

R U B Y S C O T T



OPEN HEART



City General : Medic 1 Series

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CITY GENERAL: MEDIC 1 SERIES

RUBY SCOTT

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ONE

“I promise you. It’s the best place in town. I get laid every time I go.” Jack said, giving Izzy’s hand a tug.

From the look on her face, she was still just a bit uncertain about this. She hadn’t done much “fun” over the last few years. She had been solely focused on her studies. Now that she had been accepted into the cardiothoracic residency program at City General, she figured it was about time she did *something* for herself.

“You’re telling me the minute I step foot in there, girls are going to swarm all over me?” Izzy scoffed. “Unlikely, but thanks for getting my hopes up.” Part of doing something for herself involved having a ‘big night out’ with Jack. They’d been friends for a few years, after meeting in college, and Jack called her on her sexuality immediately. ‘I can just tell’ he had told her with a smirk. Izzy hadn’t even been sure of it herself at the time.

She was now. But much like fun, Love wasn’t something Izzy had time for. Not that she was going to the club tonight to find love. She was looking for lust; she was looking for something that was just *fun*.

The club, Parade, was on the corner of a busy crossroads. It was large, taking up most of the block it was on. The exterior was painted a mid-grey with a shiny silver detailing at the top of the facade. Sitting overtop of the front door was the name, ‘Parade’ in giant silver lettering. Each letter was illuminated with a purple, almost UV light. People were flooding in and out in a seemingly never-ending stream. A tall,

muscular chap who seemed to know Jack opened the door for them, and they stepped inside.

The interior of the club was in stark contrast to the outside. A giant chandelier hung from a deep red velvet-clad ceiling above the circular dance floor. The floor reacted to the energy and pressure of the movement and lights pulsed to the beat of the bass pumping through the speakers. To the right was the first of two bars, which ran halfway down one side of the club. High tables surrounded by groups of animated people were scattered around the area dividing the bar from the throng of dancers.

Izzy stood, wide-eyed, taking it all in. It was simultaneously just like she had imagined, yet not. She must have looked like a deer in headlights. Luckily for her, Jack was there to pull her out of her daze. He gave her arm a tug, bringing her back into the moment.

“Sorry.” She said, despite knowing there was no reason to apologize. She hadn’t done anything wrong... she was just slightly overwhelmed. Parade was most definitely out of her comfort zone.

Jack shook his head, shaking off her apology. “Let’s go get a drink. It’ll help you loosen up a bit.” He didn’t wait for a response before giving Izzy another tug, this time towards the bar.

The pair squeezed in-between the people surrounding them, waiting to be served. As the people next to them left, Izzy slipped herself onto one of the black curved stools that had become vacant. Twisting around she turned her back to the bar as she took the opportunity to observe more.

“Izzy,” Jack elbowed her side.

“What?” She snapped in response to the nudge. She whipped around to see the blue-haired bartender in front of them. The bartender reminded Izzy of a pixie. She had small, dainty features with a silver hoop nose ring and dark lipstick. Izzy felt her cheeks heat up slightly. She probably looked like a fool. Offering a nervous smile, she apologized. “Sorry. I guess I just kind of zoned.

The bartender offered a smile back; however, Izzy had a feeling that it wasn't genuine. It was the type of smile someone in customer service offers when they're clearly annoyed. "Of course. What can I get for you?"

"A mojito, please?"

The bartender nodded before moving away from them to make their drinks. Jack turned his attention back to Izzy, leaning back against the bar just like she had been. "So, what do you think?"

"It's amazing."

Jack laughed, shaking his head. "Not about the club, dumbass. I'm talking about the *people*. Do you see anyone interesting?" And by interesting, he clearly meant attractive.

While she had been scanning the crowd, Izzy hadn't exactly been checking anyone out. Now that Jack mentioned it though, half the people in the club were drop-dead gorgeous. There were a number of different women she wouldn't mind going home with. "I mean... I'm not complaining about my options if they'd have me." She said, grinning at him.

"They'd be a fool not to want you, Izzy!" he gave her a wink. "You're fresh meat."

Izzy cringed, knowing she was giving Jack exactly the reaction he was after. As their drinks were placed on the bar, she swung around, grabbed the glass, bringing it to her lips as soon as it was in her hand. She took a sip before glancing up at Jack.

He clearly knew what was on her mind. He grinned back. "See? Not only is this place filled with hot and horny people, they also do the *best* cocktails."

Izzy was really starting to see the perks of this place. She took another sip and stared out into the crowd. She wasn't quite sure where to go from here. She was a bit out of shape when it came to flirting. It was embarrassing how long it'd been for her.

When she looked back to Jack to ask him about it, she noticed him making eyes with a blonde guy wearing a blue

shirt and jeans tighter than the ones that she was wearing. She took another sip of her drink and reached out, giving Jack's arm a shove. "Go." She said. "Go and talk to him."

Jack turned back to her, his facial features softening. "But it's *our* night out. I'd feel like an ass if I just ditched you here, especially as we have just arrived."

"And I'd feel like an ass if I stopped you from hooking up with *him*." She said, gesturing with her head towards the guy.

Jack laughed and downed what was left of his drink. "Alright, then." He hopped off his stool and started to walk away before he turned around to face Izzy once more. "I'll see *you* tomorrow morning." He said with a smirk.

"Stay confident!" She called with a laugh. Once Jack was out of sight, she let out a sigh before turning back to the bar and taking another sip of her mojito. Now she was left on her own, in unfamiliar territory. Before she did anything, she was going to need another drink. Refuelled with another mojito, she felt herself start to ease into the night. At this point, she was damn near certain she could walk up to anyone in the club and start to flirt.

Although, Izzy didn't get the chance to. Two sips into her second drink, somebody had taken the seat next to her that had previously been occupied by Jack. Izzy turned to look at the stranger and was instantly in awe.

The woman was gorgeous, with short mahogany brown hair that was slicked back and large, dark eyes to match. She was slender, with broad shoulders and slightly tanned skin. Her entire body was turned to Izzy, a smile toying at the corners of her lips. "I noticed your friend just kind of left you alone here. I thought you could use some company." She said with a laugh.

It was almost instantaneous that Izzy felt comfortable with this woman. Either the alcohol was making her confident, or the rust was wearing off. "If you're offering to be my company, how could I not accept?" She said with a grin.

The other woman smiled before signaling to the blue pixie behind the bar. The bartender appeared to like her new friend, and the smile on her face actually seemed genuine. The dark-haired woman ordered a JD and coke before turning back to Izzy. “I haven’t seen you around here before. And trust me, I think I would remember somebody like you.”

Izzy could feel the heat in her cheeks and knew she was blushing. She only hoped that the neon lighting of the club would hide the color. “That’s because this is my first time here.” She paused, taking in the firm biceps and tattoos which peaked from under her short sleeves. “Do these lines always work on women” She replied, finishing off her second drink.

“Are they working on you?” she paused long enough to take in Izzy’s soft smile. “If this is your first time, then I feel lucky.” She replied. The bartender returned with her drink, but before she could leave, she stopped her. “Can you get my friend here another... mojito, right?” Izzy nodded in response. The bartender didn’t hide her annoyance, sighing before walking off.

“And why do you feel lucky?” Izzy asked. She was glued to this woman. She turned to face her; her entire attention was on this gorgeous enigma sitting next to her. She slid into place next to her like a perfect fit, and she was hardly complaining.

“Because we happen to be here on the same night. Must be my lucky night since I get to sit and enjoy a drink with you – and you haven’t asked me to leave yet.”

Izzy grinned. “Why would I ever do that?”

After another drink, the dark-haired woman (who Izzy had learned was named Cara) pulled her out to the dance floor. Without a care in the world, Cara’s hands found their way to Izzy’s hips and pulled their bodies flush against each other. Izzy felt heated, but not just from the alcohol.

As the two of them danced, it was like there was nothing in the world except the two of them and the thumping bass. Cara’s hands slid over her body, and she certainly wasn’t complaining. She wrapped her arms around Cara’s neck, allowing her body to move to the beat.

Whatever wave of nervousness that had washed over her earlier was gone. She was confident and completely into this. Cara looked like fun. The type of fun that Izzy could get behind... or under.

She knew where tonight was going, and the very thought of it made her stomach tighten, as excitement started to curl up in her gut and bubble up towards her chest.

Cara's hands found Izzy's behind, she gripped tentatively at first, but when Izzy didn't object; she tightened her grip. As the rhythm of the music changed, Cara slowly pulled her body away from Izzy's.

Izzy wanted to object. She wanted Cara's warmth once more. Cara didn't pull too far away, her forehead pressing against Izzy's. "Do you want to get out of here?" She asked, her voice low so only the two of them could hear.

Izzy didn't hesitate to answer: "Yes."

TWO

Izzy ordered an Uber outside of the club and the pair climbed in the back. Even inside of the cab, they could barely keep their hands off of each other. They weren't obnoxious about it. They sat with their thighs touching, Cara's hand gripping onto Izzy's slender thigh in a possessive way. The heat from her hand radiated up, and Izzy was growing desperate to get her home.

She leaned forward to the cabbie and told him the address of her apartment building. It was only a few blocks from the club. It would be the quickest way to get the two of them back to her place, and Izzy could finally give into all the urges she was feeling.

Sitting next to Cara like this, all Izzy could think about was kissing her. She wanted to know if she tasted like the JD and coke she had been sipping on earlier or something entirely different. She wanted to see how her body looked under the pair of jeans and the tight grey tank she was wearing. Cara was exactly what she needed.

When the cab came to a stop outside of Izzy's apartment building, she swung open the door, grabbed Cara's hand and practically pulled her from the car. They all but ran into the apartment block, the eagerness between them building.

Izzy hit the button to call the elevator ride, and the doors opened immediately. As the elevator climbed up the floors, Izzy couldn't resist the urge to kiss Cara for a second longer. Her fingers were intertwined with Cara's and she pulled her in

for a long, slow kiss. Cara's response told her she wasn't alone in building anticipation for what was about to follow.

Finally, the elevator 'dinged' and the doors opened. Izzy almost skipped through the doors, pulling Cara behind her and towards her apartment. With one hand, she fumbled with her keys and got the door unlocked. They went inside together, the door slamming behind them.

As soon as it was closed, Cara let go of Izzy's hand. She turned, so she was facing her and without a moment of hesitation, she pressed their lips together. The kiss sent shock waves through Izzy's entire being. In the beginning, all she could think about was how soft Cara's lips were on hers. But the kiss progressed from the soft, tentative start to something deeper. Cara's lips parted and Izzy could taste the JD and coke she had been wondering about since the cab ride.

Cara stepped forward, pushing Izzy back against the front door. One of her hands rested on Izzy's hip while the other worked its way up, tangling in her dark waves. She moved her hand until she was cradling the back of Izzy's head, pulling her back into a kiss.

The heat between them was building to the point of desperation. Izzy's hands moved without hesitation, coming to rest on Cara's hips. She pulled, making sure there was no space between the two of them.

The kiss made Izzy's knees weak, which she chalked up to not being kissed for a while. When they broke apart, Cara rested her forehead against Izzy's like she had earlier in the club. "Fuck, I want you." She sighed.

"Why don't you show me how much?" Izzy responded, a tiny smirk growing on her lips.

Cara didn't need to be told twice. Their hands were intertwined again as she turned around, looking over Izzy's open plan apartment. "Wow!" Was the only word that Cara could utter as she looked around the sleek, modern apartment. "This place?"

It was a gift from her parents for graduating John Hopkins and for pursuing her cardiothoracic residency, and she had barely moved in, so the entire place still had that showroom feel.

“If you are looking for the bedroom, it’s the first room to the right.” Izzy raised an eyebrow, showing the slightest bit of impatience. Cara took the hint graciously.

“Oh yeah, sorry.” Grabbing Izzy’s hand, she pulled her towards the bedroom, as her head whirled around taking in the glossy white cabinets, marble floors and large flat-screen TV. In the back of her mind, Izzy wondered what she thought of her. Did she think she was bedding some wildly successful woman? Or just a trust fund brat?

Swinging open the bedroom door, Cara turned to face her, taking both her hands in her own. She walked backwards, pulling Izzy towards the large king-size bed in the centre of the room with its crisp starched white linen. No words were exchanged when Cara came to a stop and pulled Izzy to her, before turning the pair of them around.

Izzy felt herself being gently pushed down onto the bed. As Cara slowly climbed on top of her, she felt her excitement rise again. Bringing her face to just above Izzy’s, Cara whispered, “I’ve been waiting for this since the moment I saw you.”

“I’m yours to do exactly what you want with me.”

A pulse of electricity shot through Izzy’ as she watched Cara’s eyes darken with want. There was no hesitation this time as Cara’s hands slid down Izzy’s body. They came to a stop at her waist, where her jeans met her top. Undoing the buttons, she slid under the fabric, caressing her skin. The touch of her fingers caused Izzy to inhale deeply, rasping with anticipation. She had no idea who this woman was, but she was everything she needed right now. The only thing she cared about was getting rid of the last layer of separation. She wanted to feel her skin against Cara’s.

Cara’s hands travelled up, stopping at Izzy’s bra. They moved over the lace fabric, grazing Izzy just enough that a little pleased noise left her lips. Cara looked up at her with a

smirk. “Someone’s eager.” She commented, and Izzy’s cheeks heated up in embarrassment.

It had been so long. Cara didn’t say anything else. Her hands moved down to the hem of Izzy’s shirt, giving it a tug. Izzy sat up to assist her with getting it off. It was quickly tossed onto the floor.

It was Izzy’s turn to get Cara undressed. She mimicked the other woman’s movements, her fingers wrapped around the hem of her shirt and pulling it over her head. Cara was *built*. Not like a bodybuilder, but it was clear she was a woman who prided herself in her body. She was solid and muscular. All Izzy wanted to do was get her hands on every inch of her.

Their lips crashed together again; this kiss was one that was deep and passionate the minute their lips collided. Hands were no longer tentative and unsure. They both knew they were doing this; they knew where they wanted tonight to go.

When their lips parted, Cara’s lips moved downwards. She pressed soft kisses down the side of Izzy’s neck, down her shoulder, then to her collarbone. Beneath her, Izzy sighed, stretching into the kisses.

Izzy expected Cara to get right down to it. She expected her bra to be off right after Cara’s lips kissed a trail down her cleavage. Instead, Cara stopped with the kisses. Her hands went back to Izzy’s waist, this time unbuttoning her jeans. Izzy lifted her hips to help get them off and Cara tugged them down to her ankles, letting Izzy kick them off onto the floor.

Cara sat back on her heels, looking down at Izzy’s body, taking in her milky skin and soft curves. She let out a low whistle, that trademark smirk back on her lips. “I like the matching set.” She said, gesturing to her underwear.

Izzy’s cheeks burned at the compliment, but she had absolutely no idea what to say back. Was ‘thank you’ a super cringe-worthy response? Was she supposed to come up with a playfully flirty taunt in response? Luckily for her, Cara didn’t wait for a reply. She went straight back to kissing. She skipped entirely over Izzy’s breasts, moving down to her tummy.

The kisses were still feather soft; each brief moment of contact had eagerness building inside of her. It lit her skin up, making her feel like she was electrified. Each kiss made her want Cara more. They made her want so much more than small, teasing kisses.

Cara's path of kisses came to a stop right above the lace of her knickers. Remembering how Cara had just skipped over her breasts, Izzy had a feeling she was going to skip right over the one place she was *dying* for her to kiss.

Except... she didn't. She moved down just a bit further and pressed a kiss over the top of her panties of course. A ratcheted breath escaped from Izzy's mouth. She needed *more*. Cara settled between her legs, supporting herself on her elbows. "Do you want something from me?" She asked with a smirk. Reaching out with one hand, she ran her index finger up and down the material that covered Izzy's opening. She was so close, but so far. Izzy arched her back, pushing towards her hand. Her need to feel Cara inside her was painful. *Touch me, please. Really touch me.*

Squirming with want, she tried to move to bring Cara's touches closer. Right now, she was really feeling how long it'd been since someone other than herself had touched her there. She was beginning to feel desperate.

Cara's smile suggested she knew exactly what she was doing, and that was why she was teasing her right to the very brink,

"Please." The word left her lips without Izzy being able to control it. She hadn't fully realized that she had spoken until the slowly becoming familiar smirk pulled over Cara's lips.

"Please what?" She asked, slowing the pace at which she ran her finger along her slit. "You need to use your words for me."

Oh. She was *clearly* enjoying Izzy's building desperation. Izzy didn't hesitate this time. There was no unsureness about her words, just clear need. "Touch me!"

"Oh. That's what you want? All you had to do was ask." Cara smirked. She stopped her teasing and reached up,

hooking her fingers under the elastic of Izzy's underwear. She tugged them down, tossing them onto the floor with the rest of their discarded clothing.

She didn't make Izzy wait, which Izzy was more than thankful for. She ran her fingers through Izzy's wet folds before spreading her lips and dipping one and then two fingers deep inside. Izzy released a long, slow moan, as her body pushed hard against Cara's hand. A shudder shot through her as she felt Cara's thumb graze her clit, rubbing slowly, tenderly. She was playing with her, working out what Izzy liked.

Just a simple touch was enough to make Izzy whimper as she tried to push her hips towards Cara's hands. It was a signal that she wanted more, and Cara was more than happy to oblige. She increased her pressure and speed. The desire which filled Cara's eyes, deepened Izzy's need. Her moans grew louder.

"Tell me how much you want it." Cara's thrusting was sending Izzy to the very edge she was lost inside her head. The lack of response caused Cara to slow down.

"Tell me how much you want it or I might have to stop." As she said the words Izzy was suddenly aware that she was pulling her fingers almost out of her completely.

"No please. I want you. I need you."

"How much?" Cara's fingers moved deeper inside and gently pressed on Izzy's G-Spot before releasing again.

"I'll give you whatever you want, just please don't stop."

Cara's face lit up with Izzy's words and it was obvious how much she was going to enjoy watching Izzy lose complete control. Izzy felt another of Cara's fingers slip inside and she held her breath as she saw her head dip down between her legs.

The feeling of a tongue against her clit caused Izzy to throw her head back in delight. She started with little circles, then sucked gently before giving teasing flicks. Her fingers never broke tempo.

“OMG!”

Izzy’s hand clutched the back of Cara’s head, pulling her closer and holding her in place. Her moans were becoming louder and louder until she was suddenly aware she was releasing a primal scream as the first orgasm swept over her body, but Cara only slowed for a moment, before gently increasing once more, curling her fingers for maximum effect.

For the second time, Izzy’s back was completely off the bed and with an almighty scream praising every deity she could think of, a second orgasm took hold causing her body to spasm and shudder with delight.

It was exactly what she needed. With aftershocks rippling through her body, the stresses of her job and everyone’s expectations of her seemed a million miles away.

Izzy’s closed her eyes, not wanting the feeling of release to leave her body. She placed her arms across her eyes, allowing herself to come back to earth. Aroused out of the moment only by little kisses as Cara started to make her way back up her body before falling back on the bed next to her.

She reached over and brushed Izzy’s hair out of her face. Izzy’s eyes blinked open, looking over at her with a smile. “You were amazing.”

“So were you.” She said.

Izzy rolled onto her side, and Cara followed, placing her lips onto Izzy’s. Deepening the kiss, she pressed her body flush against Cara.

It was clear that Cara was much more experienced than she was. Izzy had slept with her fair share of girls in college, but Cara seemed so confident in everything she did. How she held her. How she kissed her. Feeling her naked chest against her own, she could feel her arousal build again, but this time she wanted to taste Cara. Her hands slowly swept down her stomach until they rested on the button of her jeans, fumbling to undo them.

“Here, let me help you.” Cara flipped out the button, pulling back slightly to lift her body as Izzy pulled them down

to reveal firm tanned thighs. As she threw them to the floor Izzy leant in for a kiss, her hands caressing Cara's hips, and stomach before she slid her fingers under the edge of her underwear.

Cara was wet and ready, and that turned Izzy on even more. As her legs parted a little more Izzy delved deeper, wetting her fingers before circling her swollen clit. As they kissed, Cara's moans and writhing against Izzy's touch bolstered her confidence. Sliding two fingers deep inside, she felt Izzy clamp around her immediately, pulling her in.

"I want more of you and harder."

Izzy was more than happy to meet Cara's demand and did exactly as she was told. With all her fingers sliding hard in and out in a far rougher motion than the way Cara had touched her, she slid her thumb hard over her clit and then just a few strokes she sent Cara toppling into orgasm.

When Izzy pulled her hand out of Cara's underwear, she brought it up to her lips, making a show of licking her fingers off. Cara cursed under her breath as she watched. "Jesus, you're hot." She said with a laugh. "How did I get so lucky tonight?"

Izzy laughed in response. "Who knows? Maybe it was that cute smile of yours."

Cara pulled her in and held her tight, the sweat on their bodies mingling. Without realizing how tired she had been, Izzy fell asleep.

THREE

She awoke the next morning to the obnoxious sound of her phone's alarm. She was groggy, sitting up slowly. That's when she felt the warmth in the bed next to her and remembered Cara. The sound of the alarm had the other woman rising, just as groggily as Izzy had been.

She rubbed at her eyes with the back of her hand. "What time is it?" She asked.

Izzy rolled onto her stomach, finding her jeans on the floor. She grabbed her phone from the pocket and checked it, shutting the alarm off in the process. "Six." She said with a sigh. She had barely gotten any sleep; it would be a rough day.

Cara vocalized her objection. "Ugh." She said with a sigh. Cara rolled off the bed, getting to her feet and searching for her clothes in the dark. "I have to get ready for work." She said, finding her jeans. She pulled them on, searching for her shirt.

"So do I," Izzy said, yawning. She was going to need so much coffee to get through her shift. She watched as Cara got redressed, stopping to check her own phone before her attention turned back to Izzy.

"I had a really good time last night."

"So did I." Izzy agreed. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me. I enjoyed it." Cara said before leaving the bedroom. Izzy sat on the bed until she heard the front door close. Then she fell back in bed, taking a breath.

Was she ever going to find a hook-up as good as Cara had been again?

Work for Cara that day was hectic. She always seemed to have those days when she was running on the minimum amount of sleep possible. Every day for a paramedic was busy, but it always seemed to increase on days like these. That was why she was forever thankful for having a partner like Terri, who offered to run the call while Cara drove them to the hospital.

The patient in the back was complaining of chest pains, and both Terri and Cara suspected a heart attack, so they drove lights and sirens, speeding toward City General. They arrived in record time, Cara parking them in the ambulance bay. She turned the truck off and hopped out, heading towards the back to help Terri get the stretcher out and into the emergency room.

Once inside, a nurse greeted them. They gave her the rundown and signed over care. As they turned to leave, Cara caught a glimpse of Jack.

Jack was a familiar face at City General. Whenever Cara needed it, he was willing to help her out with whatever it may be. Sometimes the pair would even go to Parade together. They weren't close, but Cara thought of him as a friend.

She turned to Terri, telling her that she would be back in just a moment. Walking up to Jack, she raised her hand in a wave. "Hey!" She said before she finished her approach. Just as she got up next to him, she realized that he wasn't alone.

Standing next to Jack was the same woman from the night before, Izzy. She was wearing a white coat with a light blue stethoscope around her neck. On her ID badge, it read; 'Izzy Frost; Cardiothoracic Resident'.

Awkwardness washed over Cara. She hadn't expected to run into Izzy again and certainly not so soon. It wasn't like they

had a bad night; it wasn't like she never wanted to see her again. It's just weird running into a hook-up on the clock.

If Jack sensed the tense, awkward air between the two of them, he didn't show it. "Hey, Cara. How have you been?"

Cara swallowed. "Fine, what about yourself?"

"Pretty good. I had a *really* good night last night. Took Izzy here," He paused to gesture over to Izzy with his thumb. Her cheeks were flushed red, and she wasn't making eye contact with Cara. Somehow, that made Cara feel a bit better. At least she wasn't the only one feeling awkward. "over to Parade for the first time. The guy I hooked up with?" Jack let out a low whistle. "Let me tell you; he was *gorgeous*."

"Yeah?" Cara was doing her best to stay normal. "Sounds awesome. We're going to have to grab a drink together sometime so we can catch up. I should probably get going though. You know how Terri gets when I dawdle too much. She just wants to run calls all day."

"Yeah, yeah. I'll text you and we'll pick a day to get drinks after our shifts." Jack said. The two said their goodbyes before they parted, leaving Izzy and Jack standing there. Never one to settle for silence, Jack turned to Izzy. "That's Cara. She's the one who told me about Parade, actually. She's a medic, so she's around quite a bit."

Izzy swallowed, staring straight ahead. "I, uh... actually already know Cara."

"Wait. How do you know Cara?"

"Remember how I told you about the hot girl I hooked up with last night..."

The look on Jack's face was one of shock. His eyes widened, and he gasped. "What? No. You and Cara?" The shock seemed to fade quickly though, a smile taking over. "You should go for it! It can't be just some random chance that you two had a one-night stand and now it turns out you'll probably be working together a lot. It's like the start of a love story."

Izzy looked at him; it was her turn for her eyes to be wide. She shook her head. "No. Absolutely not. In fact, let's not use

that word ever again.”

“Love? And why not? Are you trying to be some sort of ‘cool girl’ who doesn’t do commitment or something.”

“No. It’s not that.” Izzy sighed. She leaned back against one of the solid pillars in the ER and crossed her arms over her chest. “Jack, you know I’ve never even told my parents about me, never mind a long-term relationship. I’ve been doing my best to get this residency to keep them off my back, so I’m not going to blow it all on a relationship, besides it’s hardly the time to be staring at a relationship with the hours I work.”

Jack sighed as he looked down at her. “I see your point, Izzy. I really, really do. You’re going to have to come out, eventually. Is that something you really want to give up? If it is, fine. But I’d be a shitty friend if I told you that you’re making a smart choice.”

Izzy shook her head. “Jack, it was a one-night thing. Cara is probably feeling as weird about this whole thing as me. But it doesn’t matter anyway because I’m not ready for anything like that.”

Cara climbed into the passenger side of the ambulance, sighing, and running a hand through her hair as soon as she sat down. Terri looked over at her, “About time you got back in the truck.” As soon as she realized that something seemed off with her partner, she sighed again. “Alright. What’s up?”

Cara sighed again, turning her head to look out the window. “It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it. Let’s just call dispatch and get a new call.”

Terri didn’t put the ambulance in drive. She turned her whole body to her partner. “Sure. It’s nothing, but I haven’t seen you like this since your breakup with Ali. Something’s clearly going on.”

Cara visibly winced when Ali was brought up. The two had broken up six months ago, but the wound was still fresh. Ali

was a constant hot mess and had been since before they had started going out. But Cara had loved her with her whole heart, even if that meant carrying her out of clubs because she was fighting. If she wasn't fighting someone else, then she was fighting with Cara. It never took much. Sometimes it was just because she was fifteen minutes late in arriving home, because that obviously meant she was cheating.

Cara finally had enough and called it off. She had blocked Ali's number, but Ali wasn't ready to call it quits. It was *exhausting*. "Fine." She finally sighed to Terri. "So, I hooked up with a girl last night."

"I figured given how dead on your feet today you are today. So give... who is she?"

"Turns out she is the new cardio resident and Jack's buddy from med school." She said, nodding her head towards the hospital.

"And you didn't know?"

"Not until about five minutes ago, no. It was awkward. I didn't expect to run into her again, you know. We kind of just parted ways this morning, and that was that. I didn't know I'd see her almost every day."

Terri shrugged. "Well, I'm not ferrying patients across to Mercy so you can avoid your latest hit and run. Anyway, maybe it's a sign."

"A sign?"

"Yeah. Maybe she's meant to be more than a hookup."

Cara shook her head. "Nope, no. We're not going there. Ali was never supposed to be more than a one-night thing and look what happened there. I'm not going down that road again. I'm just not ready for another relationship. Ali messed with my head; you know that."

"I know. I'm just saying she is a resident, so she has to be more stable than Ali ever was. Maybe it could be a good thing." Terri shrugged.

“I guess we’ll never know because I’m not taking that chance.”

It was really beginning to feel like every call was going straight to City General. Granted, it was the largest hospital in the area and was a certified trauma center, but Cara was constantly on the lookout for another run in with Izzy.

She and Terri had just dropped off another patient when Cara decided to hit the EMT break room. It was located just outside of the ER. It was small with a brown leather sofa and a fridge that was stocked with food and small snacks that could be grabbed quickly and eaten on the move.

Cara made it through the ER without an issue, but as soon as she scanned her badge to get through the next door, she was face-to-face with the one person she had tried so desperately to avoid. Izzy gasped, jumping backwards to avoid the two crashing into one another. She couldn’t very well make out like she hadn’t seen her, so she went with it.

“Oh. Hey.” The awkwardness was so thick it could be cut with a knife.

Izzy managed a smile. “Hey. Good to see you.” They both clearly didn’t know what to say. It was a situation that neither of them really knew how to navigate, but they were trying.

“Yeah, same.”

Cara made a decision then, standing in front of Izzy, to own the whole thing. Why did it have to be awkward? They had both had a good time; it wasn’t something to be weird about. “Look, I’m sorry if I was weird the other day. I just wasn’t expecting to see you again.” She gave a small shrug and then thought about what she had said. “Not that I’m complaining.”

Izzy smiled then, a genuine one like the one she smiled when they were together. “Yeah, no. I get it. I wasn’t expecting to see you again either. Not complaining either.”

Cara felt relieved and looking at Izzy it was obvious the feeling was mutual.

“Well, good. Seems like we’ll be seeing a lot of each other.”

Cara ran a hand through her hair. “I should probably get going. I was just heading to the break room for a snack, but I’ll see you around, right?”

“Of course.” Izzy said, giving Cara one more smile before heading back up the corridor. Cara couldn’t stop herself from turning for just another quick glance at the cute resident in scrubs.

As she did, Izzy also turned and with a wink she said, “I love a woman in uniform.”

As much as Cara didn’t want to admit it she loved the fact Izzy had turned and flirted. She couldn’t wipe the smile off her face for the rest of the day.

They seemed to be bumping into each other more and more frequently and each time it was a little more familiar with the light tactile touches and small brushes as they passed each other. Both were oblivious to the fact everyone else had also seen growing flirtatiousness between them.

FOUR

It was a Tuesday when Cara had just signed over care to the charge nurse. She saw Izzy walk past, disappearing down a hallway that Cara knew led to the cardio wing of the hospital. She didn't know what took over her, but she *needed* to see Izzy.

She thanked the nurse one more time before practically jogging through the emergency room and walking the same path that Izzy had just taken. She saw her further down the hall when she walked past the door and called out to her, "Izzy!"

The resident whipped around, a smile appearing on her face when she saw who called her name. "Hey!" She said, stopping in the hallway.

Cara finished jogging to catch up with her. When she stood in front of her, she realized she had no reason to call out to her and stop her. She had just wanted to see her. Her brown eyes took in Izzy's features when she noticed something slightly different. She reached out, taking one of Izzy's wavy strands of dark brown hair in her hand. "You got a haircut." She said, twirling the strand of hair around her finger. "It looks good on you." Cara didn't know what she was doing, but she felt like she was unable to stop herself. There was just something about Izzy that drew her in. The attraction that was between the two of them the first night was certainly still there.

"Yeah." Izzy said, her cheeks flushed. Cara was beginning to love that rosy flush that spread on her cheeks whenever she was slightly embarrassed. "I'm glad you like it. It wasn't much, just my ends."

“It’s still noticeable.” At least to Cara it was. That made her wonder just how much attention she was giving Izzy that she noticed a small change in her hair. It was a little embarrassing that she paid that much attention to her, but Cara didn’t know how to stop doing something that she didn’t realize she was doing.

“Well, thank you,” Izzy said, looking up at Cara. “I should, uh, probably get going. I have to give a report on a patient. My attending today is a dick. He doesn’t appreciate tardiness.”

“Right.” Cara nodded. “I should probably get going too. Terri’s getting a little annoyed with me for always coming back to the truck late. I’ll see you around.” She smiled.

“Yeah. I’ll see you.” Izzy smiled back before turning and finishing her trek down the hallway.

All Cara could do was stand and watch her leave, wishing she had had more to say.

Their next run-in was completely by chance. Cara didn’t go seeking Izzy out, and from the way the other reacted, she was fairly certain neither did she. Cara was heading back from a patient’s room. It was a basic patient transfer between hospitals, so it had been an easy call. Izzy was heading the opposite way. If Cara hadn’t looked up from her phone when she did, they probably would have missed each other. “Hey, Izzy,”

Izzy looked up and smiled. “We have got to stop running into each other like this.”

“Do we though?” Cara laughed. “Because I’m not complaining about bumping into you. It kinda brightens my day.”

“Well, I guess not. It’s good to see you.”

Izzy’s smile that spread from ear to ear made Cara feel bold; bolder than she had been being during their workplace run-ins. Lowering voice, she said; “The only thing I’m complaining

about is how many clothes you're wearing every time we see each other lately. You look good, but you look even better unscrubbed." As expected, Izzy's cheeks were pink, and Cara felt excitement bubble in the pit of her stomach.

"I, uh..." Izzy didn't know what to say. She stood there, racking her mind, trying to think of what to say back. She was usually so confident, but she'd never played a game like the one she was playing with Cara before. There was no clear definition of what was going on between them, just a clear definition of what *wasn't* happening. "I should... I should go. I'll see you around?"

"Always," Cara replied with a smirk. She turned and watched Izzy walking in the opposite direction, unable to help herself. She didn't know what game she was playing here, but she was definitely loving it.

Izzy, on the other hand, was beyond confused. Usually, her entanglements consisted of one-night stands or two-week relationships that ended because she was too committed to her studies. She didn't know what to think of what was going on with Cara.

On the one hand, Izzy didn't want anything serious. She didn't expect anything to come from it, nor did she want that. She wasn't ready. On the other hand, what did Cara want? Were they friends? Two random people, who slept together and were now forced together by work? How did Izzy get the answers to these questions without being awkward and asking?

She didn't get a chance to dwell on what was or wasn't happening. Sara Thomas rounded the corner. Sara was a woman in her mid-forties with honey blonde hair that was usually up in a bun, impressively unwrinkled skin (the residents had a feeling it was all Botox) and round silver glasses. She was the Chief of Surgery at City General. She took a great deal of pride in her hospital and the program she ran, but she had a fearsome reputation, especially amongst residents.

“Frost,” Sara’s voice was naturally loud. Izzy had a feeling she had never had to be quiet in her life. “You’re scrubbing in on the next surgery with me. We’re replacing a mitral valve. Understand?”

Izzy gave a slow nod. She wasn’t given a choice because Sara didn’t give people choices. All she knew was how to dish out orders and demands. Izzy had watched a valve replacement before but had never performed one herself. She felt nervous but excited all at the same time. This was the experience she was here for.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Alright. Come with me to OR 3 and scrub in.”

“Wait.” Izzy blinked at Sara. “We’re doing it now?”

“No Frost, we’re doing it tomorrow.” Sara rolled her eyes and shook her head. “Yes, we’re doing it now. Come on.”

Izzy learned a hard lesson that day. She learned that studying something, memorizing every step, doesn’t compare to actually doing it. She felt like Sara put her on the spot too. Izzy didn’t know exactly what she was doing.

Sara had led the surgery, making most of the major cuts and putting the heart on bypass. All Izzy had to do was remove the diseased mitral valve and replace it with the artificial one.

From there, it all became a blur. She couldn’t remember what happened. Did her scalpel slip? Did she try too hard to force the valve into place? Next thing she knew, the patient was bleeding. She tried to stop the bleeding, did every technique that she knew, but nothing stopped it. She panicked, that’s when Sara stepped in, but try as Sara might she couldn’t stop the bleed either. It was too late.

The patient had died on the table, and Sara had ordered Izzy to make the call. She stood looking down at her blood-soaked hands. Running it between the tips of her gloves, asking herself the same question over and over again. *What had she done?*

Sara was angry and unable to hold back. Ordering Izzy to close the body, she pushed her aside. It wasn't until Izzy appeared and removed her gown did she confront her.

“You're going to go tell his family. You'll tell them there were complications and there was nothing we could do. Only you and I will ever know that in the hands of a better resident he might have stood a chance.”

Izzy was doing her best to hold back her tears. She bit her bottom lip and nodded her head slowly. She couldn't find the words. All she wanted to know was; what had she done wrong? What could she do to avoid it ever happening again. She wanted to know what she could do better next time to avoid the same outcome. But she didn't get the chance as Sara crashed out of the room, leaving her standing alone.

FIVE

All she wanted to do was breakdown, but she couldn't. This wasn't her trauma. This sadness didn't belong to her. It belonged to the family of the man who died on her table. She needed to be as emotionless as possible.

She stepped into the waiting room, and instantly, a family stood up. A woman who she assumed was the man's wife and his two adult children, a boy and a girl. "Is Thomas okay?" The woman asked immediately.

When Izzy didn't respond right off the bat, she held back the tears and delivered the news. "I am sorry, we did all we could for Thomas, but despite our best efforts there were complications beyond our control and I am afraid he didn't make it through surgery. He began to bleed, and we discovered that he has a heparin resistance and..."

The patient's widow let out a wail.

"We tried our best, but he didn't pull through. I'm sorry." Izzy's words were drowned by the audible anguish of his family. All Izzy could do was watch as the woman sat back down in the chair, her sobs becoming louder and more violent. Each one shook her entire body. Her daughter started to cry next, taking a seat next to her mother and wrapping an arm around her shoulder. The son maintained a straight face, wrapping his arms around both his mother and sister.

Izzy's saving grace was the same person who dished out her sentence. Sara stormed through the door that separated the waiting room from the rest of the hospital. "Mrs Walsh? I'm

Dr Thomas, Chief of Surgery. I can talk you through everything that happened.”

“Can we go see Thomas one last time?” The woman asked.

Sara nodded. “Of course. He’s being cleaned up now; we’ll go see him together.” They stood, following Sara out the door.

Izzy was left in the waiting room, her hands shaking. What had she done wrong? Why had she cost Thomas his life? She wasn’t going to be able to hold it together.

She knew when she decided to be a surgeon that not every patient would live. She would be operating on people who were barely holding onto their life. That very fact was talked about again and again in med school. But nobody ever told her what happened when someone did die on your table. Nobody told her how empty she would feel, how broken and worthless. Nobody talked about how she would rethink every choice she had made in her life.

She needed a minute. Without telling anybody where she was going, Izzy decided to step outside. She walked through the doors of the hospital and was greeted by the setting sun and rain. It was ironically fitting. It was a different setting than when she stepped into the OR earlier. It had been mid-afternoon; the sky had been sunny and bright.

Izzy walked away from the hospital entrance, around to the side of the building, so hopefully nobody would see her cry. The rain splashed down on her, soaking her hair, and making it stick to her scalp and the back of her neck. It quickly started to soak through her white coat, to the light blue scrubs underneath.

“It’s awfully wet for you to be out here.” The voice startled Izzy, causing the blonde to jump.

If anybody were going to interrupt her crying session, she had hoped it might be Jack. He would be understanding of her situation and would listen without judging. Instead, when she looked up, she was face to face with Cara. Her face was filled with concern.

“Hey. What’s wrong?” She asked.

Izzy shook her head. “Don’t... don’t worry about it.” She used the heel of her hand to wipe at her tears, trying to pull herself together.

“No. I’m going to worry. Why don’t you tell me what’s wrong?”

Izzy didn’t want to talk about it. At least not to Cara. She always seemed so cool, so put together. It was embarrassing. But she had nobody else to talk to, and eventually she would have to go back into the hospital and finish off her shift. She swallowed hard, refusing to make eye contact. “I... I lost a patient.”

Cara leaned back against the wet brick, emitting a sigh. “Yeah... that’s never easy. What happened?”

“I honestly don’t know. I don’t know if I fucked up. I’m pretty sure Thomas is putting it down to me. His widowed face as I broke the news to her—it was just awful.” The tears were rolling down her cheeks, and she felt Cara’s arms surround her. She sobbed into her shoulder.

When the sobs had calmed Cara asked her “Was this the first patient you’ve lost?”

“No, he wasn’t my first patient to die, but he was the first to die on the table with my hands on his heart.” She looked far into the distance, but in her head her eyes were still watching the moves she had made less than an hour earlier.

“I still remember the first patient I ever lost.” Izzy turned to face her. “It was during my first week as a medic. I was in the back with the patient, a teenage girl who had been in a wreck. She didn’t look good, if we’re being honest, but my first partner and I were hopeful she would be able to make it to the hospital and they’d be able to save her. But... she started to code in the back. I got her, tried everything I knew to save her, but nothing was good enough. We lost her about a mile out from the hospital. I cried for the rest of my shift.”

When Cara spoke, the pain was clear in her voice. This was something that still hurt her. “It’s never easy.” Izzy’s voice was

melancholy as she wondered how long she would relive the moment she had to break the news to Thomas's widow.

Cara gave her a squeeze. "I still send her family a card every year on her birthday. Every time I arrive at a MVC, I think of her. Every time my patient is a teenage girl, I remember her. I don't think you ever get over your first death. It sticks with you, and that's okay. It pushes you to be better, to do better. It's hard, and it hurts like hell, but that's a painful part of this field. It happens to everyone."

Izzy didn't feel soothed until Cara's last line. *It happens to everyone*. Logically, she knew it did. She wasn't alone. These things happened. "You're right. I just... I don't know what happened. He was doing fine one minute and the next he was bleeding out on my table."

"You're going to lose sleep over this until you realize you didn't do anything wrong, sometimes we can't save everyone especially in surgeries. They all have risks, I'm sure he knew it."

Izzy nodded slowly. It didn't make any of this easier, but she felt less alone. "Thank you." She said softly.

Cara shook her head. "There's nothing to thank me for. All I did was tell you the truth. Listen, why don't we go out tonight? You've clearly had a shitty day; my day hasn't been the best. We could both use a drink and a chance to relax. What do you think?"

Initially, Izzy wanted to say 'no'. All she wanted was to go home, put on PJ's and crawl into bed with some ice cream. But Cara's offer sounded better. Alcohol would help her forget and at least she might feel good, even if it was for the briefest time.

"Alright." She agreed. "I get off at seven."

Cara smiled. "I'll pick you up here at seven." Reaching out, she patted Izzy on the shoulder. "You'll be fine. Get inside before you get pneumonia, though."

With that, the two parted ways. Izzy still felt awful, but at least she had something to look forward to.

Izzy was in the locker room, changing out of her scrubs and into the nice blouse that she had worn to work that day. She was just closing her locker when Jack entered. “Hey,” He said softly. “I heard about what happened with Thomas. You know she’s a hardass. Are you ok?” He opened his locker and took off his scrub top. “Do you want to order in tonight? We could crash at my place with some Chinese food and a bottle of Merlot?”

She shook her head. “As tempting as that offer sounds, I actually already have plans with Cara.” Jack’s eyebrows shot up to the middle of his forehead, and Izzy shook her head. “Not like that.”

“Uh, huh?” He said, pulling his t-shirt on. “Likely story. We both know you two are going to end up in bed again together. It’s fate.” He added the last part in a sing-song voice.

Izzy rolled her eyes. “Yeah, okay. You’ll be eating your words tomorrow when I tell you that we didn’t sleep together.”

“Whatever you say!” Jack shouted as she left the room.

SIX

Cara drove the two of them to a small club a little out from the centre of the city. It wasn't as glamorous as Parade had been. It clearly wasn't as new or as up to date as the other club had been. The exterior was a faded black; a small neon sign was in the front window that matched the sign out front that read 'Inclusio'. At this place, there was a bouncer checking IDs. He let Cara and Izzy in without a second thought, and Cara led the two of them towards the small bar off to the side.

They both took a seat and Cara ordered their drinks, a JD and coke for herself and a mojito for Izzy.

"You remembered," Izzy said with a laugh as the bartender walked off to fix their drinks.

"I have a good memory." She smiled.

"About today..."

"Let's not talk about it tonight," Cara said, turning on her stool to look over at her. "Tonight, let's just drink and have fun. Tomorrow and every day after that, if you need to vent to someone about what happened, I'll be there. It won't do good for you to dwell on it tonight."

Did Cara understand how hard that was going to be? It had been the only thing on Izzy's mind since it happened. Every thought somehow revolved around the event. *How could drinking make it better?* She was going to be a mess, but she could try it Cara's way. She had more experience in this type of situation than Izzy did.

"Alright." She agreed. "I'll take you up on that deal."

“Good.” Cara smiled, their drinks arriving seconds after she had spoken.

It didn’t take long before the two women had downed their first drinks and then their second, moving on to their third.

In that time, Izzy had learned that Cara was the only girl in a family full of boys. She learned that before being a medic, Cara worked for the fire department. She had enjoyed the first responder aspect of the job. It’s where she felt most useful, so she went back to school for her medic license. She loved her job. It kept her busy; she had a steady schedule, and she heard so many interesting stories from different people.

Izzy’s shoulders slumped slightly. She didn’t have any amazing or even interesting stories to tell. Her life experience was definitely less. She knew she was going to be a surgeon since she was a child. She originally wanted to be an ER surgeon, but her parents made it known that they wanted her to be a cardiothoracic surgeon like her father. So, she moved to the latter. The past few years of her life had been spent studying and coming top of her class, just so she could earn her position at City General.

“Do you actually want to be a cardiothoracic surgeon?” Cara asked when they were three drinks in.

The question was the same one that Izzy had asked herself every day. Did she really want to be in cardiothoracic surgery? After today, the answer was that she was unsure. It had never been her passion, nor did she even feel like it was a choice that she had made; more a choice that had been made for her. The idea of being an emergency surgeon seemed more thrilling, less routine. So many different things could happen in that situation. Heart problems were repetitive.

Taking a sip of her drink, Izzy shrugged. “I don’t know, but I’m here now. I don’t want to have to start all over, you know?”

“So, you’d rather live your life unhappy than start over *again*?”

Izzy shrugged. “I won’t be unhappy. I don’t hate what I’m doing now. I mean, I’m sure I’ll always be curious if there is anything more out there. But I’d be content.” Izzy said, taking another drink.

“I mean, whatever makes you happy. I would go for whatever made you happy. You can’t always do what your family wants you to do.” She sighed. “Trust me; mine wish I’d settle down and have children, but I’m too young for that just now. I love my family, but I want to be happy with myself.”

Izzy was tempted to ask questions. Mostly ones about Cara settling down. She knew it was none of her business, but she was interested. Izzy hardly knew anything about Cara, but she didn’t seem like the type of person who would ever settle down. She came off so wild and free. She kept her mouth closed, sipping from her drink.

Another drink in and the two had moved away from the deeper topics. Cara downed what was left in her glass and Izzy followed suit. Before Izzy could decide whether to order another one or not, Cara was taking her hand in hers. “Let’s dance.” She said.

How could she say no?

Izzy let herself be pulled to the dance floor. Their bodies pressed together just like the first night. It wasn’t the least bit uncomfortable or strange; instead, it almost felt natural. Izzy’s arms wrapped around Cara’s neck and Cara slipped her arms around Izzy’s body, making sure they stayed flush together.

She didn’t know whether it was the alcohol or how close the two of them were, but Izzy couldn’t help but think back to the night they had spent together. Being this close sent a tingling feeling through her entire body and judging from Cara’s wandering hands, she was feeling the same.

“Should we go somewhere together?” She asked, fully aware there was a chance she was going to make herself look like an idiot.

This wasn’t her intention when she agreed to go out with Cara tonight, but she was just as magnetic as she had been

when they first met. She felt like she was unable to control how much she wanted her.

She waited for Cara's answer, a lump forming in her throat when it took longer than she felt was necessary. So far, nothing about today seemed to be in her control. When Cara finally smiled down at her and said, "Yes." Nothing but relief flooded from Izzy.

She wasn't expecting Cara to pull her in for a kiss, right there in the middle of the dance floor, but when she did, Izzy kissed her back. She lifted herself up on her tiptoes so she could lean into the kiss, as Cara held her close.

When they parted, Cara spoke again. "My place this time? It's closer."

Izzy eagerly nodded. As they moved towards the door, Cara ordered an Uber. It was like the last night they were together, on repeat. They sat in the back together, as close as possible, their bodies rippling with excitement. It took everything in Izzy not to lean in and kiss her.

The building wasn't as new as Izzy's. It wasn't as luxurious, but it was still nice and in a decent part of town. They practically ran up the three flights of stairs and down the hall, to Cara's front door with her leading the way. Once the door was unlocked and the two were inside, it was once again a replay of the last time they were together.

It wasn't the least bit tentative this time. They knew what they were doing. They knew what each other liked. Cara pressed Izzy up against the door, hands on her waist, as their lips moved together. Their lips parted, tongues entangling. Cara still tasted like JD and coke, and Izzy knew she would never be able to drink one without thinking of her again.

When the kiss broke, Cara changed things up. She moved her hands to Izzy's bottom, lifting her. Izzy wrapped her legs around Cara's waist and Cara held her there with ease. Their lips met again as Cara carried her, taking full control of the situation.

Dropping her back on the unmade bed. It was the exact opposite of Izzy's put together apartment, but Izzy didn't care. All she cared about at that moment was touching Cara's body, and having Cara's hands touch her. They had no definition of what this was or what they were... Friends? Friends with benefits? Something more? Who the hell cared when it felt this good.

The kiss deepened as Cara's hands started moving over Izzy's body. She unbuttoned Izzy's jeans, sliding them off of her hips and onto her bedroom floor. Cara's jeans followed, as did her t-shirt, then Izzy's. They could hardly take their hands or lips off of each other as want drove their actions. For the first time, Cara's hand came up to Izzy's breast, cupping it and rubbing her thumb over the lace and the hardened nipple which lay underneath.

Izzy remembered the desperation she had felt last time, wanting nothing more than for Cara to touch her. Now she finally was. She arched her chest into Cara's hand, silently urging the woman to continue what she was doing. Wasting no time Cara's removed Izzy's bra allowing her to suck and bite her nipples. Izzy's whimpers turned into quiet moans, and Cara herself was getting more and more aroused.

She loved seeing Izzy like this.. Half-closed eyes, full lips parted in sighs of pleasure, skin flushed. The sounds she made sent a sharp contraction through her body. When she stopped, Izzy pouted. She pushed herself up on her elbows, her dark brown eyes boring into Cara's with question.

Before she could say anything, Cara smiled at her. "How do you feel about toys?"

"I, eh, like a vibrator?"

"I was thinking more strap on?" Cara hovered above Izzy for just a moment, and a look of hesitation came across her face. *Was she pushing to it too far too soon?*

Izzy's smile grew, "I'd love that."

Cara jumped off the bed her heart racing. Pulling out the strap on with its black harness from the drawer she wasted no

in putting it on and adjusting the straps before making her way back to Izzy who lay back with her legs as wide as her eyes in anticipation.

As Cara leant in for a kiss, she felt the pull of the strap against her clit and the hardness against her stomach. She felt Izzy's legs lift, wrapping themselves around her body. All she could think about was how much she wanted her. Every time they had gently brushed past each in the hall. Every time she smiled, and now she was here with her again. The mix of desire and excitement made Cara's heart feel like it was about to burst.

Cara pulled back, lowering her hand to place the tip against Izzy's wetness. Cara let out a small laugh as Izzy immediately pushed her hips upward.

"Patience." She told her. "Patience."

Izzy let out a frustrated sigh, but Cara kept slowly rubbing. Her smile grew just a little more wicked as she reached down and with one small press at the base at the dildo, it began to vibrate.

Cara felt her breathing rasp a little as she felt the small, fast movements of the strap against her own clit. God, she was going to enjoy this. With another buck of Izzy's hips, the tip entered her slowly. Cara was mesmerized. Izzy's eyes were closed. Her mouth parted gently. Her dark hair spread across the white sheets. She was so beautiful.

Pushing in deeper, Cara fought against her own pleasure to keep her eyes open so she could keep watching Izzy. As she thrust a little harder, Izzy's head pushed against the pillow, her mouth opening wider, releasing a deeper, more guttural moan. *I don't want this to end.*

Picking up pace, and responding to Izzy's request for her to be harder, Cara became lost in the rhythm the two had naturally melted into. Hard and relentless, Cara gave everything she had. Izzy's legs were clamped around her waist pulling her in, her hands tightly grasping the sheets pulling them up and off the bed. She could feel a small bead of sweat tickle as it ran down her forehead. As Izzy screamed, arching

her back and tightening her thighs harder still, Cara kept the pace, entranced with the look of almost pain that threw Izzy's mouth wide and eyes tightly shut. As the shudders from the orgasm beneath her mixed with her own arousal and the strap rubbing against her clit, she allowed herself the smallest of releases.

"Out, out!" Izzy's hands were shaking as they motioned Cara to pull away.

Cara gently eased herself out and fell back against the sheets alongside Izzy, panting to catch her breath.

When Izzy finally spoke, her voice was still a little shaky. "Jesus. That was amazing."

Cara grinned. "Glad to hear that. Don't tell me you're tired now though?" Cara's question was answered as she felt Izzy's hand on the strap-on, moving it up and down slowly and with it, the straps that held so tightly against Cara's clit.

"Turn over. I want you on all fours now."

Izzy did exactly as she was told, holding her ass high in the air. *How the fuck did I get so lucky?* Was all Cara could think as she looked at Izzy's firm ass and glistening readiness. Entering harder and deeper than before, she rode her hard, pushing Izzy's head down into the bed. As her own excitement built, she watched as Izzy threw back her head, tensing her body and letting out a primal groan. She felt Izzy's orgasm in a shudder and a gush. As a trickle ran down the top of her thigh, all she could do was moan in delight.

Afterwards, they lay together, hot and sweaty. Izzy lowered her hand, sliding it down the straps to where they split. Her fingers rubbed gently against Cara's swollen clit.

"Ah, no you don't." Cara's hand swatted away the hand which was teasing her. "Tonight was all about you."

As Izzy's lips fell onto hers, she accepted the kiss.

"Are you sure?"

Cara nodded once. "Absolutely. You can make it up to be another time." The words slipped from her lips without a

second thought. It wasn't until a beat after she had spoken them that she realized what she had done. She had made the promise of another time between the two of them. She could easily go back on her word, call it a slip of the tongue... but that's not what she wanted.

She may have not been ready for a relationship, but she was ready for whatever this thing with Izzy was. She just wanted to keep seeing her. She wanted to keep hearing her make those noises.

SEVEN

“She said I could make it up to her another time.” The next morning Izzy had gotten to work early, after waking up in Cara’s bed. She was grabbing some coffee with Jack before her shift, and he was getting some of the previous night’s highlights. Izzy, as she often tended to do, was replaying the words Cara had said over and over again in her head. She needed help to decipher them, and Jack knew Cara better than she did.

Jack shrugged, bringing his coffee cup to his lips. He took a sip, wincing as it initially burnt, but he drank more anyway. “It means there’s going to be a next time. Also, for the record, I just want to say I was right. I knew you two were going to sleep together again.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Izzy rolled her eyes, blowing over the lid of her coffee cup with the hope of cooling it. “But... what does that mean?”

“Does it have to mean anything? It means she likes you; she likes the sex, and she wants to do it again. Don’t think so much into it, Izzy.”

She sighed in response. Didn’t Jack know that was just who she was? “Should I tell her that I don’t want anything serious?”

“Did she ask you to move in or make any type of commitment?”

“No?”

“Then I don’t think you need to tell her you don’t want a relationship. I think she just wants to keep things casual between the two of you... so why not? Finding a consistently good lay who’s willing to work around our schedule isn’t easy. Cara might be the best option for you.”

Izzy sighed, “I guess you’re right. I’m probably overthinking it.”

“And then I said, ‘you can make it up to me another time’.” Cara sighed, burying her face in her hands. In the passenger’s seat next to her, Terri was absolutely *dying*. She was laughing so hard that she was wheezing, arms clutching her sides. “It’s not that funny!”

“Oh. It absolutely is. You’re telling her she can get you off later equates to you asking her on a date. It just means you two can have sex for the third time. Why are you freaking out so much?” Terri asked between giggles.

Cara sighed. “Because I want to keep it casual. I don’t want to turn this into something it’s not, and I don’t want to lead her on. I’d feel like a complete ass.”

“I don’t think you’re leading her on. It just means you like her, and you want to have sex with her again. Is that such a bad thing?”

“No, I guess not.”

“Exactly. You’ll be fine. I swear. I’m sure Izzy didn’t even notice what words you did or didn’t use.”

“Yeah... you’re probably right.”

As the days passed, Izzy and Cara began to run into each other more frequently. Each time, there was some very obvious flirting between the two and no mention of what Cara

had said. Both decided not to bring it up unless the other one did.

Most of the moments between the two of them were in passing in the hallway. Sometimes words weren't even exchanged. Cara would wink at her, and Izzy would melt in return.

Then, one day, Izzy realized that she hadn't seen Cara that day despite knowing she worked. It felt weird that she had slowly begun to memorize her schedule. She knew which days she was likely to run into her at the hospital, and she secretly looked forward to those days more than she would ever admit to.

Testing her luck, even at the risk of coming off as a crazed stalker, Izzy entered the EMS break room a little after lunch. Standing there with a sandwich in her hand was Cara and another woman next to her. She was older but wore the same pale grey uniform as Cara did. They both turned to see Izzy, and a smile immediately spread over Cara's face. "Izzy! Hey!" Then she paused. "What are you doing here?"

Izzy panicked. For some reason 'looking for you' didn't seem like a good enough answer. It just felt creepy. So instead, she settled on a lie. "I was... um... wanting to pinch a bottle of water. You guys always have the best stuff."

The eyebrows on the older woman next to Cara were raised, but Cara herself appeared to buy what Izzy was saying. If she thought it was a lie, she didn't call her out on it. "Oh, right? Well... I know I shouldn't, I was just passing, and I didn't have change for the vending machine. I'll replace it later."

"Yeah, you should do that."

Before she could turn around, the unknown woman cleared her throat. "Right!" Cara said. "Izzy, this is my partner, Terri."

Izzy reached her hand out. "It's nice to meet you, Terri."

Taking Izzy's hand, Terri grinned. "It's nice to meet you too, Izzy. Cara has told me so much about you." That single comment had Izzy's cheeks flushing pink. "Well," Terri said, completely glancing over her previous comment. "I'm gonna

head back to the truck. Cara, you should probably hurry, so dispatch doesn't think we're slacking and make sure Chrissie doesn't catch you." Nodding to Izzy with a huge smirk, "I'll see you around." And she disappeared through the door, leaving the two of them on their own.

There were only a few feet between Cara and Izzy, both of them standing there, unsure of what to say. Finally, Cara spoke up and broke the silence. "You didn't need to steal a bottle of water, did you?" There was a knowing smirk on her lips that made the blush on Izzy's cheeks darken.

"I did!" Izzy tried to object before her eyes turned downcast. "I did, however... kind of want to see you." She spoke so quickly, in hopes to just gloss over it, that the last six words jumbled together.

Cara laughed. "I wanted to see you too. I just didn't have an excuse to make it to the cardio wing, and I didn't see you around the ER. I was wondering... do you wanna go out tonight? We could get dinner or some drinks or something. Totally not as a date, but just as a... thing."

Not a date. Why did those words make Izzy's stomach drop? Was it because she wanted a date with Cara? Still, she tried to play it just as cool as Cara was. "Yeah, we could do dinner tonight. That'd be nice."

"Cool. I'll see you at seven?" Cara asked, getting a nod in response. She stuffed a bag of chips to eat later in one of her pockets. As she was passing Izzy, she added in a low voice, "Pack a bag? You'll probably end up staying the night."

Of course, Izzy ended up staying the night. She began staying the night at Cara's place more and more often. Cara's place was cozy and just a bit closer to the hospital. It also didn't make Izzy feel like the walls were closing in on her. Her apartment was beginning to feel like a gift for giving up her free will.

The strangest part was... sex didn't always happen. Sometimes they would just pig out on takeout and vent about their days. They were becoming more and more comfortable in the company of each other.

Like now, they were both in their PJ's sitting cross-legged on Cara's patchwork couch. In their laps were Styrofoam trays from the Chinese place down the street. "So then," Cara said, continuing her story. "Terri realized that the woman *did* have use of the right side of her body. She was just so damn high that she didn't realize it. So, she felt *awful* because she was so patronizing in the beginning. I mean, granted the nurse gave us the wrong information, but still. It was awful."

Izzy laughed, holding tightly to her tray of food as her body shook, doing her best not to spill it on the floor. "God, that still sounds so much better than my day. Sara paired me with her *again*. It's like the fifth shift in a row that I'm shadowing her. People are beginning to talk, they're saying I'm her favorite, like I'm the teacher's pet or something."

"Wait. Wasn't she a complete bitch to you only a few weeks ago? I wonder what changed."

"I don't know, but it's starting to get a little weird. I kind of wish she went back to yelling at me again." Izzy sighed. It was beginning to get weird how often she was made to work with Sara. There were so many other talented surgeons at City General that she could learn from. Why was she paired continuously with the chief? Maybe this was her punishment. Maybe Sara didn't trust her after Thomas's death and wanted to keep an eye on everything she did.

"I wouldn't think too much into it," Cara said, shrugging a shoulder. "I'm sure it's nothing. She probably just sees the most potential in you."

"Yeah, you're probably right."

Izzy was five minutes late the next morning. More panic arose in her each second that she was late. Both she and Cara

had overslept, ignoring their alarms. They'd both just been busy at work the past few days and staying up late with each other. It was exhausting.

A minute after she had changed, Izzy was out of the locker room and trying to blend in with the other residents, Sara seemed to notice. "Frost!" She shouted over the crowd of residents trying to peek at the board and see who's service they were on that day. "You're not with Connelly today; you're with me. Hanson, you take Frost's shift with Connelly."

Izzy sighed. Once again, she was stuck with Sara. The crowd began to dismantle and head towards where their attending would be, leaving Izzy with the chief. The older woman looked at her; annoyance etched on her face. "This is the second time you've been late this week, Frost." Before Izzy could open her mouth and apologize or offer an excuse, Sara continued. "I don't care what my residents do in their personal lives, but I can't have them being late. If something's distracting you, you should probably get rid of it."

That wasn't going to happen. Izzy dipped her head and apologized. "I realize that. I'm sorry for my tardiness. It won't happen again."

"I really hope not, Izzy. You're bright and talented; I don't want to see your potential go to waste over that girl you're messing around with." *How... how did Sara know about Cara? It wasn't like they made whatever their relationship was obvious. Had she heard her talking to Jack? Or had someone told her about Izzy sneaking off to the EMS room to see her?* Izzy didn't know what to say and just like before, Sara glossed over it. "Anyway, since we've been working together so much lately... you can call me Sara when we're alone. Call me chief when others are around. I don't want people to think you're getting special treatment."

So Izzy was getting special treatment... but why?

EIGHT

Izzy was *exhausted*. Sara had run her ragged that day. Nothing was enough for the chief. But when Cara asked her to come over that night, she was unable to convince herself to say ‘no’. She wanted to spend time with her. Cara picked something up for them to eat on her way home, and they unwound from their day together, eating a decent dinner that wasn’t Chinese food and drinking a bottle of wine.

It wasn’t long after dinner when things started to get hot and heavy between the two of them. Cara’s hand slid up Izzy’s thigh, moving to her inner thigh and giving it a gentle squeeze. Izzy wasn’t able to resist (not like she would ever want to). Cara took her hand and led her to the bedroom. She pushed Izzy back onto the bed, crawling on top of her. Their lips met, the kiss between them deepening rather quickly. Izzy was into it. She leaned into the kiss, got her fingers all tangled in Cara’s short hair.

When the kiss broke, Cara cursed. “Sorry,” She mumbled. “I just remember I don’t have a clean uniform for tomorrow. Do you think it’d be okay if I ran down and put one in the wash? I know, I know, totally unsexy.”

Izzy *laughed*. She had thought she had messed something up, or Cara remembered she had a real date waiting for her. But no, she was just upset over laundry. She gave her shoulders a shove. “Yeah. That’s fine. Just hurry up, I’ll be waiting on you. I may even start the show without you.”

Cara raised her eyebrows. “Oh? I’m definitely into that.” She gave Izzy another quick kiss. “I’ll be right back, I swear.”

Izzy watched as Cara gathered her uniform from the floor and ran from the room. The front door slammed behind her as she left the apartment. Izzy laughed once more to herself and decided to just let her eyes rest while she waited for Cara.

Cara returned less than ten minutes later. She entered the bedroom, fully expecting to be receiving a nice little show from Izzy. Instead, she was curled up in the center of the bed, faintly snoring. She couldn't help but smile, shaking her head.

It would be easy to get upset or be annoyed, but why would she be? Izzy was exhausted. She didn't want to do anything unless she was completely into it too. She approached the bed, trying to be as careful as possible so she wouldn't disturb the sleeping Izzy. She moved Izzy's body so she could pull the blankets over and tuck her in.

After changing into her PJ's, Cara crawled into bed next to her. She laid there for a minute, observing how peaceful Izzy looked. That's when she realized, as much as she wanted to deny it, she was falling for Izzy. This was the last thing she wanted, but here she was.

There was no way around it either.

The next day, Cara ended up finding Izzy alone in one of the hospital hallways. Before anyone could interrupt the two of them, she grabbed her by the wrist and tugged her into the nearest supply closet. When the door shut behind them, Cara spoke. "I know, I know. A supply closet, clearly the most romantic spot in the hospital." That earned a giggle from Izzy.

"I mean, I usually think of the bathrooms in the ER as the most romantic, if you're asking," Izzy replied resulting in Cara playfully rolling her eyes before leaning in for a kiss. Izzy leant into the kiss, deepening it as she pulled Cara in closer. She just couldn't get enough of her. The sight of her made her smile and her chest lighter.

She felt Cara's hands run under her top and everything in her body lit up in response. Running her own hands down

Cara's stomach and slipping them under the waistband of her cargo pants, she knew exactly what she wanted to do. Their lips touched gently, teasing each other, toying with the lingering anticipation of a kiss. As Cara took a breath in, tightening her stomach muscles Izzy took full advantage, pushing her hand down till she could feel Cara's wetness.

Grabbing her arm, Cara's eyes widened. "Not here. We'll get caught, and I've only got five minutes and I need to be back out at the truck."

"That's do-able," Izzy smirked as her fingers grazed Cara's swelling clit.

"No!" With widening eyes, she pulled Izzy's hands out of her pants. "I just wanted to see if you wanted to do something tonight?" She realized then that she could have just as easily sent that in a text message... but she wouldn't be able to see Izzy if she did that. There was something about seeing her that usually made the rest of her shift so much easier, especially when she was as hot as she was right now.

Izzy pouted in mock frustration, "Yeah, I should be free. Do you want to go out or just stay in?" Her eyebrows raised suggestively.

"Let's order in. Although I have to warn you, I have a feeling I might not have that much energy left if your call volumes are as busy as they have been this morning."

"Yeah, staying in's good. I'll give you a massage and relax your muscles if that's the case. Your place again?"

Cara nodded in response to the question. "I'll pick you up after your shift. Text me if anything changes, alright?"

"Alright," Izzy agreed.

Cara leaned in and pecked her cheek before turning to open the closet door. Before she left the closet though, her mind completely slipped. "I'll see you tonight. Love you." The last two words left her lips before she could even think about what she had said. Not wanting to face Izzy after that, she fled from the closet, panic filling her every movement.

She left, and Izzy was in complete shock. *Had Cara.... said those words? She couldn't mean them, could she? It had to be a slip. It couldn't have meant anything serious.* That didn't change how just two simple words had made Izzy's heart sore and made her feel amazing. It wasn't as awkward as she expected it to be... and that had to mean something.

They were both silent on the ride over to Cara's apartment that night. Neither woman really knew what to say. Cara was waiting for Izzy to bring it up so she would have the opportunity to apologize for the slip of her tongue. The more she thought about it, the less she believed it really was a slip of the tongue though.

Cara hadn't been aware of it until that moment, but she had fallen for Izzy. Everything about her was something she found endearing. After spending weeks together, it just happened. She had absolutely no idea how Izzy felt. She hadn't texted her after the slip up and hadn't brought it up when she got in the car. All Cara got was a quiet 'hey' and then silence.

When she parked the car in her apartment's parking garage, she got out and grabbed her bag of stuff, slinging it over her shoulder. She walked around the car and opened the door for Izzy to get out. Their fingers didn't intertwine like they usually did. Instead, they started to walk up to her apartment in silence.

That was when Cara realized she had really messed things up. Things were so different between the two of them now. They had a good thing, and her stupid brain had blown it all to hell. She felt like a fool. Still, they walked side by side to the elevator, the silence between them unbreaking.

Cara opened her apartment door for Izzy and they both entered. She dropped her bag by the door while Izzy disappeared to the bedroom to put her stuff away. She had her own drawer at Cara's place because it was practical. As she

was spending more time at her apartment than her own, Cara felt it was only right that she got a drawer. *That didn't mean it was anything serious, though. Right?*

Izzy being out of the room made some awkwardness in Cara die down. "Want me to order from that Chinese place down the street?" She called to the other room. She heard the shower turning on before Izzy called back,

"Yeah. That's fine!"

She dialed the number, ordered some food, before she sank down on her couch. The more she thought about it, the more she realized how inevitable this all was. Izzy had a drawer, Izzy made herself at home in Cara's apartment (which was what Cara had wanted), she had memorized Izzy's order at numerous local restaurants. Maybe this entire thing had started out as lust, but it evolved. Surely Izzy had to see it.

NINE

After a few minutes, Izzy returned from the shower. She was in a pair of athletic shorts and her high school football team's t-shirt. Her dark waves were still dripping, soaking the grey material of her t-shirt and making it darker in places. She sat on the opposite side of the couch from Cara, her hands in her lap. There was more silence between them until Izzy *finally* broke it, "About earlier..." She started, but Cara cut her off.

"I know. It was stupid. I don't know where my mind was at. It just kind of slipped out and I'm so sorry. I don't want to mess things up because we have a good thing going between the two of us, you know? I like whatever this is. I don't want to pressure this into something more or..."

"Did you mean it?"

Cara swallowed when faced point-blank with that question. She looked at Izzy, trying her hardest to make eye contact. "I... I didn't, not mean it?" Cara knew the best option would be to be straight up with her about it, but that was hard. It felt damn near impossible if she was being honest. She didn't know if she was in love with Izzy, but there was something between the two of them. Was she really the only one who felt it?

Izzy nodded when Cara spoke. She fiddled with her fingers, focusing down on her lap. "I... I..." She swallowed. Cara was on the edge of seat, waiting for whatever Izzy was going to say. Did she feel the same way? Did she want to call things between them quits? Finally, in a small voice, Izzy said, "I feel the same way."

Her response made Cara's heart soar. "Do you?" It was stupid to double question Izzy's words. It would give her time to think it over, to make sure she meant them. What if she didn't? What if she was just saying it to make Cara feel less stupid?

Izzy stopped focusing on her fingers then, her eyes turning upwards to look at Cara. A small smile pulled its way over her lips. She nodded slowly, "I do."

Cara couldn't stop the response she had. She smiled widely, immediately reaching out and grabbing Izzy's smaller frame. She pulled her towards her, wrapping her arms around her. "Then... should we do something about it? Like be exclusive?"

"If you want to," Izzy smiled up at her, curling herself into Cara's side.

"Of course."

Izzy's response was more than Cara could have asked for. She untucked herself from Cara's side, pulling out of her grasp. She climbed into Cara's lap, her arms wrapping around her neck. "They'll leave the food at the door, right?" She asked, a mischievous glint in her blue-grey eyes. "Because I think we need to celebrate."

Cara moved her hands to her hips, pulling her that much closer to her. "Let's hope they do." She said, getting a good grip on Izzy. She moved her, laying her back on the couch. Cara crawled on top of her, leaning down to press her lips to Izzy's, "Because we're going to be too busy to come to the door."

Izzy didn't seem to have any objections as Cara got her hands under Izzy's shirt, finding her braless. She groped her breasts gently, her thumbs moving to her nipples, teasing them until they hardened. The groan it elicited from Izzy was just the beginning of the rewards she was counting on getting tonight.

She moved away, getting Izzy to sit up so she could discard her t-shirt. At this point, they knew each other well. Cara had a

good idea of what Izzy liked and what she disliked. She knew which buttons to push to get her going. There was something different about it now, though. A few simple words had changed everything between the two of them. Neither of them was complaining.

Izzy's shirt fell onto the living room floor as Cara lowered her back down, leaning in for another kiss. The kiss wasn't one that was as lustful as they both expected, instead it was passionate. It spoke of feelings that were only beginning to bubble to the surface between the two of them. Her hands moved back to Izzy's breasts, relishing the moment her thumbs brushed over her nipples and Izzy moaned into her mouth.

One hand left her breast, creeping down towards Izzy's bottoms. Cara rubbed her through the thin cotton fabric. Izzy's hips left the couch, moving toward Cara's hand. Cara loved making her like this, watching as she unfurled beneath her. It was better than any sex she could remember.

Cara broke the kiss so she could sit back and get Izzy's pajama pants off, discarding them onto the living room floor. She moved her kisses down, kissing a trail from Izzy's throat down past her bellybutton until she reached her short trimmed hair and swollen clit. Each kiss had her shuddering beneath her, the anticipation building.

She wasn't going to tease her tonight. Tonight was one of celebration, not one where she was going to drive Izzy mad. She moved back a bit on the couch her legs hanging over the arm. Using one hand, Cara spread Izzy's lips before leaning in and dragging her tongue up across her folds.

Izzy moaned – loud. A sound that was music to Cara's ears. She leaned in again, pushing her tongue deep inside, twisting in and out. It was driving Izzy wild. Then with one swift movement, she made her way up to her throbbing clit, sucking gently, allowing her teeth to graze over the top. The sound Izzy made was something that would forever be on repeat in Cara's head. She continued repeating that same motion, producing the same sound from Izzy each time.

Izzy was soaked. Cara ran her finger up and down before pushing inside her, curling them so they hit just the right spot. She didn't stop what she was doing with her tongue, combining the two in a way that she knew by now would drive Izzy insane. Cara liked how well she knew her body, how she knew exactly what would push her over the edge.

Izzy's hands had threaded through Cara's hair, holding her in place to continue what she was doing. Like Cara was ever going to stop. Izzy moved her hips toward Cara's face, clearly on the edge. She was desperate for more, desperate to push herself over the edge using Cara's tongue and fingers. When her thighs tried to close together and her fingers tightened their grip in Cara's hair, Cara knew she was close. She amped everything up until Izzy was crying out her name and didn't stop until her efforts produced uncontrollable shaking throughout her body. When she felt Izzy's grip loosen on her hair, she watched as she practically melted into the cushions.

Cara crawled back up and kissing Izzy gently. She kissed her back, clearly not wanting to move. They laid there for a minute, squished together on the couch until Izzy sat up, "My turn."

Cara reached out to grab her arms and pulled her back down. "You don't have to."

"I know." Izzy pushed her hands off of her. "But I want to. Remember, you said that I could make it up to you next time? Well, it's way past next time."

Cara didn't fight her as Izzy took her former place at the end of the couch. She reached up and hooked her hands under the waistband of Cara's pajama pants, tugging them down and letting them join hers on the living room floor.

She lay back down, pulling Cara's hips towards her face. "I want to taste you."

Understanding, Cara placed her a knee on either side of Izzy's body allowing her to scoot down so her face was level with her desire. She swallowed hard as Izzy hooked her arms around the back of her thighs, pulling her down to her face. As she felt the warm breath and a shot of electric pulsed through

her body. She allowed herself to be lowered and gasped as he felt Izzy's tongue and lips begin to explore and tease.

Being tongue fucked was one of her favorite things in the world and she couldn't help herself grinding down into the pleasure. Each moan she let out seemed to spur Izzy on deeper, harder and more insistent. As her orgasm grew, she felt Izzy's arms tighten around her thighs, pinning her in position so no matter how she might squirm she wasn't escaping from the intensity. With a rush and a shudder, her orgasm took her, coming harder than she had ever done with anyone. The release was incredible and as she fell forward onto her hands with Izzy under her, she couldn't stop the tremors that were rippling through her body.

As she looked down between her arms towards Izzy she was met with the biggest grin. The woman she loved so much was beaming with achievement.

“Was that okay?” Izzy asked.

Cara closed her eyes and let out a loud sigh as she smiled. Easing herself off the couch, she knelt at the side of Izzy and kissed her deeply. “It was more than okay. It was amazing. You are amazing. Thank you.”

“Thanking me sounds weird. I'm your girlfriend.” Those three words made Izzy feel warm inside. She liked how they sounded together, how they made her feel. She was Cara's girlfriend now.

Judging from the grin on Cara's face, she liked it too.

TEN

“I told you it was going to happen.” Terri said on the next shift with Cara. She sat in the driver’s seat of the ambulance, looking as smug as ever. “Once the whole sleeping together thing became a constant, I knew it was only a matter of time before you got together.”

Cara was fairly sure her cheeks were flushed, an abnormality for her. She wasn’t easily embarrassed, but here they were. She looked over at Terri and sheepishly shrugged a shoulder. “Yeah, yeah. It’s not what I planned...but it happened.”

If she was asked, Cara wouldn’t be able to answer exactly *when* she fell for Izzy. Over the period of time they had spent together, it just gradually happened. If they would have called the whole thing off after the first night, she never would have ended up here.

She didn’t regret it. Maybe she was in a new relationship a lot quicker than she originally planned, especially after her breakup with Ali...but she was happy. There was something about being dedicated to another person that made Cara feel content on the inside.

“Which is a good thing. She seems like a sweet girl.” Terri told her with a smile. “I like her for you. There doesn’t seem to be any crazy there.”

“The only problem going forward is she isn’t out to her parents.” Cara admitted to Terri. “But I mean, we’re together...so I’m sure she’ll tell them soon enough. She

probably wants to see if this thing is actually going to work. I don't blame her."

When Cara came out to her own family, they weren't immediately accepting. They didn't disown her or tell her she was going to hell, which she was thankful for. But they did tell her it was going to take them some time to accept it. They were open and honest, which Cara appreciated more than anything.

They finally came around when Cara entered her first relationship. They made her first girlfriend feel unbelievably welcome in their home. They adjusted with ease. Cara felt like Izzy's parents would be the same. What parents wouldn't

On the other hand, the look on Terri's face was skeptical. "Man, I would've appreciated that. I've had a few of these myself through the years and they have never ended well. That's like a major red flag."

A sigh left Cara's lips. *It was...but she was willing to look past it for Izzy. Sometimes it took people a while to come out of the closet, it usually took even longer when they had to admit it to their families.* "Only if there's other red flags. I think all of her friends know about me, so it's not like she wants to keep us a secret from everybody... just from her parents."

Cara felt more uncomfortable than she had in years. She was wearing a nice pair of jeans, a white top, and a navy-blue blazer. Her dark hair was slicked back, making sure not a single one was out of place. She was meeting Izzy's friends today, at the urging of Izzy. She looked at her watch, anxiously waiting for her girlfriend to join her. She had hoped that they would start small. Maybe meeting one friend, then another. But no, Izzy insisted they all should all get brunch together. All four of her best friends.

Izzy assured her that it would be okay. Her friends knew she was gay, so what could go wrong? She promised that they were all nice girls, all were super accepting of her when she

came out. “You look great!” Izzy’s voice broke through Cara’s distracted thoughts. She turned around, visibly relaxing when she saw her.

Izzy had on a cute yellow sundress with a white cardigan over it. Her hair was perfectly styled in something other than the loose bun she wore to work daily, and she had taken the time to do her makeup. While Cara loved how she looked on a day-to-day basis, there was something different about seeing her all dressed up. She was breath-taking.

As soon as Izzy was within her grasp, Cara reached out and hooked her arm around her waist, pulling her close. “You look amazing.” She said, pressing a kiss to her temple.

Izzy smiled up at her, not shying away from the public affection. That was a good thing, right? “I think the girls are already inside, so we should head in.” She took the lead, leading Cara inside the overly fancy downtown restaurant. It wasn’t a black-tie type of place, but it was definitely fancier than the places Cara usually attended.

After speaking to the hostess, she told them that the table they were looking for was on the back deck. Izzy led the way, stepping out of the double glass doors. There was a large round table with six chairs, four of them occupied. In the center of the table was a large yellow umbrella, offering some much appreciated shade for the diners.

As soon as Izzy stepped outside, the other girls squealed. Before Cara knew what was happening, everybody was hugging and telling each other how good it was to see them. Cara stood to the side, feeling like the odd woman out. She didn’t know these girls; she definitely wasn’t going to hug them.

When they all took a seat, Izzy began introductions. In order, the brunette on her immediate right was Monica, next to her was the redhead, Bets. Next to Bets was Eliza, who had short platinum hair and next to Eliza was Laurel, who had thick dark hair. Cara tried to commit each name and face to memory, but knew she was bound to forget.

The girls began chatting about life, about what was going on with their jobs and relationships. Cara stayed in her seat, holding Izzy's hand under the table as she listened. She learned that Laurel was an interior designer who was beginning to get work with celebrities. Monica was engaged to a guy named Seth, although they'd only been together for a year or so. Betty was a successful lawyer, working with her parent's firm and Eliza had close to a million followers on social media. The fact this seemed to be her career confused Cara.

Monica was the first to turn her attention to Cara. The way her green eyes looked at her made Cara feel uneasy. She felt like she was an animal on display at the zoo. "So...Cara, right? What do you do? Did you meet Izzy at the hospital?"

Before Cara could answer, Betty cut in. "Oh! Are you a doctor? I told you you'd hook up with a hot older doctor when you started at the hospital." She said, jabbing her finger at Izzy from across the table.

Cara didn't know whether or not she should be offended. Older? She was hardly three years older than Izzy. Did she really look that old? The questions stopped slamming into her after that, so Cara figured it was safe to answer. "I'm not a doctor, I'm a EMT, well, a paramedic. I met Izzy—," She glanced over at Izzy, trying to judge from the look on her face. *Did she want her friends to know they were originally just a one-night stand?* She got her answer when Izzy squeezed her hand twice under the table. She assumed that was no. "Yeah, I met Izzy at the hospital. I signed a patient over to her and we went from there."

Laurel's nose wrinkled. "A paramedic? Is that like...an ambulance driver?" She laughed, as if it was a joke.

Cara was a bit offended. She hoped she didn't let it show. "I actually went to school for two years to be a paramedic. We *almost* have the same patient privileges as doctors."

"But do you make as good money as a doctor? Izzy has expensive tastes you know and she likes her long-haul holidays."

“No, not as much as a doctor.” She gave a wry smile knowing full well they knew the answer before it left her lips. She glanced over at Izzy, hoping she was going to say something...but she didn't. Her mouth was closed, and she was smiling, laughing with her friends. Cara felt entirely out of place. She wanted to melt into the ground and disappear.

“Well,” Eliza said with a shrug. “it's a good thing Izzy's going to be making good money. She'll be able to keep up the lifestyle that she's used to.”

Izzy nodded a bit then, muttering a “Yeah,” in response to her friend's comments.

Betty hit them with the next question. “So, have you met her parents yet? They adore Izzy.”

Before Cara could answer, Izzy stepped in. “No they haven't been introduced yet. You know what it's like my hours are like crazy! Any you know I've not officially said anything to them about being gay. The right time has just never come up. It's not like it's a big thing.”

“Oh! I thought since you actually have a girlfriend now you would actually tell them. Didn't you always say you would when things got serious between you and someone? Or was that just an excuse?” Eliza almost seemed to be smirking as she asked the question.

Izzy's cheeks flushed. She was clearly uncomfortable with their questioning, just as Cara had been moments earlier. “Well, we've only been dating a few weeks. I don't want to get them involved just yet.”

After that, the questioning stopped. They ordered food and Cara listened as they all chatted about their lives. Never once did any of Izzy's friends seem interested in her, nor did Izzy try to make her feel included. She ate in silence, listening to them giggle and laugh. It was awkward. Cara couldn't remember the last time she felt like this. It was almost as if she was back at high school, sitting with the cool girls at lunch, but they didn't want her there.

When she finished eating, Cara excused herself to go to the restroom, where she just stood and looked in the mirror. She was trying to calm down, trying not to worry. Those girls made her feel like she wasn't good enough, something she had never felt with Izzy before. They made her feel like Izzy was too good for her, like she was some untouchable princess.

And Izzy didn't stop them. She didn't tell them the questions were too much, she didn't stand up for her. She just sat there, listening to them hound her with questions. It was enough to make Cara wonder...*was she ashamed? Was that why she didn't tell her parents yet? Did she not want them to find out about her because they wouldn't approve? No. Izzy had said that she hadn't had many relationships before. She clearly was just naïve when it came to this type of situation.*

Cara pulled herself together and left the bathroom. Just as she stepped back onto the deck, she heard the girls talking about her...again.

“All I'm saying is she isn't the type I thought you'd date. It isn't like she is your equal?”

A piece of Cara wished she would have stepped out a moment later so she could have heard Izzy's answer. Instead, they stopped talking when Cara took her seat. Izzy just looked down at her plate, refusing to meet Cara's eyes. Another hour or so of small talk and the brunch was over.

Everybody hugged and made promises that they would see each other again soon. They promised to text and keep each other up to date on their lives. They turned to Cara and gave her a small wave goodbye, making her feel like even more of an outcast. They had said it was nice to meet her, but she highly doubted they really meant that.

ELEVEN

When the four girls were gone and it was just Cara and Izzy remaining, Cara realized she couldn't hold it in anymore. "I don't think I like your friends much." She admitted as they walked hand-in-hand to where they parked.

Izzy looked up at her, eyebrows raised. "I know they can be a bit much but they mean well. We've all known each other since we were at prep school."

Cara couldn't buy that, she really couldn't. Maybe if it had been just one question that rubbed her the wrong way, she could write it off as a small misstep. Instead, there were multiple. They continued to talk about her after she had left the table. Who knew what they said that she didn't overhear? Hell, who knew what Izzy responded. "Do they? They have a really weird way of showing it."

Izzy stopped walking, letting go of Cara's hand. She turned to look at her, "Look, I know they overstepped but you're the first person I've really dated that they've met. They have my best interest at heart, I know they do. They will come around. Just give them time."

Cara sighed, running a hand through her hair. Who cared if she messed it up? She wasn't trying to impress anyone anymore; maybe she shouldn't have tried in the beginning. As soon as they heard she wasn't a doctor, their mind was made up about her. "They made me feel like I was trash, Izzy. They made me feel like I wasn't even good enough to be around you, and you didn't say a thing, and that is what made it worse. How would you feel if you'd been me?"

Izzy's nose wrinkled. She hadn't been thinking of it like that. She'd always cut her friends a lot of slack, but she hadn't thought this through and that was now obvious to her. Was she just that naïve? She looked up at Cara and took her hands.

"I'm sorry." She said, honestly. "I should have told them to stop. I just... I've never introduced them to someone before. Plus, if my friends are that bad... my parents are going to be ten times worse. Can't it just be practice?" From the look on Cara's face, she could tell that the answer was no. Izzy sighed, "I'm sorry, I really am. In the future, I won't allow anyone to talk to you like that, no matter who they are to me. But you don't need to worry. My opinion about you didn't change. You're more than good enough for me. You are way more than I deserve."

Cara sighed. She couldn't stay angry when Izzy was looking up at her with those big, round blue eyes. She genuinely believed that she just didn't know better. She reached down and wrapped her arms around Izzy's waist. She pulled her close, pressing her lips to her forehead. She stayed like that a moment, holding Izzy as she calmed herself down.

"It's fine." She finally said. "I guess I just really wanted to make a good impression on your friends, not look like a loser. I mean, I know I'm not one, but they made me feel like it. But... as long as you still like me and they didn't make you change your mind; I think I'm okay."

Izzy smiled up at her before leaning in and kissing her. It was a light peck, something soft and hopefully comforting. "I will never not like you." She promised.

Honestly, Izzy felt guilty about how her friends ended up treating Cara. At the time, she hadn't seen a problem with it. She remembered grilling her friend's boyfriends with similar questions. Although she didn't remember getting so detailed about how much or how little they made. As long as her friends were happy, Izzy didn't care about money. She should

have shut things down when they kept asking Cara about money, she just hadn't realized at the time.

She tried to push that out of her mind, hoping to focus on work. Things between her and Cara had felt okay when they parted this morning, but she was still worried that deep down Cara was still hurt over it. She checked her phone, finding no text from Cara, and stuffed it back into her pocket.

She was with Sara again today. She was beginning to wonder if Sara was going to be her permanent attending. She had softened up on Izzy a bit, no longer berating her for small mistakes, but that was weirder than anything. She ruled the hospital with a heavy hand. Everyone feared being called to her office... except Izzy. She had complained to Jack about it earlier, about how she desperately wanted to learn from someone other than Sara. He had just laughed and told her; "She's the Chief for a reason, Izzy. She clearly knows what she's doing. Just roll with it."

So that was what Izzy was trying to do, just 'roll' with it. She popped her head into Sara's office. The place was crystal clean. The wall was lined with certificates that the hospital had earned under Sara's lead, Izzy did note that there were no pictures of family. Sara's desk was clutter-free. Everything had a proper place. That was something Izzy had learned while working under Sara – the woman was probably the neatest, most organized person that she had ever met.

Sara looked up from her desk before Izzy even spoke. If Izzy was being honest, she was pretty sure she saw the smallest of smiles grace her lips. "Good morning, Frost. Do you have our patients for the day?" There was a pause. "Come inside. Don't stand in the doorway like you're unwanted."

Izzy managed a polite smile before she stepped inside. "Good morning, Chief Dev – I mean, Sara." She pulled out the small tablet that the surgeons used to keep track of their patients and their records. "Today we have a stent on Mr. Lee and," As soon as Izzy's eyes scanned over their next surgical patient for the day, she couldn't stop herself from sighing. "Another stent on Mrs. Rojas."

Sara turned her attention away from whatever paperwork was on her desk and focused it solely on Izzy. “What was that sigh for?”

Izzy wanted nothing more than to write it off. She wanted to tell Sara that it was nothing, but the truth was... Izzy couldn't hide the truth. “I... uh... I don't know. I've been having some qualms about whether cardiothoracic surgery is where I should be.” She admitted. Just saying the words out loud felt such a relief. She was sure people like Jack suspected she wasn't happy in her choice, but she'd never spoken those words before. She had told Cara that she had had no choice and Cara questioned her if she was going to be happy, but Izzy had never freely admitted that she wasn't sure if her heart was in it.

She expected Sara to yell at her for wasting her time, to put her on suspension until she figured things out. Instead, Sara's features softened. “Frost, I can't tell you what to do. If you're unsure about cardio, though, we can sit down and look at other long-term options for you to explore. If you want to stick it out though, we can make that work too.”

Izzy couldn't remember what it felt like to have a real option when it came to her specialty. She had been entirely convinced that emergency surgery was for her, but her parents all but insisted on cardio. Izzy didn't want to displease anybody, and her parents had done so much for her. She switched after two weeks with emergency surgery as her chosen specialty. She swallowed, her eyes focusing on the ground.

“What I can tell you Frost is that you'll make a damned good surgeon.” Sara rose from her desk and came around, taking Izzy's hands in her own. “It's a big decision and not one to be rushed. I'll make a deal with you. Give it another few months and if you still feel the same let's revisit it and I will give you every bit of help, I can afford you. Do we have a deal?”

Finally, in a small voice, she responded to Sara. “Yes, thank you. I very much appreciate that. I suspect I won't change my mind though.” She looked up slowly, expecting to see disappointment or annoyance. Instead, Sara's features were

still soft and gentle. As she felt her hands being gently squeezed, she gave the older woman a smile.

“That’s okay. Keep working with me just now and I’ll look after you. If it isn’t what you want in a few months, then we’ll sort it out for you. Will that be okay?” She released Izzy’s hands before going back to her desk.

Izzy smiled, eagerly nodding her head. Sara didn’t blow up like she expected her to. Instead, she was ridiculously understanding. Maybe everybody had been wrong about her. Maybe she was just a bit rough on the outside, but soft on the inside. “That’ll be perfectly fine!” Izzy couldn’t contain her excitement.

Sara stood from her desk then, matching Izzy’s smile. “Well, let’s get started for the day then.”

TWELVE

Cara sat in her PJ's, watching as Izzy moved around her kitchen with nothing but grace. She had insisted on making them dinner, saying that they were eating out too much. Cara definitely agreed. She was getting tired of picking between three local cuisines each night, but they were both generally tired from work. Izzy had gotten off work tonight with more energy than usual. Cara would have been concerned if it wasn't so endearing.

"Do you need any help?" She called over.

"I'm good." Izzy looked up at her with a smile as she continued cooking.

She wanted to ask Izzy why she was so happy about her day but couldn't quite figure out how to phrase it without sounding suspicious. She wanted to assume that whatever surgery she practiced that day had gone perfectly or she had saved a patient's life. But the sight of her girlfriend humming and moving around the kitchen, collecting ingredients to make dinner was certainly a new one.

Finally, curiosity got the best of Cara. She stood off the couch and walked over to the breakfast bar. She didn't sit on one of the wooden stools, instead; she leaned on it with her elbows, holding her chin in the palm of her hand. "So..." She started. "what's gotten you so happy tonight? Not that I'm complaining, I'm just curious."

Izzy looked up from the pot of noodles that she was boiling. "I talked to Sara about perhaps moving out of cardio and

specializing in another area. She was amazing. Really understanding. She says she'll look after me just now and if I still feel the same in a few months, she'll help me make the switch."

Cara's brows knitted together in the middle of her forehead. "I thought you were specializing in cardio."

She sighed. "I am, I am. Just... I told Sara that I wasn't sure my heart was in it and that maybe I made the wrong decision. She was *super* understanding about it."

Cara tilted her head to the side. "I thought you were okay with cardio because that's what your parents wanted. I thought you didn't want to start over or whatever."

"I know that's what I said, but I couldn't hide it from Sara. She saw my face; I think she figured it out and just wanted me to admit it."

Something didn't add up, but she couldn't put her finger on it. It was just a few weeks ago when Izzy spent her nights venting about working with Sara, how impossible the woman seemed and how she ruled with an iron fist. Now she was doing Izzy favors. Something was off, but Cara didn't want to ruin her girlfriend's happiness. Instead, she settled on changing the subject. "So... if you are all about making big decisions and announcements soon, does that mean you're going to tell your parents about us?"

That was evidently the wrong subject to change to. She watched as her girlfriend froze up, refusing to make eye contact. Before Izzy could respond, Cara was trying to cover her own ass. "Not that I'm pressuring you to or anything. I just thought that since you're going against their cardio wishes that you would... you know."

If she was being honest, Izzy keeping things a secret from her parents was bothering her. She knew coming out was a huge thing, but Cara thought things were getting serious between them. Why wouldn't Izzy want her parents to know? From previous conversations she gathered that they weren't huge homophobes or anything, they just had big dreams for

their daughter. They wanted her to have a picturesque life. Being gay likely didn't fit that picture for them.

"I haven't told them." Izzy admitted before instantly busying herself with cooking. "I promise I'll tell them soon." Her voice took on a tone that Cara wasn't entirely familiar with... it was almost cold.

"Hey, no big deal." Cara walked around the breakfast bar, into her small kitchen. She got right up behind Izzy and wrapped her arms around her waist, pulling her back against her. Izzy was frozen at first, which sent a fresh wave of panic through Cara. Just as quickly as she had frozen though, she relaxed. "Speaking of parents though... Do you want to have dinner with my family this weekend? I told them about you and they're eager to meet you... only if you want to come, of course."

Izzy swallowed, going back to focusing on cooking before quietly answering; "Yeah, let's do it. I'm up for it."

"Great," Cara kissed the side of her head. "I'll let my mom know tomorrow."

"Oh God, what am I going to do?" Izzy sat at a table in the hospital's cafeteria. Her head was in her hands, her lunch tray pushed to the center. Next to her, Jack rolled his eyes while her friend (and fellow resident) Rachel looked concerned.

"Well, I mean, not being dramatic would be a good start, if you ask me." Jack said, reaching over and plucking a fry off of Izzy's plate.

She looked up, uncovering her face. "I'm not being dramatic. Cara wants me to meet her parents. Isn't that moving way too fast?"

Jack shrugged. "Cara is close to her family, it makes sense."

"Isn't it a good thing that Cara wants you to meet her family?" Rachel asked. "It means she likes you a lot, right?"

Rachel wasn't wrong. Izzy would have been more concerned if Cara wanted to hide her from her family... like Izzy was currently doing. The difference was, Cara was out to her family. Izzy wasn't. She was waiting for the right time to tell them, but she couldn't figure out when the right time was. Evidently it was soon though because Cara had upped the pace.

Izzy wasn't complaining. She liked that Cara liked her enough to bring her home to her family; she liked the pace at which they were moving together. It just made Izzy feel like garbage since she hadn't even had a second thought about outing herself to her mom and dad anytime soon.

"I guess." Izzy sighed. "But what if they hate me? What if I make a bad first impression?"

"Even if you make a bad first impression, I'm sure Cara won't care. She likes you for you, with or without her family involved. Right?" Rachel looked from Cara to Jack.

"That's not entirely true," Jack was shaking his head. "Cara is like *super* close to her family so if they don't like Izzy... well..." He shrugged raising his arms with a full fork of food that looked like it might fall at any minute. "Although... they didn't like Cara's ex, and they still stayed together. Anyway, you don't have to worry. You'll make a fine first impression, Izzy. You've overthinking it."

"I've never had to deal with stuff like this before, Jack. It's way more stressful than surgery." It was true, Izzy was probably much better than Ali had been. Izzy wasn't in the business to put another woman down just to make herself feel better, but from the stories that she had heard from Cara about her ex meant she didn't have a great deal to live up to.

"Like Jack said, you're overthinking it." Rachel said, offering a small smile. "Just be your usual charming self. I'm sure her parents will like you. I mean, Cara likes you, so her parents probably will too."

There were so many things that could go wrong. "Yeah, it'll be fine." She told herself, although she wasn't entirely sure she believed it.

“I mean, if it isn’t... you and Cara can always go back to being friends with benefits or whatever you were before you two started dating. That worked out for you two, right?” Jack widened his eyes in mock question as he shoveled in a mouthful of food.

Izzy grabbed a fry from her tray and chucked it at Jack. “That wasn’t helpful advice, you ass.”

“It took your mind off of freaking out about meeting Cara’s family though, I think I win.”

But what if it went as poorly as it had when Izzy introduced Cara to her friends? Izzy hadn’t even considered her friends would have treated Cara like they did, so what if Cara wasn’t considering that her family might just hate Izzy? If Izzy had learned anything about being in a relationship, it was to expect the unexpected.

“Okay, you’re probably right.” Izzy sighed. She reached onto her tray and grabbed a fry, this time she tossed it into her mouth.

“I mean, if things don’t work out between you and Cara, there’s always Chief Thomas.” Jack tacked on, waggling his eyebrows playfully. “She seems pretty into you.”

Izzy turned to look at him, her face turning into what she hoped was a death glare. “I’m going to throw something worse than a fry at you if you say that again.”

The chief just liked her because Izzy was eager to please. She was a good student. That’s why her teachers had always liked her. There wasn’t anything more there... right?

THIRTEEN

Izzy couldn't remember ever feeling this nervous before. She was taking this seriously, because it was a very serious matter, despite Cara trying to convince her otherwise. "My parents are pretty relaxed." She had told Izzy. "They don't even dress up for chapel, they just wear their nicer clothes." Even still, the need to impress them was haunting Izzy, making her feel nervous.

They pulled up to the middle-class neighborhood that Cara had been raised in. All the homes were cookie-cutter, the same brown brick exterior with white panelling and steep roofs. The yards were well maintained with children's toys or lawn chairs scattered across them. It was a good neighborhood where people took pride in their homes. Cara put the car in park, turning to Izzy before she took the key out of the ignition. "It's going to be okay." She said for the umpteenth time. "They're going to adore you. Just like I adore you."

"What do I even say?" Izzy asked, staring down at her lap, her hands clasped together and trembling.

"Hi. is usually a good start." Cara grinned. Reaching over, she took Izzy's hands in her own, forcing her to look at her. "Hey, you gotta trust me. It's going to be fine. Okay?"

Looking into Cara's eyes, Izzy felt most of her anxiety melt away. She trusted her, knew she only wanted what was best for both of them. Cara wouldn't lie to her about something like this. She nodded. "Right. It's going to be fine."

“Good. I’m glad you’ve finally got that in your head. We should probably get out though before people start wondering what’s taking us so long.” She turned the car off and shoved the key into the pocket of her jeans.

Hand-in-hand, they walked up the driveway together. Izzy did everything in her power to make herself look straight ahead and not down at her feet. She kept repeating to herself that it was going to be okay, like that was her new mantra. Before Cara could reach out to knock on the dark-brown painted door, it swung open.

“You made it!” A woman grinned, stepping outside, and throwing her arms around Cara. Not knowing what to do, Izzy let go of Cara’s hand and tucked herself off to the side.

“Of course, I did. I told you I would.” Cara smiled.

The woman was older, with shoulder-length dark hair, the same olive colored skin as Cara and the same dark eyes. “Mom, this is Izzy.” Cara said, gesturing over to Izzy.

Izzy’s stomach was doing backflips. Oh God, what if she didn’t like her? What if she said something wrong? She tried to shove her fears to the side. “Hi Mrs. O’Leary. It’s so nice to meet you.” She extended her hand, in hopes that it was an acceptable greeting.

Cara’s mother let go of her, stepping over to Izzy. She looked down at the extended hand and proceeded to ignore it, wrapping Izzy in a hug instead. Izzy stood awkwardly for a moment before she returned the hug, although loosely. When they parted, the woman smiled down at her. “Please, call me Ann. Mrs. O’Leary is such a mouthful. It’s such a pleasure to meet you, Izzy. Cara talks about you quite a lot. Let’s get you two inside.” She stepped back from Izzy and turned to enter the home with Cara and Izzy following behind her.

Inside, the house was clean. It was clearly a home, lived in and worn over time. The scent of freshly cooked dinner and cinnamon filled Izzy’s nostrils. She had experienced something like this before, whenever she went to a friend’s house from school. It was a stark contrast to her own childhood home, which was crystal clean from the maid her

mother hired and didn't quite smell of anything. It was easily believable that no one had ever lived in that house.

She liked houses like this. As a child, she often imagined what it would be like to have family dinners and spend holidays together. Izzy didn't have a bad childhood; she didn't grow up unloved or with some other sad rich kid backstory. Her parents were just busy professionals, working jobs that always required long hours and for them to be on call. She understood that when she grew up, but as a child... she longed for something like this.

They followed Ann through the living room to a small hallway where they took a left. The hallway led into the kitchen where the smell of food hit Izzy right in the face. Each burner on the stove had a pot on it, the counters were filled with different ingredients and Tupperware containers full of already cooked food.

"It smells delicious, mom." Cara said with a grin. "Whatcha making?"

Ann beamed over to her daughter. "Just roasted chicken, potatoes, a few other veggies. The usual. Nothing special. Although..." She paused, and Izzy watched as Cara's face lit up. Whatever the although was, Cara knew what was coming. "I did make your favorite crumb cake for dessert."

Cara let go of Izzy's hand and leapt forward, wrapping her arms around her mom once more. "You're the best!" She grinned.

Ann patted her on the back before turning around to pay attention to the stove. "Your father, Sean, Tom and Pat are in the dining room. You should join them; dinner will be ready soon."

Izzy watched as Cara's nose wrinkled. "Only Sean, Tom and Pat are here?"

"Oh, I know. I tried to get us all together, but Vinnie, Craig and Paul had other plans. They have their families, y'know? Unfortunately, they don't get to come around as often as they used to. But go say 'hi' to everyone else."

Cara took Izzy's hand once more and started to lead her towards the dining room. "Vinnie, Craig and Paul are all married." She informed her. "Paul has two kids, Vinnie's got three with this wife and Craig's a newlywed. Sean, Tom and Pat are the babies."

"And you're the middle one, right?"

Cara nodded. "Yeah, I thought they'd stop popping out kids when they finally had a girl, but here we are." She grinned as she pushed open the swinging door that led to the dining room.

The table was long and rectangular with at least twelve seats around it. It was an old table, with scratched wood and chairs with yellowing cushions. On the far end of the table sat a large, bald man. His skin was the same olive color as Cara's, with a thick, bushy mustache over his lip. They all sat chatting away casually, enjoying bottles of beer.

When they entered the room, Cara cleared her throat. All the attention turned to her and the older man smiled. "There's my little girl!" His voice was booming. It was loud and gruff, but somehow welcoming. It was another clear difference between Cara's and Izzy's life. Izzy's father went to the gym five times a week, never drank, and kept a full head of well-conditioned dark hair.

"Hey dad." Cara let go of Izzy's hand again, crossing across the room to where her father sat. She threw her arms around him and he hugged her back. When they parted, she looked over at Izzy. "This is my girlfriend, Izzy." She pointed to her father, "This is my dad, Russ." She then began to point to the men surrounding Russ. "This is Sean," She said, pointing to the youngest of the boys. "This is Pat," Pat had long dark hair that was pulled into a ponytail. "And this is Tom." Tom wore glasses.

Izzy had no idea how she was ever going to remember which brother was which. "It's nice to meet all of you. I'm Izzy," She said, offering an awkward wave.

"Come have a seat, Izzy. I was just tellin' the boys here about our last client and how much of a pain in the ass he

was.”

“Dad owns a construction company.” Cara said, walking away from her father and back over to Izzy. She took a seat next to Pat and then pulled out the chair next to her for Izzy, “all the boys work for him.”

“There was a spot in the company for Cara too, but she chose another path.” Russ said. “Gotta admit. We’re pretty proud of her though.”

Izzy offered a small smile, looking down in her lap while Russ continued his story. Evidently the client had them working on a ridiculous deadline and didn’t understand that rain was an issue with construction work. He finished the story by retelling how he had told the client that they could take their deadline and shove it. They’d have the work done at a reasonable time and it would be done right. “You should’ve seen the look on the sonofabitch’s face. It was the funniest shit I’ve ever seen.”

Everyone dissolved into laughter at Russ’ story. Everyone laughed, although Izzy was a little shocked. Her father never would have used that kind of language around a guest. She was fairly sure she had only heard him curse once during her childhood. When the laughter subsided, Cara started telling a work story.

Everybody was all ears, including Izzy. She was fairly certain she hadn’t heard that story from Cara before. Izzy kept her hands in her lap, making herself as small as possible as she listened to Cara’s story.

There was always something weird about being in a house that was not yours. No matter how nice everybody was or how much you liked the people you were around, there was still a level of uncomfortableness there that you couldn’t shake. That was how Izzy felt, uncomfortable. Everything was warm, everyone was welcoming... but she was still uncomfortable. Add in the pressure she was silently putting on herself to give a good first impression, and Izzy couldn’t relax.

She had a feeling Cara noticed because halfway through the story, she reached out and took Izzy’s hand in her own, putting

them both in her lap. The small touch was extremely comforting. It helped her relax enough to listen to the story and enjoy it.

Around the time Cara finished her story, Ann entered the room with a pan of chicken in her hand. "Dinner's ready." She said as she placed the pan in the center of the table.

Cara let go of Izzy's hand to stand, "Let me help you get everything in here, mom." And then she left with her mum to go back to the kitchen and bring in bowls of food.

She left Izzy there with Sean, Pat, Tom and Russ. The entire room took on an awkward aura as nobody opened their mouth. Clearly uncomfortable with the silence, Russ cleared his throat before speaking. "So, Izzy, how long have you and Cara been together?"

"Um, a few weeks." She answered. When she spoke, she didn't make eye contact. Instead, she looked straight across the table in the hopes that Cara would return soon.

FOURTEEN

After the food was placed on the table, everybody began to help themselves to it. Cara gently nudged Izzy with her elbow. “Hey, get some food.” She said quietly to Izzy. It didn’t take long for her to realize how uncomfortable her girlfriend was. Sighing, she took Izzy’s plate in her own hands. “I’ll fix your plate for you.”

With all the plates served, Russ led the family in saying grace. Religion was an aspect Izzy was unsure about. Her family weren’t vaguely religious, but being respectful, she bowed her head with Cara’s family. When it was done, everyone perked back up and began to eat.

It didn’t take long for the conversation to turn to Izzy. It seemed like everybody was interested in Cara’s new girlfriend. “So,” Ann began. “What do you do, Izzy? How did you meet our Cara?”

Izzy took a small bite of food, drinking some water afterwards before answering. “I’m a surgical resident. Cara and I met at the hospital.” She felt Cara’s eyes on her at the latter answer. It was a lie she had started, so she didn’t look bad in front of her friends and it seemed she was still clinging to it. Plus, telling her girlfriend’s family that they met at a club and hooked up didn’t quite feel like the proper option.

“Ah. A surgeon.” Russ mused, stuffing his mouth with some mashed potatoes. Izzy had a feeling he hadn’t swallowed all of them before saying, “What’s your specialty? Surgeons have specialties, right?”

Keeping her eyes focused on her plate in front of her, Izzy shrugged. “At the moment it’s cardio but... I don’t know. I’m considering my options.”

“Really? What options are they?”

Izzy was beyond thankful when Cara jumped in. “Oh, she’s just working through some stuff right now. She was originally in for cardiothoracic, but she isn’t sure it’s for her. She’ll make a decision in the next few months, right Izzy?”

Izzy nodded. “Yeah, right?”

“Not to show my ignorance,” Russ said, stuffing more of the dinner into his mouth. “But what’s a cardiothor – whatever that word you used was?”

“Cardiothoracic.” Izzy said. “It’s a specialty in the heart, lungs and the other organs in the chest.”

“There’s other organs in the chest besides the heart and the lungs?” Pat piped in.

An awkward silence fell over them after that before Ann asked the next question, “Izzy, what do your parents do? Have they met Cara yet?”

Izzy drank some more water. “My mother’s a psychiatrist and my father’s a cardiothoracic surgeon. They live in New York, so they haven’t met Cara yet.”

“Any plans for you two to go visit?”

Izzy didn’t know what to say, so Cara jumped in. “Izzy’s parents don’t know about ‘us’ yet. They don’t know about Izzy’s sexuality, but I think Izzy is gonna tell them soon, right?”

Izzy felt completely put on the spot. She hadn’t even really considered telling her parents yet. She knew that she had to. She knew the longer she put it off, the worst it was going to look. Every day she didn’t tell them just built up her anxiety and gave her more of a reason *not* to tell them. She knew keeping this a secret would get to Cara and cause them problems if it wasn’t already. She swallowed, keeping her eyes

focused down on her lap instead of the surrounding people. “Yeah, I’m going to tell them soon.”

“Are your parents homophobic, sweetheart?” Ann asked in a motherly tone, one that made Izzy feel like it was mocking more than caring. “We weren’t the best at accepting Cara when she first came out... but we came around. She’s our daughter and we love her, even if we don’t agree with all of her life choices. I’m sure your parents will be the same.”

“They’re not.” Izzy shook her head, still not making eye contact. “They just... I don’t know if they’re expecting it.”

She didn’t want to let them down or hurt them, even if it wasn’t on purpose.

“They might.” Ann told her. “You’ll never know until you do.”

Cara reached down, lacing her fingers with Izzy’s and pulling her attention somewhere other than her lap. “I promise that no matter what, it’ll be okay.”

“I know.” Izzy said.

Luckily for Izzy, that seemed to shut down the questioning of her. Ann and Russ turned their attention to asking questions to the boys about their lives, about work and girlfriends. Dinner came to an end and Ann offered to fix Izzy a plate to take home, which she accepted. She helped Cara and Cara’s mum clear everything away, but she was quiet for the rest of the evening as she thought about everything.

She probably looked like the shy, awkward girl. That wasn’t how Izzy was. She was confident and fun. People loved her... but she couldn’t be that person, not right now with so many things swirling through her head.

When the night with Cara’s family came to an end, Russ and Ann hugged Izzy goodbye and told her how good it was to meet her. Izzy returned their sentiment before Cara took her hand and led her down the driveway.

“I think that went okay.” Cara said when they were both in the car with the doors shut. “What do you think?”

“It was fine.” Izzy said. “Your parents were nice.” And they left it at that.

Cara was at work the next day, stationed in a gas station parking lot while they waited for calls. Her phone buzzed, telling her she had a message. She was expecting it to be from Izzy, who hadn’t said much that morning. Instead, it was from her mom. *‘Call me when you can? Love you.’*

It was never a good thing when her mom wanted her to call. Worried filled Cara, so she told Terri she would be right back before she hopped out of the truck. She dialed her mom’s number before leaning against the side of the red and white truck. The phone rang twice before Ann’s voice answered on the other end, “Hey sweetie.”

“Mom, what’s wrong? Is everything okay?”

“Oh honey, it’s nothing. I just wanted to see how you were.”

“I’m great mom. What did you think of Izzy? She’s great, isn’t she!”

“Yeh. Yeh.”

“Mom, what is it? Didn’t you like her?”

“Oh, it’s not that Cara, it’s just after Ali we thought—well I don’t know what we thought but it’s just... your father and I were talking last night after you left, and we weren’t sure if Izzy’s right for you.”

It wasn’t what she was expecting her mom to say, but it still made Cara’s heart drop. It made her stomach tighten in that not-so-familiar anxious feeling. She swallowed again. “Why do you think that?” She didn’t want to get angry. She wanted to hear her mom out.

“Well,” Ann started. Cara could tell she was stalling on the other end, trying to find the right words to say what she wanted to say. “She seems a bit... stuck up. She hardly talked

to us last night. We just don't want you to rush into another relationship."

"She's not always like that, mom. I think she was just nervous." Cara was quick to excuse her girlfriend's strange behavior, but that didn't stop the thoughts from entering her mind.

She thought back to the brunch with her friends, how they made Cara feel like garbage and how Izzy never stepped in. She thought about how Izzy didn't talk about work with her as much anymore. *Maybe her parents knew she was gay, but she didn't want them to know she was with Cara, maybe she was worried that they'd think she wasn't good enough.* She was clearly ashamed of how they met, not wanting anyone to know they had met in a bar.

"I know and I'm sorry, perhaps I shouldn't have said anything. We just want you to be happy no matter who you are with."

Cara knew her parents just cared about her, and they didn't want to see her hurt yet again. She swallowed. "I know. Thanks mom. I appreciate you caring enough to tell me what you really think. I really do."

"I know, baby. Please let me know if you need anything. No matter what."

"Thanks, mom. I'll think about it, promise. I love you. Take care."

"Love you too. Keep in touch and stay safe." With that, her mom hung up and Cara stuffed her phone into the front pocket of her work cargos.

Her mind was racing, problems she didn't know were a thing now racing through her head. She had brought Izzy over to her parent's house in hopes that they would see how wonderful she was; now she was worried that everything about Izzy was too good to be true. She took a minute to try to regain her composure before walking around and climbing back into the truck. When Cara opened the door, Terri peaked over at her.

"Everything okay?" She asked, concern etched on her face.

Cara looked straight ahead, trying to keep herself together. She told Terri everything. They'd worked together for years at this point. "Yeah... it's just..." She debated on whether to tell Terri what was really going on. Finally, she said, "My parents didn't take too well to Izzy. They thought she was a bit stuck up."

"Oh." Was all Terri said.

FIFTEEN

Later that night, Cara and Izzy were going about their nightly routine. Cara laid in bed as she watched Izzy in the bathroom, watching as she brushed her teeth, went through her ridiculously expensive skincare routine, put her dark waves up in a wrap. Everything she did was meant to be perfect, and Cara was just now noticing that.

Izzy turned the light off in the bathroom before turning around and walking into the bedroom. She crawled underneath the covers next to Cara, tilting her head as she looked over at her girlfriend. “Hey, is everything okay? You’ve been quiet today.”

How could Cara look Izzy in the eyes and tell her what her parents had said? If she knew her girlfriend, like she hoped and prayed that she did, it would crush her. Cara was convinced that Izzy didn’t think she was better than anyone. Cara was completely convinced that Izzy had just come across as awkward, not stuck-up. Her parents just didn’t know the difference. But her mother’s words had wiggled their way into Cara’s brain, making a home there, making her anxiety rise at the thought. She didn’t want to think of her girlfriend that way, but now she was.

So, Cara did something that she wasn’t proud of, something she had never done before. She looked Izzy straight in her blue eyes and lied, “Nothing. I’m just extra tired. Today was rough.” She paused before asking, “Everything okay with you? You’ve also been a bit quiet.”

Izzy shook her head. “Everything’s fine. I’m just tired too and you’ve been extra quiet, so I kind of just followed suit... if that makes sense? I didn’t want to be obnoxious and drive you insane with my constant blabbering, y’know?”

Cara felt awful for lying, and even more awful that Izzy believed her. She did her best to shake off the conversation she had had earlier with her mother, hoping she could find a place in the back of her mind and store it there, forgotten, like an unwanted Christmas present.

“You could never be obnoxious or drive me insane, I hope you know that.” Cara said as she leaned over, wrapping an arm around Izzy’s shoulders. “But since you’re so tired, let’s get some sleep.” She pressed a kiss to her cheek and Izzy seemed to beam.

There was no way she thought she was too good for their relationship. No way at all.

Cara couldn’t sleep that night.

The pressure of everything was beginning to weigh Izzy down. Being a surgical resident was stressful in itself, but not knowing what you wanted to do with your future? That made it ten times worse. Her future was sneaking up on her quicker than Izzy wanted to admit, ready to jump out and attack her at a moment’s notice. She was stressing so much, trying to figure out exactly what she wanted to do.

Sara had been true to her word, supporting her and helping her in every way she could. She’d taken time out of her busy schedule to chat about different options for Izzy, and she made it very clear that her door was always open. She’d even comforted her on a couple of occasions when the thought of disappointing her parents felt somewhat overwhelming.

It had given her the strength to talk to her parents about her doubts about her career path and whilst they were calm, their disappointment was obvious. It left her with a decision to

make. Did she follow what she felt was right, or did she go with what would make her parents happy?

On top of all of it, there was Cara. Izzy hadn't realized how much pressure a relationship would put on her. She thought it would be fun, thought they would have a good time... but she had hardly slept the night before because Cara was acting different. She was worried she had done something wrong.

Cara kept pressuring her to tell her parents about them, but Cara hadn't heard the disappointment in their voice when she told them about potentially switching specialties. She couldn't imagine the disappointment she'd have to hear when she told them she was gay. They'd accept her, but Izzy worried they would always be disappointed with her. She wasn't sure she could handle that, no matter how much she loved Cara.

She had already changed out of her scrubs and coat and into the jeans and shirt that she had worn to work that day. She had them stuffed in her bag, which she held onto tightly as she walked up the stairs to Sara's office. She had a report to hand in for the end of the day and they had arranged to have a chat about how Izzy was progressing.

Izzy quietly knocked on the door to Sara's office. Sara didn't even look up from her desk when she called, "Come in." Izzy stepped inside, taking a seat in one of the leather chairs across from Sara's desk. A few seconds later, she finally looked up at her. "Is it that time already?" Sara asked.

Izzy didn't speak; she just nodded her head.

Sara scrunched her lips to the side but didn't say a thing. "How are you feeling, Izzy?"

How could Izzy look at this woman and tell her that she still wasn't sure? How could she tell her that even after all her help, she still didn't know what she wanted? In a quiet voice, Izzy said; "I think I'm going to stay with cardio, if that's okay."

"Of course, that's okay... if that's what you want. Is that what you really want to do, Izzy? I want you to be sure before

you dedicate the next twenty years of your life to this.”

Sara’s words made the weight of it all come crashing down on Izzy. Whatever decision she made now was going to affect her entire future. She couldn’t keep it inside anymore. She leaned down, putting her face in her hands, and just started to cry. She had been keeping it in for so long that as soon as it started to come out; she felt she couldn’t stop.

She felt like an idiot for breaking down in front of her boss. She couldn’t imagine how emotionally unstable it made her look. She didn’t hear Sara get up from her desk or walk around to where Izzy sat, the next thing she knew was Sara was sitting on the arm of the chair she was in and wrapped an arm around Izzy’s shoulder.

Izzy leaned into her, crying even more. What was she going to do? It was all so overwhelming; it was a weight that she felt like she couldn’t carry any longer. Sara’s grip on her tightened, pulling her closer. Receiving such comfort was what made Izzy fall apart even more. It had all been building up for so long that it was finally spilling over. She couldn’t handle anything else on top of this.

Sara was sturdy, holding Izzy firm. She smelt like clean laundry and fresh cotton. The act of her rubbing her back, quietly whispering things to comfort the crying woman and her scent are the things that slowly lulled Izzy into some form of calm. Her tears finally began to come to a stop, the wave of emotion that had been rocking her finally coming to an end.

She slowly sat up, wiping at her tears with the heel of her hand. Izzy was sure she looked a mess, ragged hair, and smeared mascara. She was embarrassed for breaking down like this in front of Sara, who still hadn’t said a thing about it.

Sara broke the silence between them. “Are you okay?” She asked, her voice full of something that sounded like concern. “Do you want to talk about it or do you need me to give you a ride home? You’re in no condition to drive. We’ll reschedule this chat and give you a chance to step back a little.”

That was when Izzy remembered that Cara was probably downstairs waiting for her. She was probably starting to get

annoyed with the delay. She had been so caught up in her crying, in her emotions, that Izzy hadn't felt her phone vibrate in her pocket.

She shook her head. "Cara is going to give me a ride home. She's probably waiting for me."

"Alright, but are you okay, Izzy? People don't usually break down like that unless something is really bothering them."

Despite her breakdown, Izzy still had no idea how to put into words everything that she was feeling. She had no idea how to tell her girlfriend, let alone a stranger, that everything was piling up inside of her. "It's just... a lot." She said, because that was the best way to cover it. Everything felt like it was too much. Each new problem added another weight onto her shoulders. Now, she was worried about her future. Would she ever be happy?

"I know." Sara replied, her voice soft. She turned to look at Izzy, still perched on the arm of the chair. She put her hand on Izzy's cheek, cupping it gently in her palm, before using her thumb to wipe at her tears. Izzy wasn't sure what she was doing; it just felt natural to lean into her hand. "You're going to be okay though."

"I know." It was Izzy's turn to reply. She expected Sara to move away from her now, to further the distance between the two of them. She didn't.

What Izzy didn't expect was for Sara to lean down, closing what distance remained between them, and pressing her lips to Izzy's. Sara's lips were soft, full and eager to take hers. Confusion flooded over her. Confusion from the comfort this woman was offering her, but in her head and her heart she knew this wasn't right. It didn't feel right. It wasn't what she wanted. But Izzy didn't know what to do.

What if she pulled away and Sara retaliated? She was sure she didn't *mean* to take advantage of her in such a situation. For a second there... Izzy might have even kissed her back. She didn't really know.

SIXTEEN

Keeping the secret that her parents didn't quite like Izzy was killing Cara. She didn't know how, or even if she should, approach that topic with Izzy. What she really wanted was for them to give her another chance, maybe have dinner in a more relaxed environment where Izzy wouldn't feel so uncomfortable. As much as she hated knowing her parents didn't like her girlfriend, she still liked Izzy. That wasn't going to change.

She was sitting outside of City General, staring straight ahead at the Emergency Department sign. She was supposed to pick Izzy up twenty minutes ago, but she was still sitting, waiting. Izzy had always texted her when she was going to be out late, but so far, she had received nothing from her girlfriend.

She had sent Izzy two messages in the past twenty minutes, feeling like that was a reasonable amount. Cara knew how the medical field worked. She knew sometimes you got off late, that those types of things were out of one's control. Izzy was just so good at being in touch that it really felt off.

Cara wasn't sure what came over her, but she felt the need to go inside to check in on Izzy. What if something happened? What if she were stuck in a twelve hour long emergency surgery and couldn't tell her? She got out the car, locked it and shoved the keys into the pocket of her jeans.

She trekked through the parking lot and into the hospital entrance that led to the emergency department. In a moment of luck, the first that person Cara saw wearing scrubs was Jack.

He looked exhausted, but that gave Cara the idea that he and Izzy had been stuck in surgery together that day. Izzy would probably be following close behind him, right?

“Jack!” She called. When he turned to look at her, Cara moved forward to close the gap between the two of them. “Have you seen Izzy? I was supposed to pick her up twenty minutes ago.”

Jack looked down at her, the bags underneath his eyes clear. She had seen the same one’s underneath Izzy’s eyes. The signs of being a surgical resident. “No.” He said, shaking his head. “I haven’t seen her since lunch. I think... I think she said something about talking to the chief before she left? I think she had a review meeting with her.”

Cara hadn’t known that. It probably got lost in translation between the two of them somewhere. She thought Izzy had a few more days before her trial run ran out. “Right. Alright.”

“Chief was probably running late and made Izzy wait. You could go check if you wanted. Chief’s office is on the third floor, past the waiting room. You can’t miss it, it’s huge.”

She wasn’t sure if she should head up or go back to the car, but she couldn’t see the harm in heading up to the third floor to see she could find her.

“Thanks Jack, have a good night.” She headed towards the elevator. She pushed the button to the third floor and waited for it to take her up.

The entire time, Cara’s heart was pounding. She just had this awful feeling that something was wrong, and that scared her. She silently willed the elevator to go just a bit quicker. When it finally ‘dinged’ signaling that she had reached her destination, Cara rushed out of it. She headed past the waiting room, stopping when she saw what she assumed was the Chief’s office in front of her.

It was larger than the other rooms, jutting out from the wall and making it so the hallway turned in a sharp angle instead of continuing straight ahead. It was painted white, a stark contrast from the beige coloring of the rest of the walls.

She turned toward the doorway of the office, finding it wide open. When Cara turned to look inside, her heart dropped.

She was in that moment where her worst fears had come true; the one where she realized that the little voice inside of her head was right all along. Every emotion boiled up inside her. She couldn't process what she was seeing.

Izzy was kissing someone. She was kissing the Chief of Surgery. She didn't notice any other details, because what she saw was all she needed to see. All she could see.

“What the fuck?” Her tone angry and incredulous. “You've got to be kidding me.”

White hot rage that made her entire body feel hot, that made her feel like she wouldn't be able to control herself. So, she did what she felt was for the best. She turned and stormed away.

Cara's voice brought Izzy back to reality. She knew her lips had only been pressed to Sara's for seconds, Cara had just walked in at the wrong moment. But... there was no wrong moment. Izzy didn't have an excuse. She had kissed somebody other than Cara, even if she felt like she had had no other choice. She couldn't make an excuse for what she had done.

She pulled away from Sara, not saying a word before she stood from the chair, bag in hand, and rushed after Cara. She had to talk to her. She just had to hope that she could explain the situation and that Cara would understand.

When she got out of the office, Cara was nowhere in sight. Izzy knew she didn't have a lot of time. She had to speak to Cara before she left. This would be her only chance. She took the stairs, racing down to the ground floor. Her heart was pounding in her chest, pounding so hard and loud that Izzy thought she was going to drop to the ground.

The tears she had thought that she had finished crying were bubbling back to the surface, threatening to spill over at a moment's notice. She did her best to keep them shoved back down, trying to focus on finding Cara and explaining things.

She pushed the door to the stairwell open and ran through the lobby, out the front door.

SEVENTEEN

In the distance, she saw Cara's car, so Izzy urged herself to run just a bit further. The muscles in her legs were stinging; they felt like they would give out at any moment. "Cara!" She saw Cara's head turn and look at her; she watched the silent debate on her face, deciding whether she was going to just drive off or if she was going to talk to Izzy. She evidently decided on the latter. She didn't get into the car, instead she just leaned against the door.

When Izzy got close, she could clearly see the pain that was etched on her face. Cara wasn't crying, but judging from the way her face was twisted, she was close to it. "What Izzy?" Cara asked. She sounded tired; she sounded like she was trying to control her rage. "What do you want?"

"Let me explain. I know what it looked like, but it wasn't exactly what it looked like." There was no tangible way to explain it. There was no way to make herself look better. No matter how she tried to spin it, or how badly she wanted to tell Cara that she wasn't that person, there was no taking back what had happened.

"Izzy," She sighed, looking up towards the night sky. "Look, there's... there's nothing to explain. I get it, I do. There's a reason you're her favorite, right?" Her last sentence was said with such venom that it was hard to believe that it was coming from Cara.

The words stung Izzy, but she was trying her best not to let it show. This was about what she had done to Cara, right? Not

about turning this into an argument. “She kissed me! I... I didn’t know what to do.”

“Right. Because it’s too hard to say ‘I have a girlfriend’ or ‘No. Stop. I don’t want this’.”

“It’s not... I’m sorry.” There was no point in denying anything. She had messed it all up. Izzy just wanted to fix it. “It’s just... everything was too much, and it happened, and I didn’t know what to do. I know I should have pulled away; I was wrong. I’m so sorry.”

Cara scoffed, still looking everywhere but at Izzy. “You know, I guess I should have known it would be like this. My parents were right about you, I just didn’t want to believe it.”

That took Izzy by surprise. Her parents were right about what? This wasn’t where she wanted to do this, or how she wanted to do this, but she couldn’t stop herself from asking. “What? What were your parents right about? What are you even talking about?”

“You! They think you’re too good for me, you think you’re too good for everybody. You have this air of superiority about you, just like your friends do. And when you do something wrong? It’s everybody’s fault but your own. I’m sorry I wasn’t good enough for you, Izzy. Or, I guess I wasn’t enough period, but you knew who I was before you got yourself involved with me. You decided to jump in and fuck it all up, anyway.” Each word was spat with more venom, the anger in Cara spilling over the surface.

Each word stabbed Izzy right in the heart. Cara’s parents thought she acted like she was too good? Like she was stuck up? She had thought everything had gone okay with them. She had thought the meeting had been fine. Why hadn’t Cara said anything?

“I — I — ” She was lost for words, so Izzy ended up doing what every hurt person did... she hurt Cara right back. “I’m so sorry I was uncomfortable with meeting your family after dating you for two seconds. Don’t you think that was rushing into things just a bit? We barely had a chance to get started before you’re taking me home.”

“And you couldn’t have said anything? Oh. That’s right. You don’t like saying things. You’re somehow too scared to speak your own mind at any given time. You can’t tell me you think it’s too soon to meet my parents, you can’t tell your parents that you like fucking girls. You’re too scared of everything, so you just self-sabotage it all. You know, I thought I was getting out of the toxic bullshit when I broke up with Ali, but I jumped right back into it with you.”

Izzy was left speechless. What was she supposed to say? The woman she loved just told her how awful, how toxic she was. Maybe Cara wasn’t wrong, maybe Izzy was too scared of confrontation to make any difference in her life, but she never intended to hurt anybody. She never, ever wanted to hurt anybody. Especially somebody that she loved.

“I’m...” She didn’t know what to say. She looked back over at Cara, tears blurring her vision. “I’m sorry.” Izzy felt lost. She knew she had messed up, but she had no idea how to sort it. She couldn’t take back what had been, and the tears flooded her eyes.

Cara looked at her, and for a minute, Izzy thought she saw her face go to soften. Instead, it seemed to harden even more. It was like she doubled down on her anger towards Izzy. She scoffed, shook her head. “I don’t know why I’m wasting my time with this.” She said. “It’s clearly not worth it. Have fun being the teacher’s ‘pet’, Izzy. You’ll really get ahead that way.”

She didn’t give Izzy a chance to say anything; Izzy didn’t know what she would say if she could. She watched as Cara got into her car, slammed the door shut and sped away. Izzy just stood there. She watched until the car became nothing but a blur in the distance.

Her heart felt like it was shattering in her chest. How had everything gone so wrong in the space of an hour? How had she messed this all up? All she wanted to do was to be happy... all she wanted to do was make the right choices. It was clear now that all she had done was mess up everything around her. She stared after the car for just a few seconds longer before turning and walking back towards the hospital;

she was going to have to get an Uber home to her empty apartment.

As Cara drove away, she knew that she should not be driving. Her vision was blurred from the hot tears stinging her eyes. Maybe she shouldn't have said everything that she did to Izzy, maybe she should have heard her out. But... what excuse could Izzy give that would make this all make sense? She all but admitted to kissing the chief and who knew what else they had done. The very thought made Cara feel sick.

She was angry, hurt. She felt like a damned fool for letting someone in so quickly after Ali, after she had sworn off relationships for a bit. Izzy came into her life like a tornado and left a mess of everything in her wake. She had made Cara a mess; a mess to a level that she never imagined reaching again.

She didn't remember the drive home or how she got there. All she remembered was pulling her car into the parking garage. She grabbed her stuff out of the car, tears still streaking down her face, and walked up to her apartment.

When she slammed the door, Cara allowed herself to fall apart. She allowed herself to fall to pieces alone, in the middle of her living room. Why had she been so blinded by love?

EIGHTEEN

It had been almost a month since her split with Izzy. She refused to think about Izzy. She had avoided going into ER as much as possible and Terri wasn't happy with her at all. She'd gone back to Parade a few times but she couldn't bring herself to hook up with anyone because everyone reminded her of Izzy. When she was surrounded by people, keeping busy she could wash all the pain out of her head.

But as soon as she was alone again, it all came flooding back to her. Each time the pain hit her with a fresh wave, taking over her completely. She had lost count of how many times she had almost been late to work because she had a breakdown in her shower. This wasn't her first breakup, but it was hitting her differently. Cara had had such high hopes for the two of them.

Cara and Terri were stationed in a grocery store parking lot, waiting for their next call. Cara looked over towards the store, her feet kicked up on the dash of the ambulance. "Should I run in and grab lunch for us?" She asked, leaning forward just a bit to check the clock. "It may be the only chance we have to eat all day."

Terri looked up from her phone with a sigh, "We just had breakfast. Do we really need more food?"

"Hey, suit yourself. I'll get *me* lunch and you can be hungry later." Cara sat up straight in her seat, her boots slamming

from the dash onto the floor. She reached over for the door handle when their radio interrupted.

“Unit 256?”

Terri reached down and grabbed the radio, “This is Unit 256. Go ahead, dispatch.”

“Unit 256, we need you to respond to a cardiac arrest call. Patient is male, early sixties. He’s unconscious and his son is performing compressions. Sending you the address.”

“You got it.” Terri responded before clicking off the radio. She looked over at Cara, “Guess that means no lunch for you, huh?” She teased, causing Cara to laugh.

Since Terri had handled the radio call, Cara reached over to the computer on their dash. She flicked it on, and it loaded their call information. Just like the dispatcher had said, cardiac arrest, male, early sixties. She reached out to click the address so the navigator would lead them to the address – and she paused.

“Oh fuck,” She whispered under her breath. Panic began to flood Cara, a feeling she wasn’t quite used to. Everything went hazy for a moment as she fought to control her breathing. She was pretty sure Terri had spoken to her numerous times, but Cara hadn’t quite heard her, and she couldn’t speak.

Finally, Terri’s hand was on her arm, giving her a shove. “Cara? What is it? We gotta go, dude.”

Cara swallowed, hard. “Terri... that’s my parents’ house. Our patient is my dad.” Tears were threatening to spill over, but she did her best to keep them inside. She knew she needed to act rationally and with a straight head... but... but her dad.

Before Terri could respond to say they should hand the call off to another unit, Cara had slammed the truck into gear and was heading out.

“Okay. Okay. It’s fine. It’ll be my call. It’s okay. It’s gonna be okay.” Terri voiced had gone up a couple of octaves and Cara wasn’t sure if she was trying to comfort her or herself. With the sirens blaring, they didn’t exchange any more words as they sped through the streets.

As they arrived at her parents' address Terri jumped out of the ambulance, leaving Cara to go around the ambulance and grab their bag from the back. She watched as Terri raced through the doors of the house; Cara flew behind her. As often as she'd been told to become emotionless in the field, to not let things get to you, there was nothing that could have prepared her for this. Not when it's family.

Cara knew that she should have let dispatch know as soon as she realized that it was her family's home, but she wanted to get to her father as quickly as possible. She'd apologize to Terri later.

As soon as Cara stepped through the front door, the scene before her was one from a nightmare. Her father was lying on the living room floor, Terri was on her knees next to him, performing compressions. Pat was on the floor next to their mother, whose face was wet with tears. She looked up as soon as she saw Cara; the tears starting to flow even more. "Cara... I don't know what happened. Your father just collapsed. He wasn't breathing or moving. I called 911... they told me to do CPR, and I had Pat do it... but—" She started crying even more and Pat wrapped his arms around her, allowing Terri to attend to his father.

Cara couldn't do this right now. She couldn't listen to her mother sob about her father while she was trying to save him. "Pat, take mom outside. Please." Her voice was borderline desperate as she reached into her kit, getting the equipment out so she could bag her own father.

She got on her knees, using the bag to breathe for her father as Terri continued compressions. After a moment, she paused. Terri placed her index and middle fingers to Russ's neck and shook her head. "No pulse. Continue CPR." Terri was just as calm as ever, completely focused on the job in hand.

What was she supposed to do? Cara continued bagging, silently willing her father to pull through. If she had to pronounce it... life would never be the same. Another round of CPR and Terri stopped to check his pulse again. "I—I got a pulse. It's weak, but it's there. We need to get him and go." She said. "Continue bagging while I go get the stretcher."

Cara nodded at her partner's instructions, looking down at her father. As soon as Terri left, Cara quietly said, "Please dad... please."

Terri returned quickly with the stretcher and working together, they got her father out. Since it was Terri's call, all Cara had to worry about was driving. They got him in the back, told her mother and Pat that they were going to City General and headed in that direction, lights on and sirens blaring.

Cara didn't remember anything about the drive to the hospital; she just remembered arriving. They came to a stop in the ambulance bay and Cara hopped out, running around to the back to help Terri with the stretcher.

"I lost his pulse again in the back." Terri told her. "But I got it back again before we arrived. He still hasn't regained consciousness."

Every one of those words stabbed Cara right in the heart, but she did her best to try to keep it together. She was struggling. She wanted to breakdown, but that wasn't an opportunity that was afforded to her. She had a job to do. They wheeled her father into the Emergency Room and straight into rhesus. Fully gowned ER staff flooded around the gurney and she was hustled out of the way as they lifted him on their count of three across to the bed. Her job as an EMT was done, now she was just a daughter.

She jumped, pulled from her thoughts when Terri reached out and put a hand on her shoulder. "I'll call one of our supervisors and let them know what's going on. You go to the waiting room and find your family. Okay?"

"Okay." Cara said with a quiet nod. She took one last look back at the room that her father had been wheeled to before going to the waiting room, where she found her mother and Pat. She sat next to Pat; silence washed over the entire family. Everyone sat stunned.

NINETEEN

It was Sara's day off and Izzy had been placed with Dr. Trevor Hoffman. He was closer to her age, with dark, floppy hair, a stunning bone structure and hazel eyes. If Izzy liked men.... Dr. Hoffman would have been her type. Dr. Hoffman was kind of an asshole, though. He was extremely strict about how he ran things. Luckily for her, Izzy had worked with him a few times now and was able to live up to his standards.

She was following behind him in the hallway; they had just checked up on Mrs. Diaz, who had just had a pacemaker put in and was doing perfectly fine. His pager buzzed, and he stopped; Izzy followed suit. He checked it and turned to Izzy, "We're going to the ER." He said. "Got a patient in with assumed cardiac arrest,"

"Got it." Izzy said, following him to the ER.

Since her breakup with Cara, Izzy had thrown herself into work. She still didn't know what her choice was going to be, and she had a few weeks before she had to make a final decision. She missed Cara every day, deeply regretting what had happened between the two of them in the end. She still wanted to fix it... but Cara had never returned one of her calls.

Thankfully, she had managed to straighten things out with Sara and they'd put it down to a misreading of signals. Roughly translated, that meant Izzy would say nothing and her career would go on, unhindered. Sara did seem genuinely sorry, and she had assured her she had no idea what had come over her and that nothing like that had ever happened before.

Since then, she was solely focused on keeping her mind off Cara.

Izzy had seen Cara a few times at the other end of the department since but respecting Cara's obvious wishes she had stayed away. Izzy hadn't even asked for the clothes that she had left at Cara's place.

Jack had told her that Cara was doing okay though, she was trying to go back to her normal self. Izzy was happy for her. She was happy that Cara was trying to be happy. Despite everything, she still wanted the best for her.

Dr. Hoffman led the way down to the ER. As they pushed their way through the swing doors, they saw a sea of nurses and ER doctor huddled over the bed.

"What do we have?" Dr. Hoffman asked as he stepped into the room, Izzy following close behind him.

"Sixty-four-year-old male with cardiac arrest. Paramedics said he didn't have a pulse when they found him. After performing multiple rounds of CPR, it came back. On the ride to the hospital, he lost it again." The ER doctor said. "We've been thinking –"

They didn't get to find out what the ER doctor was thinking. The surrounding machines began to beep incessantly. One look at the heart monitor showed that the man was in atrial fibrillation. Dr. Hoffman jumped into action. "Get the paddles." He instructed one of the nurses who pulled the defibrillator from the cabinet. It was set up quickly, the paddles handed to Dr. Hoffman. "Clear!" He called and everybody stepped back.

When everybody stepped back, Izzy got a good look at the patient. It took her a split second to piece it together, struggling to recognize the familiar face. It hit her. That was Russ. It was Cara's father.

Dr. Hoffman shocked him once, but Russ was still in A-fib. "Clear!" He called, shocking him again. They all watched as his heart jumped back into a somewhat normal rhythm. He stepped back with the paddles, handing them off to a nurse to

put back into place. “I need an ECG and blood work.” He ordered to whoever was listening. “It’s urgent, so get on it.” With that simple order, everybody scattered.

Cara lost track of time as to how long they’d been in the waiting room. It was enough time for the rest of her family to arrive. Nearly half of City General’s emergency room waiting room was filled with O’Leary’s. Her mother had been uncharacteristically silent since the moment they entered. Pat had said she had been like that the entire ride over.

When Terri had called their supervisor, he had lectured them for running a call on a person they knew, but ultimately understood it. He told them both to take the rest of the day off and to keep them updated on what was happening. So Terri was waiting with the family. She said it didn’t feel right to leave Cara alone after all of it.

Her nieces and nephews were getting anxious, running around the waiting room, and getting a whispered lecture from their mothers. Her brothers spoke in a hushed tone to one another, mostly about the family business and what they were going to do with it now. She wished she could tell them to shut up, that the business didn’t matter right now. But she understood it, Russ hadn’t been willing to give it up to anybody, hadn’t trained any of the boys how to take over yet.

The waiting room doors swung open and the ER doctor stepped out. It was an older gentleman with a receding hairline and thick black glasses. He walked right over to the O’Leary’s and Cara’s heart was pounding in her chest. They normally always sent a nurse out, never a doctor. Something was wrong. Had her father died? Just the thought was enough to push her to tears.

“O’Leary?” He asked as he approached the family. They all nodded. “Our cardio team has determined that Russell has had a heart attack, a myocardial infarction according to the ECG, but he isn’t responding to any of our treatments thus far. Nothing we’ve done is pulling him out of his current state. We feel like the best course of action would be an emergency coronary artery bypass. As his next of kin, we need your

permission to proceed?" His attention was solely on Ann then, waiting for her response.

Ann looked around at the children before saying, "Of course. Anything to save our Russ. Do what you all feel is best."

The doctor nodded. "Okay. I'll have a nurse take you up to the OR waiting room, so you all can have some privacy and we have some paperwork we will need you to sign."

"Wait." Ann's brows knitted together as she looked up at him. "Right now? Today? I... I haven't had time to call his parents. We have so much –"

Cara reached out and put her hand on her mother's shoulder. "Mom, I'll call grandma and grandpa. They have to do the surgery now. Let all of us handle everything else. You just pray for dad, okay?"

Ann gave a slow nod, reaching up and putting her hand on top of Cara's. "Alright. That's fine. Just please save my husband."

"Frost!" Hoffman barked, causing Izzy to turn around from the nursing station. She was going over Russ' paperwork like Hoffman had instructed her to do, making sure she double-checked all of his test results before they wheeled him back to surgery. They had to make sure that everything was perfect, that all his blood work was right. There was no room for surprises.

"Yes?" She asked, stuffing the paperwork back into its manila folder.

"I need you to go speak to the family before we go back to the OR. Give them the basis of the surgery, what we're going to do. You've done that before, haven't you?" He asked. Izzy responded with a small eye roll and a nod of her head. "Great. Go do that, then come scrub in."

"But..." She had been biting her tongue about her connection to the O'Leary family since the beginning. She didn't want to cause a delay in Russ' case, or mess anything up, but Izzy felt like it was important information... especially

if she was being made to go talk to the family of her ex-girlfriend.

“What is it, Frost?”

“I... I know the patient. He’s my ex-girlfriend’s father.”

Hoffman sighed. He reached up and rubbed at his temples, refusing to make eye contact with Izzy for a moment. “You didn’t think that was something important to say in the beginning?” He didn’t give her a chance to answer. “Were you close to the patient? Will your former relationship affect you in the OR?”

“No.” Izzy said, shaking her head. “We weren’t close.” She had to pause and think about the last question. Would it affect her in the OR? She didn’t believe that it would, because she wasn’t close to Russ, she was close to Cara. They weren’t together anymore. “No. I’ll be fine.”

“I’m trusting you on this one.” He said, making eye contact with her. “If you mess this up, Frost... you’ll regret it.” Izzy knew that that was not a threat. It was the truth. If she somehow got too distracted by her feelings, whatever they were, and messed up the surgery... it wouldn’t end well for her. “Now, go tell the family.”

“Still?”

“You said you could still do your job, so do it.”

Izzy took a deep breath, sighing. She placed the folder she had been looking through back on the nursing station desk and gathered her composure. Here went nothing.

CHAPTER 20

She walked out to the OR waiting room, only to be greeted by the entire O’Leary family. Ann looked up, her dark eyes growing wide. “Izzy?” The sound of her name got Cara’s attention, causing her ex-girlfriend to look at her.

“My attending and I, Dr. Hoffman, will be performing an emergency coronary artery bypass on Russell.” Izzy began refusing to make eye contact with anybody but Ann. “The surgery may take anywhere from three to six hours. Afterwards, we’ll come back out to speak to you about how it went. The rest of Russell’s blood work looks fine, so we don’t anticipate any hiccups with the surgery, but as with any surgery there are risks as you have already been made aware of. If anyone has any questions, now is the time to ask.” She tried to keep her voice calm, tried to keep herself perfectly normal and professional. There was no time for emotions to get in the way.

The room was silent. The only person who spoke up was Cara, “I don’t think we have any questions.” She said. Izzy was reluctant, but she finally turned to make eye contact with Cara. It was the first time they had looked at each other in forever; it still made Izzy’s heart rate rise. “Just...” Cara ran a hand through her already disheveled hair, “please save my father, Izzy.”

Izzy had been putting enough pressure on herself, but hearing that from Cara made it worse. “We’re going to do our best.” She said, not wanting to make any false promises. She was already a villain in the eyes of her ex and her family. If

something were to happen to Russ... Izzy could only imagine how bad she would look.

With that, she turned and walked back down the hallway towards the OR. She scrubbed in before stepping inside. The lights were already dimmed, Russell was already under. There was no time to hesitate.

Hoffman allowed Izzy to make the first incision but took over when it came to opening Russell's chest and the stopping of the heart, which Izzy was more than thankful for. She couldn't imagine the pressure she would have felt if that was left up to her. She knew she would need to learn eventually, but Russ wasn't the patient that Izzy wanted to experiment on. She just wanted to make sure it went as flawlessly as possible.

"Do us the honors of hooking him up to the heart-lung?" He instructed and Izzy followed, working carefully. She judged every move that she made, working meticulously. Thankfully, Hoffman wasn't rushing her. He knew how important this was.

"Patient is on the heart-lung machine." Izzy said after a moment, looking back up at Hoffman with a nod. The heart-lung machine circulated blood through the body while the heart was stopped, keeping the tissue alive until his heart was restarted.

"Perfect. You're in charge of getting us a healthy vessel from the leg. Think you can do that?" Izzy was ready to get offended, thinking Hoffman was just being an ass, but when she looked up at him, it was clear that he was just joking with her.

"Think I can." She mumbled back, moving down to Russ' leg. Hoffman joking with her was off-putting, but Izzy decided to take it as a sign of respect from her attending. If he actually doubted her skills, he likely wouldn't have brought her into the OR.

When the three-hour mark hit, Cara started pacing. She was waiting for Izzy to walk through the doors at any moment and

deliver the devastating news that she didn't want to hear. She was waiting on bated breath, her heart pounding in her chest. The silent chatter that had filled the waiting room from her family earlier had stopped. Now nobody spoke. She would bet money that everybody felt as anxious as her.

She looked up at the clock, expecting to see a big difference in time. Only a few minutes had passed. She couldn't do this. She couldn't sit around and continue waiting. Cara stood up. "I'm going to go get us all dinner from a vending machine." They needed to eat. Eating would take their mind off of everything else that was going on.

Ann started to reach into her purse, but Cara stopped her. "I got it, mom. You have enough to worry about right now." Shoving her hands into her pockets, Cara walked off to where she knew the nearest vending machine was. She just needed a minute, some air. She needed to try to clear her mind, to get herself to relax. But she had no idea how to do that. All she could think about was whether her father was okay, whether he was going to be able to pull through.

She found the nearest set of vending machines and started feeding loose change into the slot. She was so lost in her own thoughts that she hadn't heard footsteps following behind her. She didn't realize she wasn't alone until a voice said, "I have some extra quarters."

She turned around to see Pat standing there, hands shoved in his pockets just like hers had been. "What are you doing?" She asked him.

"I wanted to make sure that you were okay."

"Pat, do you really think any of us are okay?"

Pat sighed, shrugging one shoulder. "No, but I know that you were close to him. You had to focus on being professional for like the first hour after finding him. Your ex is performing the surgery. I'm sure you have a lot going on."

Pat was a year and a half younger than her. They had been close growing up, but after a bit Cara found herself attached to her older brothers, wanting to emulate their behavior.

She had been close to her father. Growing up, Cara was your stereotypical daddy's little girl. Their relationship had only dwindled when Cara came out and her family wasn't immediately accepting. Her mother accepted it much quicker than her dad had and after that, their relationship was never the same but she knew he would do anything for her and his love was never in question.

Cara turned around, leaning back against the vending machine. "I... I don't know what I'm expecting to feel because all I can think about is how worried I am about dad. I can't imagine living in a world without him in it. I don't know how I would do that. I don't know how mum would do that."

Pat walked up to her side, leaning back against the same vending machine that she was. "I get it. I know I've struggled to grow up, but this has changed things. I want to grow up, y'know? I want to become a better person, one that dad would absolutely be proud of. Not just one he would say he's proud of. Before... before he collapsed, we were talking. Mom was in the kitchen and I was sitting with dad. We were just talking, and I was going to ask him some questions about business... because... I think I realized what I want to do. I don't want to do construction work for the rest of my life, but I want to run the business. I think we could use someone like that."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't. He didn't get a chance too. Dad was talking about how a part of him wishes we all went our own way like you did, how he wishes we didn't depend on him so much because sometimes he doesn't know how to run things. He just has to trust his gut. That's why I thought it would be perfect for me to step in, but... yeah." Pat anxiously reached up and tightened his ponytail.

"Dad's gonna be okay." Cara finally decided. She was sure of it because she had to be. "And he's gonna be super pissed when he wakes up and finds out we were all sitting around worried about him."

Pat looked over at her, giving a small nod of his head. "I... I think you're right. Yeah, dad's tough. He's gonna be okay."

How couldn't he be? I can't imagine something like a heart attack taking him down."

Cara looked over at her brother and smiled for the first time in hours. "Yeah. His stubborn ass is gonna get taken down by a bear, like he always used to say."

Pat mocked her smile. "Yeah. You're right." He pushed off from the vending machine, turning around to look at it. "I don't know about you, but I'm eating a candy bar for dinner and I don't think anyone can stop me."

And just like that, Cara felt a bit better. She was still scared to death, but she didn't feel so alone. Growing up in such a big family, she had quickly learned that it was easy to feel alone in a crowded room. Sometimes, she just needed a simple connection with somebody else, somebody to share her fears with and somebody to see things her way. Luckily for her, she had Pat to be that person.

In silence, they filled their arms with various snacks and treats from the vending machine, probably going overboard with the amount of junk that they bought. They did have a big family to feed though.

CHAPTER 21

Izzy watched, her heart rate speeding up as her anxiety built up. Hoffman was rerouting the blood past the clogged coronary artery and to the vessel that Izzy had harvested. She watched, observing every step he took, knowing that one day she would do the same.

Everything Hoffman did was with a certain ease that came after years of practice. He finished the reroute and then they removed Russ from the heart-lung machine. Then, right before their very eyes, his heart began to pump again. It was... it was a thing of beauty. It was something Izzy had never been part of before, but she knew she would never forget it. It was magical.

Dr. Hoffman turned away to look up at the monitor, finally giving a nod of his head. His attention turned to Izzy, “We did it, Dr. Frost.” He said and Izzy could see the smile in his eyes. “Mr. O’Leary is going to be just fine. Good work, doctor.”

Izzy was unable to describe how happy she felt, how successful she felt. She had somehow managed to push aside what she felt, her worries, her fears, her personal battles, and she had saved the life of Cara’s father. “Thank you, Dr. Hoffman.”

“Don’t thank me, Izzy. You worked just as hard as I did. Why don’t I close him up and you go tell the family?”

Izzy paused. She wasn’t sure she *wanted* to be the one to tell the family. Cara hated her, no doubt the rest of her family hated her. Izzy had ruined everything between the two of

them. She didn't feel like she deserved to be the one to give them such good news. But... she had helped save him. This was her job, emotions aside.

“Alright.” She nodded. She turned and walked out of the OR. She washed her hands and changed out of her gown before walking into the hallway. Her heart was pounding in her chest, radiating through each heartbeat as she walked toward the waiting room. Taking a deep breath, she pushed the door open.

This time, she actually allowed herself to look around. Inside the waiting room was what she assumed was Cara's entire family, and Terri. There were the siblings that she had met, and the siblings that she hadn't with their children and wives. They took up the entire waiting room. They were busy chattering quietly to each other. The only person who seemed to notice Izzy's presence was Ann. She cleared her throat and chatter around her dissolved into silence.

Izzy took another deep breath, preparing her speech. “We performed a coronary artery bypass on Russ this evening. I'm not going to explain to you the details of the surgery because I feel like all you really want to know right now is if he's okay. And he is. The surgery went well and he is in recovery as we speak. Russ is doing fine and we expect him to make a full recovery. You'll be able to see him in the next couple of hours.”

Izzy got to watch as the entire room lit up, as stress melted off a family and relief took place. She had delivered the news of a patient's survival before, numerous times at this point, but it was never somebody she knew.

The family hugged one another, cheering. The quiet chatter that had been in the room earlier turned into cheers, into excited voices and *I told you so's*. Ann stood from her chair and crossed the room, wrapping her arms around Izzy. “Thank you.” She said quietly as she squeezed her into her chest. “Thank you so much.”

Izzy didn't know what to do. She had never been hugged after delivering such news before. Hesitantly, she hugged Ann

back. “Don’t thank me.” She said softly. “Please don’t.”

Ann let go of her and turned back to her family, hugging every one of them. Izzy knew this moment didn’t belong to her, but she wanted to watch it just a bit longer. It was hard to explain exactly how she felt. She had saved a man’s life, performed a life-saving surgery.

It hit her then. This had nothing to do with her parents, this was her choice. This is what she wanted to do. Not because she was being pushed or following a family line. This is what she wanted to do because of the impact it had on other people. It wasn’t about her, this was about them, and that felt good. She thought she was giving up her free will, giving up her own choices when she elected cardio... but nothing was further from the truth.

Because in this moment... Izzy chose cardio. She chose cardio and she would choose it a thousand times over for more moments like this. She stole a few more seconds of this moment with the O’Leary family before she turned and walked back through the door and into the hallway.

Tears threatened to spill from her eyes, but these weren’t tears of sorrow, these were tears of happiness. Was this what it was like to just stop? Izzy stopped in her tracks and looked up towards the ceiling. She stopped herself from crying, pushing it all inside before starting to continue her trek. Izzy was so caught up in her own thoughts that she didn’t hear the door behind her swing open. Her attention was only caught when she heard someone softly say, “Hey, Izzy,”

She turned around to see Cara standing there, still in her work clothes although her work shirt had been unbuttoned, revealing the white t-shirt underneath. She swallowed, looking back at her. “Hey Cara,”

“I just... I wanted to say thank you. I know it’s your job and I know you’d do it for anyone, but I wanted to—I needed to. You deserve it. My family and I will never be able to explain how grateful we are for you. I know I said some awful things to you before and I’m sorry. I do regret them. Nobody deserves to be treated like that, no matter what happened.

Thank you for putting those behind you and being professional... not that I think you would be petty or anything.” Cara paused to run a hand through her hair. “Sorry, I think I’m rambling a bit.”

The entire time that Cara was talking, Izzy was just staring at her. It was the most contact they had had in weeks. Standing before her, she realized just how much she missed her. She had pushed it down for the past few weeks, throwing herself into her work. She had done her best to ignore the feelings that she had still felt, but seeing Cara right now made that really hard.

Izzy knew that she still loved Cara. She hated the way things ended between the two of them; she hated that she had ruined it all. But there was no time to focus on the past because Izzy was on a high. For the first time, she knew exactly what *she* wanted.

This newfound confidence was urging her to do another thing for herself.

“It’s fine. I don’t need a thank you, but it’s appreciated. And please don’t apologize... I messed up... I know that, but...” She paused, trying to find her words. She wanted to say the right thing, do the right thing. “I messed up, Cara. I know I’ve said that a thousand times at this point, but I regret everything that happened that night. I could stand here and tell you what really happened, what I think happened that night, how you didn’t see the whole picture. But that doesn’t change anything.”

It was a painful truth that Izzy had learned over the past few weeks. Even though Cara didn’t understand exactly what happened with Sara, it didn’t change the fact she saw Izzy kissing somebody that wasn’t her. In her mind, Izzy tossed away the relationship. Izzy felt like she did. “But... I would be stupid if I stood here and didn’t say I love you. I still love you. I’ve always loved you. I messed up; I know that. I know you’re probably going through a roller coaster of emotions right now, but you need to know it. I love you, Cara.”

Cara didn’t quite know what to say, it was clear on her face. Of course, she still loved Izzy. She loved her so damn much,

that was why it had hurt so much, that was why she was so angry at her for what had happened. She could have sworn they had had a good thing going before it all got thrown away.

Maybe she didn't know the entire story of what happened that night.

"I love you too." Cara glanced upwards trying to get a reign on her emotions. "I love you a lot, Izzy. I wanted this to work between us. I think a part of me still does... but I don't think we can. We're so different."

"I know." Izzy said. "But... I can prove to you that I'm a better person than you think I am. I was so... so weighed down by all these decisions, by everyone expecting something from me. I was confused and scared to make the wrong decision. Tonight, I realized that I made the right decision all along, just for the wrong reason. I'm doing the right thing. I'm in the right place. I just want to be with the right person and for me—that's you." She looked directly into Cara's eyes as she spoke. "Cara. I'm not scared of what my parents think or if we move too quickly. I'm not scared at all. All I want is for us to be better than we used to be. I want us to be together."

Expressing these feelings felt... so damn good. Izzy didn't expect anything out of Cara, and that was what made it all the much better. If she walked away from this moment without repairing at least a small part of them, it would hurt. It would break her heart all over again. But keeping this all inside would hurt more, passing up this chance to tell her exactly how she felt... Izzy would never forgive herself for it.

Cara looked at her, lips pressed into a thin line. Izzy could only hope she was saying everything Cara had wanted to hear. She could only hope she could move past what she thought she saw that night. As Cara stood looking at her, it felt like every second was an hour. Izzy felt vulnerable, exposed and exhilarated.

"I love you, Izzy. I've never stopped. I can't forget about you. I can't stop thinking about you. You're still the first thing I think about when I wake up. Christ, I can't even have a coffee without thinking about you." Cara shook her head. A

single tear rolled down her cheek. “We could try again? Have something better than before?”

Izzy felt her heart soar. Without thinking about where she was or what she was doing, she closed the distance between them and took Cara in her arms, kissing her with abandon. Everything in the world was right again. For both of them.

EPILOGUE

“Your mother is such a lovely woman, Izzy.” Ann was beaming as she slid in between Cara and Izzy, looping her arms through theirs and drawing them closer. “She’s invited me down for the weekend to New York to take in a show. We’ve just had a wonderful chat about musicals and it’s been a while since I’ve been to Broadway.” She squeezed her arms together in glee, pulling them all closer. “Now that Russ is back on his feet and Pat is managing the business they can look after themselves for a few days. I am so glad your parents came along.”

Izzy glanced over to her dad who was sitting chatting to Russ. They were deep in a conversation about heart tissue and harvesting veins. Catching Izzy’s eye, Cara nodded her head towards them. “All he talks about now is hearts and medication. You’d think he was the only person to have survived heart surgery.” She laughed and rolled her eyes.

“He’s doing great though, and he looks so much better.” Izzy looked from Cara to Ann, who were both beaming with pride. He had stopped drinking and had lost three stone since his operation and he looked the picture of health sitting chatting with her dad. “My dad will talk to him for hours about it. They’ll bore each other to death.”

“Well, at least they’re boring each other and not us! I’m away to make sure that Sean has got enough salmon and cauliflower steaks for the grill. God forbid a burger appears in this house now your father has turned pescatarian!” Ann slipped out from between the girls and made her way to the

barbecue which Vinnie and Sean were manning, leaving them on their own for the first time all day.

“I told you not to worry. Everyone is getting on great.” Cara slid her arms around Izzy’s waist. It was strange being held by the woman she loved in front of everyone, in front of her parents. She gave a quick glance around almost nervously, but nobody was giving them a second glance. They accepted them for who they were, individually and as a couple.

She had never quite believed that it could all be so easy. In her head she had built it up to be such a major obstacle. That she couldn’t free herself because of the worry about what her parents would think. But the reality was that being honest was exactly what she needed to do to live more freely. Ironically, her mum had guessed years ago but had wanted Izzy to find her own way. They were proud of who she was, and that didn’t matter what she did or who she was with.

Izzy was so relieved as she looked around. She would have married Cara regardless, but watching how all the pieces had fitted together well that was the icing on the cake. Her friends had been a different matter. They couldn’t understand what Izzy saw in Cara and that had hurt, but she had talked about it with both Cara and her mum before finally realizing there was no great loss in moving on with her life without them in it.

Terri, Cara’s partner, had been delighted to step in as bridesmaid, although she flatly refused to wear a dress. That was the thing about Cara’s friends, they were so much easier to be around and she liked that. There was a whole group of them, most of who were gay or queer or 100% lesbian as they liked to remind her, and all were coming to the wedding. It was going to be a riot.

In six months she would be Mrs ? she had no idea. They couldn’t decide on what the name would be should they double barrel, O’Leary-Frost? Should one take the others? Or perhaps they could combine names and have some sort of weird anagram, although Fear or Lost couldn’t be further removed from what she was feeling just now.

“Do you think they’d miss us if we nipped up to your old bedroom for half an hour?” a mischievous smile spread across Izzy’s face, followed by an eyebrow raise that strongly suggested it would be to Cara’s benefit to say yes.

“Only if you promise not to scream!”