

Chapter Two

"Okay Alexis, stare straight ahead for me." Doctor Ericka was gentle as she shined a light and studied her young patient's eyes. "Good. Now without moving your head track the light as I move it."

Alexis's gaze ickered as she watched the light move steadily in and out of her limited range of vision. Doctor Ericka nodded and turned to her computer making notes. The steady clacking of the keyboard was the signal the examination was over. Alexis remained seated on the table while her mother anxiously waited for the results.

"Well?" Lynn prompted when the doctor hesitated.

"As you know Miss Carter Alexis's eyesight has been rapidly deteriorating," the doctor said. "Alexis, be honest, how is your eye sight really?"

"I can tell light from dark," Alexis shrugged. It was how she was able to track the light despite the gray fog that consumed her vision. "Honestly though, it doesn't really bother me."

"Lexi," Lynn gasped at her daughter's nonchalant attitude.

"Alexis, would it be all right if your mom and I talk for a bit?"

"Sure," Alexis said getting off the table.

Taking out a foldable cane that snapped to its full length she used it to sweep the area in front of her to the door. Reaching it she let herself out and headed to the nurse's desk where the waiting room gave her a place to sit.

Once she was gone the doctor turned to the anxious Lynn. Like everyone else Ericka had drawn her own conclusions concerning the children's birth but having known Lynn for several years now she realized the rumors surrounding the other woman couldn't be true.

Lynn was a kind and genuine person. Her love for her children could not be denied. The kids hadn't missed a single appointment or booster shot. It was clear she sacrificed everything to ensure the kids remained healthy. In fact, aside from Alexis's chronic failing eyesight, none of the kids had ever suffered more than a cold. Such care just didn't t the image of a promiscuous lady of the night.

Undoubtedly there was more to the story of the triplet's birth but it wasn't a doctor's place to pry into the private lives of her patients. Once the door was closed she sighed and said, "Miss Carter, I think we have to realistic. You heard Lexi herself."

"But...it's not hopeless, right?"

"Degenerative conditions are progressive and very dicult to treat," Ericka explained. "The prognosis for them is inevitable. I hoped Alexis's blindness could be slowed but the process for her has been unexpectedly rapid. That says nothing about you. Lexi is very happy and healthy. It's just the nature of the condition."

"So...there's nothing that can be done?" Lynn asked tears blurring her vision.

"I've been reading up on different developments. There is a surgeon who has been doing some impressive work and has had some success with patients similar to Lexi. But the treatment is still experimental...and very expensive."

"Of course it is," Lynn nally broke down.

Try as she might, as hard as she worked, it all came down to money and how much she would never have. Her children would always suffer because of her shortcomings.

"It will be okay, Miss Carter," Ericka handed Lynn a tissue. "You raised a strong and intelligent daughter..."

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Alexis sat with a sigh. She supposed this day was inevitable. Ever since she was six her eld of vision had rapidly diminished. Her peripheral narrowed giving her tunnel vision but that too eventually failed. Her world had faded into a gray mist. Telling light from dark was about all she was capable of doing now though she was good at faking it at least for her mother's sake.

"Right this way, gentlemen. This is one of our waiting rooms. This oor is mainly for routine appointments and initial diagnosis," the hospital director explained as he led his guests through. "This area in particular is for our patients with sensory disabilities."

"Oh Director, could you look at this please?"

"Pardon me," the Director excused himself to meet the nurse hurrying up to him.

With grunts his guests remained at the nurses' station. Though Alexis could not see them she knew there were two. Both walked with a condence born of someone who knew the world was theirs. Even more distinctive was their aftershave. One in particular was very expensive. She could tell by the complex nuances of the scent. Cheap cologne had a heavy musky smell strong enough to cause her to choke with one sniff.

Her brothers often made fun of her obsession with smells claiming she was part bloodhound. But it wasn't as if her sense of smell was any better or worse than theirs, she just paid more attention to it because she couldn't rely on her sight. It was the same with her hearing.

Their footsteps were distinctive. They were probably wearing loafers rather than sneakers. Even their clothing had a particular sound as it rubbed against itself while they waited. Most likely silk or satin which meant they were probably wearing suits and expensive ones at that.

Even without her sight she could gleam a lot of information about the two men waiting nearby. They were alone, unaccompanied by children so it was unlikely either were a parent of a patient. They were rich or came from money so even if they had children she doubted they would use this hospital's services. The way the director was acting indicated they were probably investors here to make a donation.

"You know it's rude to stare," a gruff male voice interrupted her internal debate.

"Oh? I wouldn't know," Alexis easily answered.

"Excuse me? Who are you?" the man asked.

His demand alone was enough to tell her he was someone used to getting what he wanted. It only made Alexis more determined to frustrate him. She didn't owe him answers and she hated people who thought so highly of themselves they dismissed others. Those were the kinds of people where it was fun to take down a notch.

"Who am I? Well, let's break this down shall we? One, I'm ten years old which makes me a child according to modern convention. Two, this is a children's hospital so it stands to reason I am a patient. Three, this waiting room is for appointments concerning vision and hearing impairment. Which would mean your earlier comment about me staring was incredibly rude, don't you think?"

"...You're...blind..." he said slowly putting the pieces together as she laid them out.

"There, you see, that wasn't so hard to gure out," Alexis said with a smile that caused her sightless green eyes to sparkle.

The man's companion chuckled saying, "She's got spunk. You have to give her that, Si."

"Where are your parents?" the rst asked more gently this time though Alexis had no need for his sympathy.

"Parent," she corrected though she didn't explain her absentee father. "Mom's talking to the doctor about whether or not I could get my sight back."

"Can you?"

"If there is a way I'm sure it's too expensive," Alexis shrugged. "I'm ne the way I am."

The entire conversation was spoken in a matter-of-fact tone. Alexis came to grips with her vision loss long ago. That wasn't to say there weren't things she missed, like her mother's face or her brothers. She could still picture them clearly when she was last able to see them but that vision was like a time capsule. Alexis would never see them mature or age except in her imagination.

"I'm sorry about the wait, gentlemen. Oh Lexi, are you here for an appointment?"

"Yep, I'm here for my three thousand mile checkup," she answered and smiled in the direction of the hospital director.

"How's your mother?"

"She's ne. She's talking to Doctor Ericka."

"Good. Good." His voice took a dismissive tone. "If you need anything let the nurses know."

"Roger that." Alexis saluted feigning interest.

The Director was like most people assuming her mother was some promiscuous slut and that was as far as his interest in her went. Alexis overheard him solicit her mother once despite the fact he was a married man. Her mother quickly ended the conversation and ushered Alexis away. Since then she always had her guard up around him and saw no reason to be overly friendly with him. As long as he was civil she would treat him in kind. If he stepped over the line his wife would soon learn about his extramarital affairs.

"Shall we gentlemen?"

"Good bye, young lady," the man who had been talking to her said.

"Later, old man," Alexis shot back.

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"Mister Prescott?" Director Weston asked as the other hesitated.

Shaking his head Silas let his retort go and followed after his host. Beside him Thomas, his right hand man and best friend, chuckled.

"What?" Silas glared at him but Thomas wasn't intimidated.

"Never thought I'd see the day Mister Big Bad Executive was intimidated by a child."

Silas grunted though there was no denying it. The girl's attitude caught him off guard not that he had much experience with children. Even so he didn't think it was normal for one to be so brazen.

"I hope Lexi didn't bother you," Director Weston said. "She's a good kid. They all are?"

"They?"

"Her and her brothers," Weston answered. "Triplets. They were born here as a matter of fact, in our maturity ward."

"Interesting," Thomas said.

"It can't be easy to raise three children on your own but their mother seems to handle it even with Lexi's medical needs."

"What about their father?"

"He's never been in the picture," Weston shook his head.

"You think he abandoned his family?" Thomas asked as they reached the elevator. He was an avid mystery reader and all puzzles intrigued him.

"I can't say and it's not my place to speculate on the lives of our patients," Weston said.

The elevator arrived and the trio stepped on. Silas remained silent as Thomas conversed with their host. Something still bothered him about the young child who was the center of their conversation. Her attitude was not that of someone ashamed of their lot in life despite the fact she came from a poor home. He did sense some resignation to her blindness but it was not depressing in the least.

All of this was to her credit as far as Silas was concerned. He couldn't stand people who thought the world owed them something because they had been given a bad hand. Yet there was something off. There was something almost familiar about the girl he couldn't quite place. Her green eyes practically begged him to remember something important.

While he debated this he had watched the Director interact with the girl. She treated him with equal sarcasm which comforted Silas. For some reason he didn't like the idea of the girl being familiar with someone else which was ridiculous. But something about the Director's attitude toward the girl irritated him. There was something almost licentious in his voice which rubbed him the wrong way. Could the Director be interest in her mother?

Silas was certain the Director was married and the thought he might have carried on a relationship with a patient's parent disturbed him. Could the Director be the girl's father? No. Silas dismissed the idea as soon as it formulated. He didn't know why he cared but for some reason he hated the very idea that the Director was in any way connected with the girl.

For that reason he remained silent as Thomas and their host spoke. Stepping onto the elevator his mind still desperately tried to grasp a memory lost to him. As his gaze drifted outward he saw the child stand as another gure arrived.

The new gure was a petite woman wearing an oversized jacket over her waitress uniform. While the girl had straight hair her mother had natural wavy hair that was secured in a half-up style. Reaching her daughter the woman wrapped her in a hug bowing her head. Why did he suddenly have the urge to rush to their side?

The pair stood like that as the elevators closed. Only when they were out of sight did Silas shove away the strange yearning in his chest. Why was he reacting like this? They didn't have anything to do with him.

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"Are you okay mom?" Alexis asked still wrapped in her mother's arms.

Lynn didn't answer immediately trying to control her tears. She hadn't realized how tightly she held onto the hope her daughter's sight would be saved until now. The doctor made Alexis's prognosis quite clear.

"It's okay mom. I'm ne." Alexis said squeezing her tight. "Look on the bright side."

"What is that?"

"Now I don't have to see my brothers' stupid faces anymore."

Lynn chuckled. Her children never ceased to amaze her. The tears that threatened to fall dried up and she managed a haggard breath before releasing Alexis from her embrace. Kissing the top of her head Lynn said, "Come on, let's go. Let's celebrate."

"Yeah? Celebrate what?"

"Celebrate the fact you won't have to watch your brothers stuff their faces when we bring them McDonalds."

Alexis giggled, "That sounds good, mom."

With an arm around her shoulder Lynn directed her daughter toward the exit. They were far from being okay. Alexis knew her mother would put on a brave face in front of them saving her tears for a private moment but eventually her mother would accept the truth. Alexis and her brothers would watch their mother for awhile and be careful not to upset her until then...which meant it was a good thing their mother didn't know their weekend plans.