "I didn't mean to hurt her. It was an

accident.”

“But you ran away while she was bleeding,” I said. “If you just called an ambulance that would have helped your case. You’re coming with me to the station. A night in a cell is going to do you enough.”

“Okay,” he said as he got closer.

That went better than I thought. I honestly thought he wouldn’t resist. That was my mistake. As I let down my guard, I didn’t notice the pipe swinging from my left until it was almost too late. I moved my head to the right and shielded my face, but he managed to land a hit on my ear, causing me to stumble.

He hit me again, and I endured the impact. He took a step back and held the pipe properly.

“I thought you were going to come quietly,” I said.

“Like I’d come to you that easily,” he said. “You chased after me alone. Isn’t it normal to call the cops and have them look for me? You’re clearly going to do something to me.”

“Caught already?” I sighed as I touched the arm he had hit, and my ear too. There was a cut, and I was already bleeding, “I was planning to look for a tree and bash your head in... accidentally. Just like you did to her?”

“You came here seeking revenge for Olivia? When do you get off your high horse?” he asked. “You don’t even love her.”

“What makes you say that?” I asked as I cracked my knuckles.

“Olivia,” he said.

I stopped short, “What?”

“I found out from her that you haven’t even expressed your love for her,” he replied, grinning that he had gotten an edge over me. “When we were together, I made sure to let her know that I loved her verbally.”

“But you still left her when she needed you the most,” I reminded him.

“At least I didn’t treat her like a glorified babysitter that I can conveniently fuck,” he shot back.

I know that wasn’t the case. But the way he placed it made me hurt a little. Something told me that this was his usual tactic.

Did he also talk to Olivia like this?

“I didn’t treat her like that,” I said as I took a step closer to him but he swung the pipe, missing my face by an inch or so.

“Oh yeah? You know both our daughters look alike, right?” he asked.

“There’s no way Olivia would have told you that,” I said.

“I’ve seen your daughter,” he said in a menacing way that made my blood boil.

“You’re stalking my family?” I asked.

“Again, I’m not stalking. I happened to know her school and saw you guys at the park coincidentally,” he replied. “And Olivia is not your family.” He paused and got ready to swing again. “She’s my family. And I love her more than you ever will.”

He charged at me again but I leaned in and caught his hand. I punched his face, and he stumbled backward, falling down.

I brought out my phone and dialed 911. “You wait here.”

“I don’t get it you know?” he stated as he wiped his bleeding lip.

I searched my pocket for a handkerchief and gave it to him. “Use this.”

He flinched as he looked at the cloth and back at me.

“I’m a doctor, I can’t stand to see a potential patient bleeding and do nothing,” I explained.

Punching him had gotten me to relax for what he had done to Olivia. But I was starting to realize that he wasn’t worth the extra effort.

“No wonder she’s attracted to you. You show her a shred of kindness, and she’s all over you,” he said and wiped his lips with his hand, refusing to take the kerchief I had offered. “Tell me, when you find out about her past, why did you let her continue living in an illusion of false hope. Her daughter looks like yours, meaning she’s constantly being reminded of her past just by looking at her. I bet she’s kept that locked up, just like she always does. And you don’t even care, do you? All you care about is having a convenient woman to look after your daughter.”

He paused and chuckled. “And I’m the bad guy?”

I felt bad for the guy.

“You really don’t know Olivia, do you?” I asked. “To be honest, I thought punching you would make me feel better, but this just feels pathetic and is honestly a waste of time. In fact, if this was a novel, readers would find it as an absolute waste of time.”

“What are you going on about?”

“I already know about Olivia’s pain. Time and time again, I’ve thought if letting her take care of Chloe is the right choice. But she has taken it to herself, to give Chloe a taste of having a mother, and in return she has a little bit of closure for moments she missed with her own daughter,” I said.

“Bottle it up? She’s already told me about her fear of replacing her own daughter. But she’s chosen to stick with it. I can share a little of her pain, and I’m going to be there for her every step of the way to make sure she doesn’t fall into despair. Because I love her. Not because our daughters look alike but because she’s been through too much.”

“So you only love her because she’s vulnerable then,” he scoffed.

I grabbed his collar and pulled him up. “Yes. And because I can be vulnerable with her as well. That’s what love is. She told me how she was willing to wait until you were ready for marriage, but you ran away because you’re a coward and

couldn't take her hand even when she was willing to take yours."

Why was I getting so annoyed?

"You and I are not the same Jason. She's helped me become a better father. She knows how unlucky she can be; she knows how awkward I am with my daughter. She knows I'm also hurting from not being able to save my wife, just the same way she couldn't save her daughter," I continued, my voice a little higher.

"But I chose to accept her, because she accepted me. Me, a random widowed stranger in London. She and my daughter mean the whole world to me."

"Why are you telling me this?" He raised a brow. "You've kept all of this inside without telling her about it? Face it, you're afraid of her rejecting you. You've gotten comfortable with this strange lifestyle. A fake family that you know is mostly reliant on the fact that your daughters look alike." He got on his feet properly, but he was slightly shorter than I was.

He grabbed my collar and continued, "You're worried that she might not feel that way. You're worried about telling her how scared you are of the two of you taking the next step while at a critical point in your life. While you've kept receiving bad news after bad news, while she keeps getting better in her career. You slowly realize that if you tell her, everything will change. And not necessarily in a good way. You foolishly hope the life you have will continue, but it won't. Because..."

"Is that what happened to you?" I asked.

He stopped talking and punched me. "What would a billionaire like you know anyway? I won't be surprised if she gets sick of you."

He made me realize one thing I've been secretly worrying about: if Olivia didn't share the same feelings but was comfortable with the atmosphere my family provided her.

"I feel nothing for you," I said as I let go of him and turned to leave. "If you get close to my family, and by that I mean

Olivia and Chloe, I'll not stop at punching you.”

“You don't get to tell me what to do. I still have to talk to her,” he said.

“Try me then,” I said without looking back.

I had other things to focus on, like telling Olivia everything. If Jason was able to make me feel worried about my relationship status with her, then who knows what he had told her before she got injured.

When I returned to the hospital, I headed straight to her room. She wasn't there. She was supposed to be there.

I noticed Martha walking past and she noticed me, “Oh, welcome back, sir. Were you able to find who you are looking for?”

“Where is she?” I asked, “Where's Olivia?”

“What? She's not in the room? She was with Ethan,” she replied.

I left her there and made my way to my office with a heavy heart. I thought about all the things that could have possibly happened. I couldn't shake the feeling that there was something wrong.

I opened my office door and found Ethan sitting on the sofa, going through his phone.

“Oh, hey, you're back,” he said. “How did dragon hunting go?”

“Where's Olivia?” I asked. “I checked her room and she wasn't there. Martha said you were with her. I also asked you to look after her.”

“She was feeling better and asked me to take her home,” he replied. “She said she'd rest better there. I dropped her off. I did refuse at first but she didn't listen to me. Both of you are a stubborn pair.”

She was at home then. But why wasn't I feeling at peace?

“I see,” I said.

“She opened her eyes and asked for you immediately.” he informed me. “I know she’s home alone now, but I think she’d love to have your company. It would mean a lot to her. I also think this would be a perfect time to tell her about your feelings.”

“I’ll go get Chloe. She’s still at mom’s,” I said.

“Just go check on her,” he insisted. “Chloe can spend the night at Mom’s.”

Something was wrong. Something was very wrong.

“Something’s not right,” I said.

“What isn’t?”

“I’m going home now,” I said as I ran out of the office and raced to exit the office.

“Did you see her?” Martha asked but I sped past her without answering.

I got into my car and headed for my house. I started calling her number but it wasn’t going through. I didn’t want to believe anything had happened to her.

“Maybe she forgot to charge it again,” I said to myself as I chuckled nervously.

I tried convincing myself that she was still at home. When I got home, it was eerily quiet and the lights were out. I got inside and made my way upstairs.

“Olivia?” I called.

I opened her door and there was no one there. The bed was neatly arranged.

“Maybe she went to get something,” I said to myself.

I remembered the last time I had a scare like this, I didn’t check if her things were still here. I opened her wardrobe and it was empty. Her suitcase and handbag were gone.

“No...” I said softly and started calling her number again, but I couldn’t get through to her.

I left the house to look for her. Did Jason convince her to stay with him after all? Did she choose him over me?

I was angry.

“What would a billionaire like you know anyway? I won’t be surprised if she gets sick of you.”

His statement came back to haunt me. I didn’t want to believe it. I made my way to the place I had left him. There was a small medical center nearby. I knew the police hadn’t picked him up, and he wasn’t stupid enough to wait and have them arrest him.

I went to the medical center and looked around.

“You,” I pointed at a nurse, “Did a man with bleeding lips come here?”

“We just finished patching...” she stopped and turned. “There he is.”

Jason had gotten his split lips fixed and was with a bag of medication.

“Jason!” I called and stormed my way to him.

He didn’t even try to resist or run. “What the heck do you want now?”

I held his collar, “Where is she?”

“What are you talking about?” He frowned, then a smile formed. “She left you, didn’t she? I told you, you wouldn’t understand.”

“Shut the fuck up, and tell me where she is,” I demanded. “Where’s your place?”

“I know we got off on the wrong foot; but believe me when I say, I have no idea where she could be,” he replied, “I know Olivia. If I asked her twice and she refused, there was no way she’d come to me. Plus, she doesn’t know where I stay.”

“Then why are you grinning like an idiot?” I asked.

“Because she didn’t choose you,” he smirked.

I pushed him and decided to look elsewhere.

“She’s probably gone back to London,” he said as I left. “I’m sure you don’t know where she stays either.”

I ignored him. Maybe she went to Mom’s place.

As I knocked on the door, my mother opened it.

“Oh, I guess you’re here to pick up Chloe,” she said.

“Oh no...” I groaned.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Is that daddy?” Chloe asked as she ran to the door. “Did Miss Olivia find the teddy bear?”

“She didn’t come here?” I asked Mother.

“No, we haven’t seen her. I thought that she’d be here earlier,” she replied. “Is everything okay?”

“She’s...” I stopped and looked at Chloe, who was visibly getting worried.

“Did something happen to her?” Chloe asked.

There was no need to lie. If we went home, she’d find out for herself. It was just nine pm, international flights would continue till midnight.

“Miss Olivia is gone,” I said.

“What? Why?” Her voice broke my heart.

“I don’t... I don’t know, but I’ll find her,” I promised as I squatted to match my daughter’s gaze, “She wouldn’t have left yet.” I turned my attention to my mother. “I have to go look for her. She might be at the airport.”

“Alright son, be careful,” she warned.

It didn’t make sense why she’d leave. I told her how her leaving affected me. Even as I drove to the airport, I couldn’t help how much it hurt, not knowing where she was. There was traffic. There was never any traffic to the airport, but there just had to be some the very moment I was looking for the new addition of happiness that I had just gotten.

Why did things just get in my way whenever I found happiness? Like Selina's health after giving birth to Chloe. And now Jason, coming in and ruining everything. After twenty minutes of traffic, I arrived at the airport. I made my way in and checked the flights. As I asked the staff, flights to London had ended as early as the afternoon. That meant there was a chance she was still in the city. I went around the airport calling for her, and even getting the announcers to help. Her number wasn't reachable, and I scoured every inch of the place. The next course of action was to check the nearby hotels.

But...Each one I went to:

"Is there an Olivia Collins lodging here?"

"She's late twenties...prettiest woman you'd ever seen."

"Brown hair, matching eyes. A little humor in her words."

"Distracted sometimes, but careful at the same time."

"I'm her lover."

"I need her."

"Do you have any idea?"

"I just..."

"Need to find her."

Nine hotels around that area, and I couldn't find her.

I called Ethan, "Did you see her?"

"No, I dropped her at your place," he replied. "She wasn't there?"

"I can't find her..." I buried my face in my left palm. "I can't find her at all."

"I'm sorry, Ben," he apologized.

"This is my fault," I said, "She had her doubts and I was too full of myself - too scared to say anything to help her get over her fears and worries. I messed up."

"She didn't leave anything behind? Not even a message?" he asked.

“I don’t... I didn’t check,” I replied. “Did she actually get tired of us?”

“I don’t think so. You know she’s not like that,” he replied. “Just go home.”

I called Mother when I went home and told her I failed to find her. I went to the dining table and noticed the note she had left.

“So she was just going to work on her career,” I said as I finished reading through the letter. “Then just say that. I’ll understand. Making me all worried.”

I noticed that the ink was smudged. She had been crying while writing this. Why wouldn’t she?

But I need to take this step in my career and focus on my professional growth. I hope you understand that this is not about running away from us or abandoning you; it’s about finding my own path and becoming a stronger person for our future together.

She was obviously lying to herself and to me.

“You dummy. I told you to rely on me when you don’t know what else to do,” I said as I the tears began to well up.

Why was she running away? Did she not trust me enough? Did I act in a way that made her think I wasn’t trustworthy enough? Why was she abandoning me again?

I was going to find her.

Chapter Twenty-One

Living Without You (part one)

B^{en}

There's a common misconception that one can sell one of their kidneys and live on just one. Well, it's not a misconception, but there are still some risks. While living with one kidney is generally safe and manageable, there are certain risks and considerations that individuals with a single kidney should be aware of:

Things like reduced kidney function: having only one kidney means that there is a reduced overall kidney function compared to individuals with two healthy kidneys. While the remaining kidney typically compensates, it is essential to be cautious about factors that can put additional stress on the kidney, such as certain medications or substances that are toxic to the organ.

Then there is a higher blood pressure, kidney disease or injury, proteinuria, kidney stones, and so on so forth.

Why share this? Because, some humans feel they can function with one person they've already formed a bond with. I thought the same thing when Olivia left. The first week wasn't easy. When Chloe found out that Olivia was no longer around, the conversation got to me.

"Does Miss Olivia hate me now?" she asked while sobbing heavily.

"She doesn't hate you," I said.

"Then why did she leave?" she asked.

"She just wants to focus on her career, she'll be back," I replied, although I doubted my answer. "She did promise in

the letter.”

She stopped sobbing as she remembered the contents of the letter. “She did promise.”

“I’m sure she’d come back to visit. Any day or week now,” I said.

“That means I’ll have to be staying with Grandma,” she said.

“You don’t want to?”

“I do but... I like spending time with Olivia. And we look like a family,” she replied.

To think she had noticed it as well.

Two months had passed and there was no sign of Olivia. No call, no texts, no sign of reaching out. I kept on calling her phone every day, hoping I’d get something... but nothing.

Two months. What if she had moved on already? I still hadn’t been able to go to London to look for her. And that’s because...

“Ben? Ben?” Martha’s voice brought me back.

“Hmm? What?” I asked.

“I said there’s an emergency surgery on its way,” she said. “Car accident and the patient has a major head injury.”

“Oh okay,” I replied as I got to my feet and sluggishly made my way to the emergency room to wait for the patient to get here first.

Did the hospital always feel this big? When Olivia was here and I was making my way to the ER or operating theater, she’d always tell me good luck and ask if she could help. Maybe I should have let her work with me just the way the other nurses did. Another mistake I made.

“Sir?” a doctor called. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Hmm, Dr. Roberts... you’re back from your leave?” I asked. I recognized one of the youngest surgeons in my hospital.

“I’ve been back... for a month now,” he said.

“I didn’t notice, I’m sorry,” I apologized.

I had been working absentmindedly for the past two months. I know she had said that she was going to work on her career, but it still felt like an excuse to me. If only I could see her one more time.. to maybe apologize or something. But Dr. Williams won’t tell me anything.

I don’t know who else to ask because I didn’t know any other hospital where she may have worked. It just felt like I was being purposefully kept in the dark.

“Patient’s here,” one of the nurses announced.

I readied myself and switched to my doctor side. That she was gone didn’t mean I was going to become sluggish when it came to my profession. If she was indeed using her career as an excuse, knowing how hardworking she was, Olivia would have been giving her all as well.

The surgery was successful. After a few other cases, I was done for the day. I dragged my feet to the car and drove to my mother’s place to pick up Chloe. Olivia would have helped in picking her up and bringing her back home and fed her dinner.

But it was eight pm... I could have left her at mom’s, but I knew that it wasn’t a good thing to do. We had already bonded thanks to Olivia stepping in. I didn’t want the bond to break. As I opened the door, I found her in the living room reading the story book I had gotten her, to her teddy bear... the one that Olivia had found when she lost it.

“Are you okay son?” Mom asked as she placed a hand on my cheek.

“Just a little tired,” I replied with a warm smile... at least I think it was warm.

“You have to hang in there for your daughter’s sake,” she reminded me. “Olivia will be back.”

“I don’t think so this time,” I said in a whisper. “I really think I underestimated how she was struggling.”

“I think you might be wrong about her true reasons for leaving,” she said. “You love her don’t you?”

“Yes... I do love her.”

“And she loves both of you as well,” she said. “Maybe this career opportunity might help in boosting her standing with you as well. You have to believe in her, okay?”

“Okay..”

Mom always knew how to make someone feel better.

“Chloe, we’re having hamburger steak,” I announced.

She turned to look at me, “Hi, Daddy.”

“Hey there, princess,” I smiled, “What are you reading?”

“The princess and the pea,” she replied as she closed the book and made her way to me along with her teddy bear and the book.

I held her hand and we made our way home. During the drive back, she told me about her day. She had helped Mom with the vegetable garden. I was proud of her. She insisted she sat in the passenger seat and pretended to drive along with me. Even when she clearly couldn’t see above the dashboard. It was a cute moment.

During dinner, I could tell there was something on her mind. Normally, she would have finished devouring the entire meal.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Did Miss Olivia call?” she asked.

I didn’t want to lie to her. Anytime she asked I told her I wasn’t able to reach her. I figured if I lied, and said she called; she’d feel Olivia wouldn’t want to talk to her personally.

“She didn’t. I still haven’t been able to reach her,” I replied.

“Is she in London? We can go look for her,” she suggested. “Maybe, she’s in trouble.”

“Trouble? What makes you think that?” I asked.

“I saw it in a movie,” she said. “The mommy was in trouble and her son had to go look for her.”

“You’re not planning on going to look for her on your own are you?” I asked.

“N...no,” she said and sank into her chair.

Yeah, she’s my daughter after all.

“I think we just need to be patient with her,” I said.

“But she hasn’t even called or texted. Isn’t that odd? She even promised to,” she reminded me, “I don’t think Olivia would just do that.”

Now that she mentioned it... it was kind of odd. Olivia wouldn’t just block me or restrict me from contacting her. There’s no way her phone was just not reachable whenever I called her. I remember in a conversation when she mentioned that she always forgot something if she traveled, due to her unlucky streak.

There’s no way... Did she actually forget her phone? I wanted to laugh at how silly it was. I could clearly see it actually happen. Her face when she’d land and realize that she’s probably left her phone at the airport.

“Maybe she just forgot her phone,” I replied with a shrug.

“Daddy, you’re smiling,” she said.

“Olivia is a funny person,” I said.

“Do you love Miss Olivia?” she asked.

“Why do you ask?” I raised a brow.

“I saw two of you... kissing. When I lost my teddy bear,” she said as she looked at her plate.

I could tell my cheeks had turned slightly red from embarrassment.

“Kissing is for people you love, right?” she asked.

“It is,” I said, “I do love her.”

“So if she comes back, she’ll be my mommy?” Her eyes lit up.

“What?” I couldn’t believe my ears.

“Miss Olivia, she’s going to be my mother,” she repeated. “She was already like a mommy. Helped me with my homework and studying, got me a dress, and let me sleep in her bed. Isn’t that what mommies do?”

“Yeah... that’s what they do,” I said. “I guess you love her too.”

“I do love her,” she said.

“I promise you Chloe. I’ll find her,” I said.

“Alright,” she said and started eating.

The next day at the hospital. I was looking through hospitals in London that accepted traveling nurses. I figured she’d be in one that was within Dr. William’s hospital area. Ian and Ethan made their way into my office. Even as someone who had grown up with both of them, it was still hard to tell them apart.

“Hey big brother,” Ethan greeted me. “What are you up to?”

“Good morning, Ethan, Ian,” I greeted back. “I haven’t been able to properly look for Olivia. So I decided to narrow my searches to likely hospitals in London.”

“You’re still looking for her?” Ian asked.

“Well, last night, Chloe said Olivia would be her mother when she came back,” I replied with a grin. “It’s my duty to provide my daughter with a lovely mother, isn’t it?”

Ethan’s shoulders dropped and Ian sighed.

“Is everything okay?” I asked.

“Tell him what you told me,” Ian said to Ethan.

“What’s going on?” I raised a brow.

“Okay big brother. Remember that time I kept a secret from you when we were kids?” Ethan chuckled. “Then when you found out, you hid my favorite action figures?”

“Good times, what’s the point?” I crossed my arms.

“Promise me you won’t get mad at me this time?” he asked.

“What’s this all about? What did you do this time?” I frowned.

“It’s not necessarily what I did per se,” he said as he took a step back. “It’s what I was told not to say or interfere.”

“I don’t have time to play games,” I sighed and turned my attention to my laptop.

“I know where Olivia is,” he said and I stopped typing. “She’s not in London. She’s in Maryland.”

“You’re joking,” I frowned.

“He’s not,” Ian said as he dropped a file on my table. “She’s operating as a travel nurse at a children’s hospital.”

“She’s been in Maryland all this time?” I asked as I picked up the file, it had Olivia’s picture on it along with details of her transfer. “She told you to keep it from me.”

“Yeah,” Ethan replied. “But I don’t like seeing how you and Chloe look so glum without her.”

“Thank you,” I sighed. I finally had a lead.

“You’re awfully calm,” he said with relief. “I thought I’d have a punch on my face.”

“Well you finally told me. And I understand you wanted to respect her wishes,” I said as I got up and walked over to them. “Thanks. I’ll fix a date when I’m less occupied and visit her.”

“Well since you’re calm and all, I can tell you the other secret,” he said. “I ran some tests on her, and she turned out to be pregnant with your kid. Isn’t that good news?”

I stared at him blankly while he looked proud of himself. I grabbed his collar and raised my fist to punch him but Ian held my hand.

“Ben, you promised not to get mad,” Ian reminded me.

“She’s pregnant?!” I yelled at them.

“I swear I told her to tell you,” Ethan defended.

“You idiot, do you know what I would have done, if you called me and told me?” I asked.

“I don’t know about that, but telling a girl you love her *after* she’s pregnant doesn’t sound too nice,” he said.

I let go of his collar, and he adjusted his shirt.

“I have to find her,” I said.

“You can go today,” Ian said. “Your jet is still under maintenance right? Use mine, I’ll call Rufus.”

“But the workload...” I started to say.

“We’ll handle everything big brother,” Ethan said. “Go find love.”

“I’m still mad at you,” I pointed at him. “But thank you... both of you.”

“You’re welcome,” he said. “Go with Chloe. She’ll know what to say to Olivia.”

“We’re looking for Olivia?” Chloe asked and I went to pick her up.

“You found her?” Mom asked as she walked with us to my car.

“Yes and yes,” I replied.

“Will she be excited to see us?” Chloe asked although she was the one clearly excited about the whole thing.

“I’m sure she will,” I smiled.

“Good luck,” Mom said.

“Thank you,” I nodded.

Olivia may have run away, but I was going to have her tell me why she really left directly to my face.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Living Without You (part two)

*O*livia

In Maryland, I threw myself into my work, trying to distract myself from the ache in my heart. I missed Ben's warm embrace, Chloe's laughter, and the feeling of being home. But I had to focus on my goals, convincing myself that I was doing the right thing.

Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months. The distance and time apart took a toll on me, and I found myself longing for the comfort and love I had left behind. I missed the little moments, the shared smiles, and the feeling of being a part of something special.

As much as I tried to convince myself that I was doing what was best for my future, doubts gnawed at me. Had I made a mistake? Was my ambition worth sacrificing the love and happiness I had found with Ben and Chloe?

About my new workplace, it wasn't easy at first. To no one's surprise, my unlucky streak had activated. I had forgotten my phone on the plane and there was no way it would still be there. So trying to explain who I was to the manager was slightly a problem. But he had a good relationship with Dr. Williams; he got in touch with her. She was able to speak to him on my behalf, and I got to work.

It was a fun environment, with children everywhere I turned. Compared to the children's ward at Ben's place, this hospital was lacking. I applied everything that Martha had taught me and became loved by almost all the children there. It was a relief to see that everything I had been taught was of some use.

I missed working with Martha and the staff at Ben's hospital. This place worked, but there was more passion at Ben's hospital. Ben himself was an embodiment of passion, and my body shuddered whenever I thought about him. Remembering everything he had done to my body, I would feel warm. When I returned to reality, I would feel cold all over again.

In the stillness of my lonely nights, I found myself remembering the letter I had written. Each word felt like a dagger, piercing my heart with guilt and regret. I missed them so much that it physically hurt.

"Chloe must hate me now," I said as I cuddled with the teddy she had gifted me.

I missed tucking her into bed, or waking her up.

I missed walking around with her.

I missed her laughter.

I missed having her read me stories.

I missed watching her eyes beam with joy when I would go to pick her up from her grandma's place.

Then cooking with her while we waited for Ben. Then Ben... just like Chloe's laughter, his voice still lived rent-free in my head, comforting me whenever I would feel down or upset. Some nights, I would touch myself to try and remind myself how it felt with him. But it wasn't enough, he was just better at it. Sometimes, I'd touch my face to remember how he held my face, but my hands were too small.

"I'll take all your bad luck."

I chuckled to myself as I remembered his promise. He was so cringe. But he was sweet. He loved me... didn't he? I wondered what had happened to Jason. Did Ben find him that night? If not, would he stop stalking Chloe, if he found out that I was no longer in the state?

Maybe... I rushed into this decision of chasing after my career. That wasn't the only thing that bothered me, I was also pregnant. The first month wasn't that bad, getting used to the

boob increase and morning nausea. I was reminded about Sophia, is Ben AA?

I didn't want my daughter or son to suffer what my mom and Sophia did. Had Ben already found out about the pregnancy? I told Ethan I was going to tell him, but even with my new phone, I didn't have Ben's number. My stupid ass didn't save his number to the cloud.

During the second month of my pregnancy, the signs became obvious, and my colleagues started acting a little differently. I guess it would be expected. I was a single young lady - and a travel nurse at that. When did I have time to get knocked up?

"So like, do you know who the father is?" Rita, a fellow auxiliary nurse asked.

"I do. And I don't want to talk about it," I smiled.

She nodded and never brought it up again. She wasn't a bad person, but I didn't want to provide a source of unnecessary gossip. I continued to live my life quietly. Waking up, going to work, ensuring I ate properly for the growing baby. A lot of times, I just wanted to pack up and return to Richmond and see if Ben would take me back. But with what I did to him and his daughter, there was no way he'd want to see me again.

I mean he did mention he didn't like the idea of me abandoning him in London, so much that he developed a phobia if I disappeared. Now two months without contact with him? He wouldn't care anymore even if Ethan were to tell him where I was.

"If you'd feel this bad, why did you leave in the best place?"

"Because I've always wanted to go to Maryland. I thought this would be a good opportunity."

"You'd even lie to yourself."

I held back the tears. I was at the reception area trying to get a cup of water. The last thing I wanted to do was cry in front of the patients and my colleagues. One thing was certain now. I was stupid for leaving Richmond.

“Lady luck, if you’re listening today, I want to apologize for the pizzas I didn’t sacrifice,” I said as I squeezed the empty cup. “I know I don’t deserve it but I need to ask for one more stroke of luck. I need to see Ben and Chloe again. I want to go back... I want them to accept me again. I promise not to run this time. I’ll be a good woman, and.... a good mother. I promise.”

Like that would actually work.

“Olivia,” a familiar voice called.

I turned around in disbelief and found Ben standing behind me with Chloe.

“Ben? Chloe?” I couldn’t believe my eyes.

“Miss Olivia!” Chloe called as she ran to me and embraced me. “You liar! You didn’t call! You didn’t write letters either!”

“I didn’t.. I.. I don’t...” I was too stunned to speak or say anything.

I honestly thought my eyes were deceiving me.

“Do you hate me and daddy now?” she asked as she stared up at me with teary eyes.

“What? No? Never! I never have and never will,” I replied.

“Why did you...” Chloe stopped midway and just hugged me instead.

It was the first time I didn’t see my daughter in her. But just an innocent little girl that I had abandoned.

“I’m so sorry,” I started to apologize as a fresh batch of tears started to form, from my guilt and shame. “I’m so sorry, Chloe. I didn’t... I thought...”

My excuses were pathetic. I looked at Ben: his fists were balled and his face was filled with frustration, but there was relief as well. He was hurt. I hurt him. I hurt both of them.

Tears welled up in my eyes, and my voice cracked as I replied, “Ben, I’m so sorry for causing you pain. I didn’t want to hurt you. I didn’t want Jason, or my luck to get in your way. I thought if I just went away, I could...”

He walked up to me and hugged me. “You idiot. Didn’t I tell you to rely on me for your luck?”

“I know, I just...” I couldn’t finish my statement as he held my chin and made me face him.

He kissed me right in front of everyone and his daughter. I didn’t feel embarrassed at all. I needed this. This reassurance. I didn’t know I did, until he kissed me. We kept our relationship secret, and I worried about his reputation but now it didn’t matter. I kissed him back. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I remembered all the times we kissed and spent time together.

I remembered breakfast with Chloe. I remembered the fiasco on the couch. I remembered everything that made me love him, How kind he was, how awkward he could be, and how much he was willing to keep me close to him. To think I subconsciously let Jason into my head, just because I had never heard Ben say the words I wanted to hear.

I never said them to him either.

“Isn’t that the travel nurse?”

“Is that Dr. Sullivan? The eldest Sullivan?”

“No way, the both of them? Together?”

The murmurs around us continued but we didn’t care. As we stopped the kiss, he didn’t let go of my face. He kissed my forehead and my hair, before staring into my eyes. He looked so happy to see me. To think he didn’t hate me after what I did, abandoning him like that.

“I’m still mad at you,” he said and frowned.

“I know,” I smiled, “I’m sorry.”

He kissed me lightly on the lips, “You’re not going to do that again. Ever.”

“Why?” I smirked, “You can’t get enough of me?”

“You’re right. I can’t get enough of you,” he replied. “I’m also sorry that I didn’t notice everything you were suppressing. I know you might have doubted my feelings for you. But I assure you, they were not one sided. I’m sorry it

took this long to say but... Olivia Collins, I'm in love with you. And I want you to come back to Richmond."

"You mean it?" I was beaming.

"You know I do," I replied, "I had my fears and doubts about you returning my feelings. I thought the makeshift family we were was enough for you, and I didn't want to destroy it at the expense of your happiness and make things awkward... sorry, I'm not even making sense."

I chuckled, "Did you read my letter? About seeing this opportunity for an improvement in my career?"

"You were obviously lying," he said.

"Ouch. I'll have you know some parts of it were true," I pouted at his calling out. "I wanted to work towards a better future. But at the same time, I didn't want you to worry about me."

"You could have talked to me," he said, "You shouldn't have disappeared without warning. If it was a genuine reason to actually focus on your career, I wouldn't have stopped you. Love is supposed to let both sides flourish."

"I know, and I'm sorry," I apologized. "Turns out that... leaving was stupid. I couldn't get the both of you out of my mind. The experience here has been good. But I prefer your place. And seeing you work as well."

"That's all?" He raised a brow.

"And because I love you too," I touched his nose.

Chloe's giggle reminded me that we were still in public. I turned my attention to the little girl. "I'm sorry that I left you."

"It's okay, now that you and daddy love each other," she said sweetly. "Can I ask you something?"

"What is it dear?" I asked.

She exchanged glances between me and Ben. He gave her a warm smile, nodding in approval.

"Can I call you mommy?" she asked.

I held my heart as it started to pound out of control,
“What?”

“I told daddy you were a good cook, and a good listener, and... you feel like a mommy,” she said. “I would love to have you as mine... if you don’t mind.”

I hugged her and confessed, “I don’t mind it at all.”

This was a dream... I was dreaming right?

She hugged you back, “Thank you, Mommy.”

“Don’t mention it sweetie,” I said as I hugged her even tighter.

“Olivia,” Ben called. “Be my wife and her mother.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

The Path to a Happily Ever After

*O*livia

Maybe it's because he's a very humble and a slightly minimalistic person, but sometimes I forgot that Ben was a billionaire. I was startled to see a private jet waiting for us when it was time for me to leave. Chloe seemed used to it. Apparently, it was Ian's. I was reminded how much of a difference in class we were.

I wish the plan was the last of it, but no. Rumors had spread before we even returned to Richmond. The widowed billionaire doctor had a girlfriend. Imagine my shock when we were greeted by journalists as we touched down. Ben hated the attention and had to hold Chloe and me close as we escaped.

"I'm sorry," I apologized.

"What are you apologizing for?" He frowned. "I just want to go home with you and Chloe. They're a waste of time."

So blunt. I hoped they didn't overhear him.

As we returned to his mother's place, Ethan and Ian were already there.

"I'm glad you're okay," Ethan said with a smile.

“Thank you, Ethan. I know it couldn’t have been easy keeping it a secret,” I said.

“It wasn’t easy telling him either,” he said as he gave Ben a knowing glance.

I looked at Ian and all he did was nod. Chloe ran to him in an embrace, “Uncle Ian! We used your jet.”

“Did you have fun?” he asked as he rubbed her hair.

“Yes, thank you for your help,” she said.

“What about me?” Ethan pouted as he pointed at himself. “I was the one who told your dad where to find Olivia.”

“Fine,” she groaned and went to hug him. “You’re a good uncle.”

“Good thing I was recording that,” he smirked as he showed her his phone still recording.

“Nooo! Delete!” she whined as she tugged on his pants.

“Never!” He cackled maniacally.

“Oh would you stop it.” He smacked his head. “I swear you just had to be the weird one.”

“Mom...” he rubbed his head in pain.

“Thank you for coming back Olivia,” she said.

“I’m sorry I ever left,” I apologized.

“It’s not a problem,” she affirmed, “The important thing is, you’re here and now.”

“Alright then, let’s celebrate,” Ethan announced. “I’ll get the drinks.”

“Weren’t you supposed to be depressed? Over Stacy?” Ian asked.

Ethan shuddered and his shoulders dropped but he shrugged, and the smile returned. “The past is in the past. I’m a man who moves forward.”

“Whatever you say,” Ian sighed.

“Siblings are weird,” Chloe whispered to me.

“Are they? You wouldn’t want one?” I asked.

“Oh, I want one. They can be weird like Uncle Ethan, or cool like Uncle Ian, but they’re fun,” she replied.

“That’s nice,” I smiled then leaned in to whisper. “I actually have a sibling on the way in my tummy.”

Her eyes widened and she covered her mouth, then whispered, “Really?”

“Mmm...hmm.” I nodded. “But shh.... Don’t tell your uncles.”

I already figured that they knew but having her keep a secret, was cute. She nodded and gave a salute.

“That’s my girl,” I smiled and kissed her forehead.

“Mommy kisses,” she giggled.

“Alright let’s go have some drinks,” Ethan insisted. “I’m opening all mom’s good stuff.”

“Actually, Olivia and I want to get some air,” Ben said as he held my hand.

“Huh? But you just got in,” Ethan said.

“Yeah but we both seem to be out of it,” he added. “Maybe some alone time outside will help.”

“I don’t get it, you two could just...Ah!” His words were cut short as his mother grabbed him by the hair and pulled him to the drink bar.

“Let’s go,” Ben said.

Ben

It was late. Mom had bought a plot of land next door and converted it to a mini garden to relax, host guests, or have mini parties or events. It was the perfect place: dim lights and baptized by the glow of the moon. We took a seat together, while I looked at the moon. I was wearing my glasses and adjusted them for a better view of the moon. I could feel her loving gaze. Five to six months ago, it was a different gaze entirely.

“If you stare too hard, I’ll blush,” I said as I adjusted my glasses and turned to her.

“Now, where have I heard that line before?” She smiled.

She was wearing a black dress this time, that stopped slightly above her knees and revealed a little of her cleavage. She was beautiful.

“You can stare back if you want,” she said as she pushed out her chest a little.

I stared... and burst into laughter as I looked away. “You’re a strange one.”

“I know right?” She sighed and placed her head on my shoulder, “I’m so glad I met you.”

“I’m so glad I met you too,” I said.

She hummed a little as she placed her forehead on my shoulder and kissed it.

“I know I’ve already asked but,” I said as I pulled away and got on my knee. “I didn’t do it right the last time.”

“Oh Ben,” she called softly as she covered her mouth.

“Olivia Collins, will you officially be my wife, mother of all my children, and promise never to run away again?” I asked.

“With my bad luck?” she asked.

“Every form of your luck,” I replied.

“You have to buy some pizza tonight,” she said as she gave me her hand. “I do.”

I kissed her hand. “Thank you.”

“I have better places you can kiss,” she said as she held my face and kissed me. “Like there for example.”

“Where else?” I smirked.

“Is your childhood room still available?” She returned with a bigger grin.

“I’ve always wanted to fuck my wife, in that room, during Thanksgiving,” I admitted. “I guess it’s not bad to have an

early start.”

I led her to my room. We had to sneak upstairs to not alert any of our family members. As we made it to my room, she pinned me against the door and locked it. She got on her toes and kissed me. I held her ass and kissed her back. Her body was softer than I remembered.

Maybe my memory was foggy because we had been apart for two months. I raised her gown and placed my thighs between her legs.

“Mmmm,” she moaned gently as her pussy made contact with my thighs.

She started to grind against me, and I could feel her getting hotter and wetter.

“Did you miss me that much?” I teased as she stopped kissing me to continue humping.

“You have absolutely no idea,” she replied amid heavy breathing and attempting to take off my pants.

She stopped the humping and kissed my neck. Then she got on her knees and unzipped my pants. She pulled the pants down and kissed my bulge hidden beneath my underwear. She pulled it down as well, and I groaned as her lips made contact with my length. She left her mouth open, urging me to slide it in myself. I did as expected and placed it in her mouth.

“Oh... I’ve missed this,” I groaned as she accepted my length and started to suck, moving her head and adjusting her pace from fast to slow.

She held my dick with both her hands and started to suck even faster, leaving her eyes open to make contact with mine.

“You’re such a good girl,” I praised.

“Mm-hmm,” she nodded and continued.

She paused and I help her take off her gown. I bit into her shoulder while I took off her bra and dropped them in the pool her gown formed at her feet. She helped with my shirt and kissed me again. Her tongue in my mouth made me dizzy with

pleasure. I couldn't get enough. I was naked but she was still wearing her underwear.

"Your boobs," I remarked as I touched her breasts which had gotten bigger due to her pregnancy.

"Ahh!" she yelped as she covered her mouth. "They're tender and sensitive."

"I like that," I said as I leaned in and kissed them.

She moaned and held my shoulders to support herself. I placed her nipples in my mouth, and I sucked gently. She left my shoulders and held my head to assist my pace. I used my teeth a little and she shuddered.

"Mmm, easy with the teeth," she warned.

I placed my hand into her underwear and gently rubbed against her pussy. Her wetness surprised me as she was already dripping.

"I missed your fingers so much," she said softly.

"I can see that," I said as I pulled out, "I don't think I should keep you waiting."

"You're right, I can't wait anymore," she said as she got on the bed and bent over. "You're going to be a daddy aren't you?"

"Damn right," I agreed.

I moved her panties to the side and slid my dick into her. She felt so good. I didn't have time to go slow; I just start rutting as fast as my hips would let me. Her insides tightened and loosened according to how good she was feeling. I pulled her hair and fucked her deeper.

"Oh yes... Ben... that's it," she moaned as she started rubbing her clit while I continued to fuck her.

Hitting against her spots made her succumb, as she threw her hips back to meet my pace.

"I love you so much Olivia," I said as I held both her hands and continued my thrusting.

“I love you... I love you too Ben...” she replied. “More.. more...”

I gave her more. Lifting her and fucking her while standing was even better. She started mumbling incoherently. I was also slipping from my consciousness, losing myself to our passion. As we reached our climax, she turned her head to kiss me. As we kissed, I released in her. She was panting for more.

“You want to rest?” I asked.

She shook her head.

“Good, we have two months to catch up,” I said.

A year later, we were in the hospital. We had gotten married during her third month of pregnancy. Of course, the press had whatever they wanted to say about us...talking about our age gap, and the fact that she was getting married to me while being pregnant. Olivia worried about my reputation, but I knew it would all blow over in time, and it did.

But we were in the hospital for the next biggest fear of our lives; childbirth. Although we were sure that the child coming would be AS at least or AA, I was plagued with memories of what happened to Selina. If I lost Olivia as well, I would finally understand what she meant by being cursed by bad luck.

“Are you scared?” she asked with a warm smile as she held my hand.

“Terrified,” I replied, “I keep... remembering.”

“I keep remembering too,” she said. “What if I lose this one too?”

“I doubt you’d lose,” I replied, “I’m more worried about losing you. Or worse, losing both of you.”

“We sacrificed a lot of pizza, I’d like to believe we won’t lose,” she said. “I also prayed too.”

“I prayed as well,” I said. “Moments like this make me feel so helpless. Just watching the woman I love, handle everything

on her own, while I stand by and watch.”

“Oi, you did your job, you put this in me,” she said.

“But you’ll handle it alone,” I stated.

“As long as you’re here, I’m not alone,” she smiled, then her eyes widened “Oh shit.”

“The baby is coming?” I asked.

She nodded and held my hand, “I’m here.”

It was... a long process. I panicked more than anyone else there, but I kept my cool and encouraged her. Then she did it.. giving birth to a beautiful baby girl.

“Can I suggest a name?” I asked.

“I have a feeling I know what you’re suggesting,” she smiled.

And so, Sophia our new daughter was born.

What started as just two strangers at a conference, to a night of passion, to reuniting with each other again. Opening up about past insecurities and learning to lean on each other when we couldn’t handle it on our own.

Now became a love story, giving us a family we thought we would never have the chance of ever getting again. My daughters grew up loving each other. Chloe being the older sister, took her role with pride, and her younger sister Sophia loved her and clung to her.

Olivia, my wife, made each day brighter.

“You’re making me blush, staring at me like that,” she said without looking at me, focusing on our girls playing with gifts from their uncles.

“Just lost in how beautiful you are,” I said.

She blushed red. I kissed her cheek.

The End

Chapter Twenty-Four

Epilogue

E pilogue

Ethan Sullivan, older twin of the Sullivan brothers.
Middle child.

Society knows me as a butterfly.

I'm precise with my hands.

I'm attractive to many.

I'm a playboy.

I have a charm that most ladies can't resist. I'm always laughing, so I come off as the funniest and goofiest of my siblings. But not to sound cringe or edgy, but the people who smile the best are those who have learned to hide their true feelings.

And that's what I do best. Hiding.

I may be bold, and playful. But I'm awfully clumsy and keep losing the women who love me. Even now, I've made a huge mistake. I guess everything I touch is bound to slip and break. Thanks to my butterfingers.

Chapter Twenty-Five

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