

~ With All of My Heart ~

by Catherine Burke

Author's Note: Here we are again....I thought I'd try this again.

Category: Orig. Uber Alt.

Rating: R / NC-17

Summary: Doctor Holly Graham was going through the motions. Taught to rely on no one but herself, she toiled through the medical school and settled into a position at one of Baltimore's top trauma centers. Tracy Campbell had looks, a career, a loving family and loyal friends. Yet, her love life was lacking. Pursued by many a suitor, she never found what she was looking for until a snowy night on a Maryland highway.

Comments/Disclaimer(s): This is an original story. The story and characters belong to me. They are not to be used or reproduced without my express written permission. I have posted an similar story on another site under the kato5568@aol.com email....This is me. These characters are mine and not swiped from someone else. It good to know people are looking out for us!

This story depicts a love/sexual relationship between two consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it.

Special Thanks: To J Brownell for ideas suggestions and getting me to actually post this. Kerrie who was able to beta and get this story back to me a very short time. Living half way around the world does have its advantages. Time differences worked well for us. I'd like to give a shout to Powerbab, who actually writes about Cleveland where we live. We'll get together at the coffee shop soon.

I'm posting this in chapter blocks. Life gets in the way at times. Hope you enjoy.
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Chapter 1

The exhaust from the school bus engine visibly floated into the January skies. The cold was a side effect of the massive winter storm currently pummeling the Baltimore area. Six inches of white fluffy snow blanketed every adhering surface. As the mercury continued to drop into single digits, every resident of the area tried their best to stay inside. Not so lucky were the coaches and players of Bayview High School.

Standing at the high school entrance, Tracey Campbell rubbed her leather clad hands together. She hadn't anticipated the severity of the storm. For the safety of her team, she wished she had taken the advice of the school board and cancelled the game against cross town rival Jefferson. As the stubborn and dedicated coach of the Girls Varsity team, she didn't want to disappoint the

girls by canceling the championship game. Since their first practice, the girls wanted to make it to the state playoffs. The game was over, but instead of the usual excitement teams had about winning, the team was focused on the weather outside. During the time they had been inside, a winter storm raged outside. As the Bayview Senators ran the floor against the Jefferson Bulldogs, Mother Nature's wrath continued outside. Her patience was wearing thin as another fan told her of the number of white outs reported. She needed to load her victorious team on the bus and get home.

Looking out at the dark evening sky and the sheets of snow falling heavily, Tracey silently wished she the board had cancelled the Saturday match. Baltimore was not known to get heavy snow falls. The storm outside was making up the last four light winters. She didn't want to cancel the game either. In fact she enjoyed beating Becky Kramer's team. Going up against Jefferson and their All-State Center, Amy Lancing proved her team was able to take on taller teams. The line-up for Bayview was quicker and able to score on turnovers and breakaways. The six-two center didn't have an impact on the game. Instead, Zoey Pope, senior point guard for the Senators played the game of her life. Scoring a career high twenty-eight points and a season high ten steals, the small blonde was the catalyst for her team.

When a gust of cold air hit her face, Tracey turned to see a bundled figure hurrying through the door. Turning her silver eyes to the snow filled sky, she couldn't wait to get home. Tonight she was looking forward to sitting on her couch under a blanket with a book and a hot cup of café mocha near by. The stomping of booted feet on the entrance mat announced the driver returning to the school. A smile appeared on her face as Carl Parker, the bus driver, brushed the snow from his stocking covered head. He clapped his gloved hands together and shuffled in her direction, his movements hampered by the weather and age.

"Cold getting to you Carl?" Tracey teased the retiree. Carl was a favorite driver of the students and staff. He teased saying he took the driving job to "get out of Millie's hair." For years Tracey had heard of the infamous Mille, but she hadn't met the driver's spouse. His unassuming manner with the high school kids went a long way. Quick with his advice or words of wisdom, he was respected by the students, staff and parents. There was a time or two when Carl stepped in to break up fights between students. A Veteran of the Vietnam War, he could hold his own. Last week, he stepped in to break up a nasty fight between two senior boys over a girl.

"Ms. Campbell it's pretty bad out. And cold... my chest even hurts." He rolled his shoulders and rubbed his barrel chest. "We should get going as soon as we can." The bus driver smiled back at the attractive teacher. He liked the friendly way Ms. Campbell treated everyone. She was well respected by the faculty and students. She never used her feminine attributes to get her way, although almost every male on the campus would love to be the subject of her affection. From the comments and groans the bus driver heard over the years, Ms. Campbell only needed to bat her eyes and there would be people falling at her feet. The dark wavy haired, lithely built woman's sparkling smile and clear silver eyes made his heart flutter. Although Millie held his heart, he didn't mind the smile Ms. Campbell flashed his way on occasion. He would venture to guess that the young Biology teacher had many young men thinking about the subject, although not in the academic manner.

"I'll get the girls and Andy. Let's just take it slow. I don't like this weather." She turned towards the locker room to get her team moving. Dressed in a fitting dove gray v-neck sweater that mirrored her eye color, pressed black slacks with matching dress boots with a heel that gave her a couple of inches on her five seven frame. Her long black leather jacket was draped over her arm. The Weather Channel predicted snow for the day but the raging storm outside was not in the forecast. Knocking loudly on the locker room door, she opened it a few inches. "Let's go ladies! It's Saturday. I don't think you want to be spending it with me or Coach Morgan!" Tracey let the door fall closed and walked into the gym. Andy Morgan, her assistant coach stood talking to Becky Kramer, the head coach of Jefferson. Tracey sighed. She needed to brace for the conversation with Kramer. The opposing coach had been asking her out for years. Tracey did everything in her power to avoid the woman, yet not be rude about it.

"So you did it again." Becky called as Tracey moved closer to them. "Well, we seemed to work out the kinks in the team over the last few weeks. Your girls gave us a run for our money." Jefferson really only got close once in the game. "Zoey and Michelle have stepped up." Her team had stepped up today. Her two best players Michelle Stanley and Zoey impressed her with their leadership on the floor. At first, Michelle tried to take everything to the hole by herself. After getting rejected twice by the Jefferson center, she began to pass and get her teammates involved. As the game went on, they were able to get the ball into the key for Michelle to score ten points. Glancing back at the falling snow, Tracey's eyes sought Andy's. They needed to get on the road.

"Has Zoey Pope been on varsity before?" Kramer was trying her best to keep Tracey engaged in the conversation. Tracey looked at the coach as if she were crazy, knowing the reason behind it was to ask her out again. Her team had made the comment that Jefferson's coach looked like a redheaded Goofy. The reference to the Disney cartoon character was an accurate description. Every time Tracey spoke with the woman all she could envision was the coach saying, "Ah..yuck. .a yuck."

"She's been hurt last couple years. Her senior year has been really good." Andy jumped back in, saving Tracey. He knew his co-worker did not want to talk to Coach Kramer, although he was enjoying her discomfort in the situation.

"Andy, we need to get going. Carl has the bus warmed up and the snow is starting to come down again." Tracey watched her assistant coach hide the smirk on his face and felt Coach Kramer's eyes watching her. "Good game Coach." Tracey turned to make her escape. Andy moved away with her. She elbowed him in the side cursing him silently. "That's for putting me there in the first place."

"Coach Campbell." She heard Kramer's voice call out to her. Andy let out a chuckled. Tracey turned back to the woman and Andy continued towards the exit. "Coach... Tracey." Redhead closed the space between them. "I'd really like to take you to dinner." Tracey looked over her shoulder to see if any of her students or parents in hearing distance. "Becky... look, I really think you're a nice person but I don't mix my work and social life." Tracey tried her best to let the older woman down. Becky just wasn't her type. If she did date, it certainly would not be with someone she couldn't carry on a conversation with. Her social life consisted of her friends, Yvonne Piper and Maxie, Maxine Kendall, her one time girl friend and teammates from college

and recreation. For a short time, she dated Maxie. Tracey felt they were better off as friends. The friends could usually be found playing softball in the summer months and out together on weekends. Tracey tended to go out more once school was out. During basketball season, she rarely ventured out with the dynamic duo, her nickname for her friends when she was not able to venture out. "I hope you understand." Tracey turned making a bee-line for Andy. His standard buzz cut settled against the brick wall as he leaned back watching the show.

"You just crushed her." He mumbled as she swept by. "Doubt it... she's a big girl." Tracey's heeled frame was dwarfed by at least four inches. "Let's go ladies! And you..." She pointed at Andy as he pushed off the wall and stepped in front of her, beating her out the door. For the last three years, Andy Morgan had worked as her assistant coach. She met the Elementary Science teacher at an open gym during her first year at Bayview. Andy was former military and teaching for his first year. He was having trouble adapting from the military demands to those of a sixth grade teacher. The teachers bonded right away. Tracey's family moved multiple times through her childhood, finally ending in Washington DC when her father, a career navy man took a post at the Pentagon. They talked as they shot basket after basket. Andy reminded Tracey of her father, or at least his hair did. The standard high and tight was a quick fix in the morning, both men confessed to her. Sometimes during her morning preparation, she understood why her father and Andy continued to sport the style. Since meeting six years ago, they were very close colleagues, even having rumors spread regarding them dating. Last summer, Andy and Allison got married. Tracey was asked to be the best man. According to Vonnie Piper, her best friend, she was dashing in a tuxedo. He was the natural choice to ask to be her assistant coach when she took the team over three years ago.

The line of girls walked briskly on to the bus as Tracey followed. Standing at the top of the steps, she winked at Carl and began to count heads. Two short... she looked at Andy and held up two fingers. He stood to recount. He confirmed her number with a nod of his head. She tightened her leather jacket around her waist and went back into the school. In the lobby, Zoey Pope was bent over zipping her duffle bag. She looked as if she had been crying. Tracey took in the redness in her eyes and the track marks of tears. Placing a hand on the player's shoulder, Tracey gestured for Zoey to go to the locker room. The small blonde wiped her face with her forearm, then grabbed her bag and followed her coach. Her steps were small in comparison to the long strides of the coach.

Tracey went in first. Not stopping at the empty benches, she continued to check the alcoves, making sure no could overhear their conversation. Gesturing to the player to take a seat on the wooden bench, Tracey took in the small blonde with the expressive blue eyes. Injuries had plagued Zoey's career and finally in her senior season, she was healthy.

"Are you okay?" Tracey's voice was gentle and soothing. Today's game was the teen's career best. Tears were not the result of her play. Teaching at the high school level for a number of years, Tracey learned ways to get the students to talk. Dropping her voice to the tender caring level a parent would use with their child, she approached Zoey. Watching the young woman shake her head and tears began to flow. "Are you hurt?" Another shake. "Do you want to talk about it?" Tracey watched the mix of emotions play on the senior's face. "Sometimes it helps to

talk about things that are bothering us." The blonde bit her bottom lip and Tracey winced, thinking it looked painful.

"Have..." Zoey stopped. "Have you ever had someone you cared so much about not believe in you or care about you in the same way?" Tracey processed the question her player posed to her. Her family was always supportive. The only girl from a family of four children, she never had to worry about her brothers or her parents not believing in her. When she blew out her knee in her sophomore year of college, her brother Tommy was at her side working out with her during her rehab. She was never able to play the same after the injury. Her movements a little tentative, she moved to the recreational side of sports. She played slow pitch softball with a group of her friends and left the world of competitive sports, giving up the high impact abuse of her knee.

"I can't say I have. My family is very supportive. Maybe this person who..." Tracey paused, she could see the girl was hurting. "Who doesn't believe in you, is a person you don't need in your life." Knowing her words weren't helping the young woman, Tracey got to her feet and gathered the blonde in a hug. "You'll get through this honey. Right now I know it hurts, but in six months when summer hits you'll forget all about it and get on with your life." She felt the blonde's head nod against her shoulder. "It gets better? You promise?" Zoey said in a muffled voice. "You're young and just starting to become an adult. Zoey... I promise. It will get better." Tracey pulled back and looked at the player's face. "You are a beautiful, talented young woman, whoever they are, they're a fool." She got a slight smile from the blonde. "Take your time, but we need to get going. I don't think any of us want to be stuck in Towson overnight." Zoey chuckled and wiped her face. Tracey ruffled her hair then went out the door. She ran right into Coach Kramer.

"Tracey. I thought you'd be long gone." Kramer smiled as she pressed a clipboard to her chest.

"Trying." *Could this day get any worse?* "A little issue with one of the players." She looked towards the door as a very concerned Andy Morgan was walking in the building.

"Hey..I got Michelle." Andy called out information regarding the missing player.

"I got Zoey." Tracey replied. "See you later, coach." Tracey brushed past the redhead knowing full well the woman purposely stood in her way slightly.

Witnessing her discomfort again, Andy inwardly winced at his co-worker's ability not to show her distaste for the woman. Tracey drew attention. She was beautiful, rich chestnut hair hung just past her shoulders and bright silver eyes shone when she was happy and stormed over when her temper got the best of her. He knew she dated on occasion but there had been no one special since he had known her. When he started dating Allison seriously, she wanted to meet Tracey. Andy thought she was jealous of his relationship with the head coach. After dining out with Tracey, Andy asked Allison what she thought of Tracey. Allison chuckled and said she really liked Tracey and she wasn't concerned with Andy spending time with her. Andy looked at her for a moment. This was not the reaction he was expecting. Allison let him stew on her answer until they got to her place.

"You know she's gay." Allison said as Andy walked her to the door. The blanched look on his face conveyed his disbelief.

"But she's..."

"Hot?" Allison shrugged her shoulders. "It's what's inside Andy. Not the outside image. The only person I saw her give a second glance too was the Sous Chef, the blonde who came out to the table to ask how our food was."

"Really?"

"Really." Allison let Andy open the door and waited for a moment at the threshold. "Does it bother you? That Tracey likes women?"

"Umm.." The teacher pondered his thoughts for a moment. "No. It doesn't matter to me. She's just Tracey. I never really thought of her any other way. She's a friend of mine. I really don't care who she sleeps with."

"Good." Allison grabbed his hand and pulled him into her apartment.

Months later, when Andy met Allison's very flamboyant brother, Simon, he realized how important his answer to her question was.

"Sorry for teasing you earlier." Andy murmured as she passed by. "Zoey coming?" Just as the words were spoken the small blonde appeared from the locker room, her toboggan cap pulled low on her head, covering her ears. The player brushed past the coaches and settled in the seat right behind theirs. Tracey glanced back at the senior, knowing this was not her usual spot on the team bus, Zoey usually sat farther back with Michelle. The coach raised her eyes to the lanky form of her center straddling her legs between the aisle way and the seat across from her.

"We're all here Carl. Let's head home." Tracey lowered her eyes and silently prayed that they would make it home safely.

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A soft breeze carried through the tall palms as the bright sunlight beamed on the woman lying face up on the beach. Running her fingers in the sand at the side of the towel under her, she felt the grains and granules course over her fingers and across her skin. The hard packed earth under her back was irritating, but being in the sun was worth it. Times like this she savored the peace and quiet with the sunshine of a tropical paradise. If only she had the company of a lovely woman to share this with. Her mind immediately flashed to a woman's head thrown back as she kissed her way down her throat, over her sun kissed shoulders, down to the heaving breasts and strained nipples waiting for her mouth to savor. She smiled at the fantasy of wanting to be in the middle of one of those cheesy romance novels. The women meet in the middle of a tropical paradise and have mind-blowing sex for hours, or maybe it was a porn flick. She felt wetness pool between her thighs. There was no deep bass line music playing in the background just a soft sound of birds singing in the trees. The tell tale sign of a trashy romance novel. Now she needed

was a beautiful woman to stumble upon her. A small noise got her attention, followed by the soft murmuring of her name.

"Holly!"

Dragging her lazy hand through the sand and up her sun kissed thigh she looked towards the light as a shadow of a woman appeared at her side. The motion of her hand continued reaching out to the woman beckoning towards her. Sure she could do this. A smile passed over her lips as she moistened them with the tip of her tongue. Dark hair. She could tell the woman was a brunette as she reached to touch the woman's bare shoulder. Closer...closer. She wanted to fist her hand in the woman's hair and crush her mouth to this stranger. To taste the sweetness of her lips to touch the softness of her skin. Run her hands and mouth across the smooth plane of her stomach. Teasing her nipples into hard peaks and savoring them like water in the desert. She wanted to have life altering sex and escape every relationship she had been in. Escape to forget the heart wrenching turmoil her ex put her through. Escape to forget about her family. Disappear from her lonely life into the arms of a soft, caring and loving woman. To climax over and over as this woman clung to her, screaming her name.

"Doctor Graham!" The scream careened through Holly's unconscious mind waking her from a deep slumber and a semi erotic dream.

Shooting up from the lounge couch and into a sitting position, her hand still extended towards the floor's head nurse, Sandra Rollins.

"Doc!" Sandra's voice penetrated through the foggy dreamscape of Holly's awareness. "Doc!" Again the call vibrated through her senses. With a shake of her short blonde hair, Holly finally registered the figure by the couch. The short African American with a solid girth and ample bosom stood in front of her with her arms cross waiting impatiently for the doctor to wake.

The overhead florescent lights were in full force beating down on the doctor. Holly came to her senses and put her hand up to block out the brightness of the lights. Her tropical dream was a farce. She was at work. Another fantasy ruined by the reality of being an Chief Resident in the emergency room. She gathered from the look on Rollins face, it was going to be a long shift.

"It's alive!" Rollins teased. The nurse knew Dr. Graham had fallen asleep a few hours ago when the storm was just starting. After the morning lull, the Emergency Room was on the verge of all hell breaking loose as the storm outside raged. Jessup County and the Maryland Department of Transportation had not declared a state of emergency. Who knows what the politicians were thinking?

Rollins gave the attending physician a hard nudge on the arm. Wide alert brown eyes stared up at her. She had worked with Holly for close to a decade and recalled the first day those big brown eyes surveyed the ER. Fresh out of medical school, she looked like a frightened child. She wasn't quite as old as the other interns, but there was a maturity about the twenty four year old. Through conversations and small comments, Sandra knew Holly graduated high school early and immediately enrolled at university. Fast tracked to medical school, she started her residency as

soon as she could. In a matter of weeks, she knew the tall blonde would be a natural. A workaholic and overachiever by nature, Holly never seemed to mind the long hours and double shifts. She was quick to pick up a shift if needed. In fact, Rollins couldn't remember the last time the doctor took any time off. Where some residents never made it past the first six weeks, let alone the years of training they were required to go through. The well balanced young woman did not succumb to burnout or depression. The only falter in the good doctor's step had been four summers ago, when a strange woman showed up in the ER asking for Holly. The glare of anger Holly sent to the woman still sent shivers down the head nurse's spine. She knew the blonde was extremely private and rarely spoke about her family or personal life. Well respected and easy to work with, Holly was a favorite of the staff and the interns.

"Let's go sleeping beauty. We have incoming." Rollins made certain Holly was aware of her surrounding before she left the lounge. As if in slow motion, sleepy woman swung her feet off the beaten faux leather couch onto the square white and gray vinyl tiles. She hung her head, staring at the flecks of blue and red spattered like a Jackson Pollock painting. She needed to wake up and fast. Stretching her lengthy arms above her head, she felt the tension release as her spine popped. To a bystander, the sound would seem to inflict pain, but Holly felt the relief as her back loosened up. After decade of working at Jessup Hospital, she should know better than to fall asleep on the unforgiving cushions. For her residency, she specialized in Emergency Medicine and matched at her first choice Jessup Community Hospital, an offshoot of the Maryland University program. After residency, she was offered an attending position at the prestigious Maryland hospital.

Rising to her feet, her almost six foot frame came to its full posture. Grabbing the stethoscope from the table, she headed to the coffee maker and poured herself a tall cup of java. Smelling it, she pondered if she wanted to know how long ago it had been brewed. The smell of roasted beans took her back to freshman year in college when she first dabbled in the brew. She turned sixteen that fall and learned what pulling an all nighter was about. Her first tasted of the bitter roast, she needed cream and sugar. Now, close to twenty years later, she drank it black and by the pot full. As a medical professional, she knew she should switch to decaffeinated but it went against the purpose of the dark liquid. She learned to use the breakfast staple as a crutch during her school years. Accelerated through her high school and college studies, she landed at the University of Maryland Medical School at the prime age of nineteen. Her classmates teased the awkward teenager, who stood a head taller than most of them. Yet when it came to study partners or groups, Holly was the student in demand. She was focused on practicing medicine and no amount of teasing would interfere with her goal.

Emancipated from her parents at the age of sixteen, just prior to her father's death, Holly's drive and determination were the skills she learned to survive on. For most of her undergrad, she was a minor who rarely got into trouble. Living on her own with scholarships to cover schooling, she barely had two nickels to rub together. On occasion, a memory would trigger. The smell of Pine Sol reminded her of the dorms during holiday break. These were lonely, tough times when five bucks felt like a fortune. Her bank account rarely slipped above the fifty dollar mark. She spent most of her free time in the school library. On the holidays, she'd go to the train station to people watch. Her form of free entertainment, she tried to guess the stories behind the travelers. An easy escape from her reality, she'd watch the families coming and going. Travelers hustling through

the terminal trying to catch the connecting train. When the reunions happened in front of her, she'd watch as loved ones reconnected with hugs and kisses. Her life wasn't filled with hugs and kisses. She watched like a voyeur, imagining what life was like for people with caring families. Maybe she'd have that one day. To have a relationship where there was no holding back.

Love and trust were the two things her relationship with her parents and her former lover lacked. Her solace for company was found in a hot cup of coffee. During Christmas, co-workers asked her to trade shifts. She did without a second thought. She had nothing better to do for the holidays. It was just another work day for her. With the Styrofoam cup on hand, she pushed open the swinging door to the main hallway. Any thoughts of lying on the beach sunbathing were quickly erased by the amount of snow piling up outside.

"Where did you go this time Doctor Graham?" Musah, the dark skinned admissions clerk asked his thick Ghana accent filtering through the hallway over the scream of the sirens entering the emergency bay.

"South Beach!" Holly said with a big smile. Rollin's must have been yapping as she passed by his station. Running her fingers through her short-cropped blonde hair, she closed her eyes for a moment and relived the dream of Florida. Smiling at the thought of a beautiful woman rubbing oil on her back, a quick elbow from Rollins brought her to the center of the ER. She glanced at the clock then back to the falling snow. A long night was ahead of her.

"Next time you go there you take me with you. Beats Baltimore in the winter any day. Here we go!" His large black finger pointed towards the emergency entrance doors as two EMTs roared in on a gurney.

"Anyone page Martinez?" Holly asked hoping there was a surgeon on call.

"He's on the way. Called from the car. I think he is stuck on 295." Musah could see the relief flash across her face as she headed towards the trauma room. Her white lab coat flapped open and closed with her movements. Taking a small breath, she entered the room. Mel Watkins, the EMT and one of Holly's closest friends was straddled across the patient, her hands pumping on his chest as her partner, John Dillon pushed the air bubble for ventilation. Blood saturated the bandage on the patient's forehead.

"How we doing kids?" Holly asked as she caught John's sky blue eyes. If she was straight she'd consider the handsome EMT. The deep frown of concentration on Mel's face was a tell tale sign of bad news.

"Well mom..." John started but one look from his partner's rich hazel eyes stopped his sarcastic remark. "Got a sixty eight year old man, head trauma with possible heart attack. Stopped breathing in the field. Resuscitated twice on the way in and can't seem to stabilize."

"Did we get any history or is there a family member here?" Holly asked as her eyes scanned the heart monitor and her ears picking up vital stats as the nurse rattled them off.

"No. The scene is still a mess. Too many victims. We took the critical ones first." Mel labored voice called out.

"Out!" Holly ordered the spunky auburn haired EMT, they staff readied the victim's chest and probes were set in place. "Charging." The call came out followed by the standard "Clear." All hands went up.

Defibrillation paddles in hand, she waited to see all the staffs' hands away from the victim. Her lithe body loomed over the older man. She thought about the family he had waiting for him. A well tarnished wedding band was on his left ring hand. She couldn't let him go. The impact of the paddles on the victim's bare chest caused his loose skin to bounce up and down. She looked at the monitor, a faint blip appeared, followed by a series of small but steady pulses. Once the patient was stabilized, Holly continued her exam. Running her fingers along his ribcage and abdomen, her main concern was for hemorrhages. When she passed over the upper abdomen, she stopped and retracted her path. Finding signs of internal bleeding she hoped did not exist, she called out. "He needs to go up. Alert Surgery."

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Chapter 2

White knuckles curled over the seat back, Tracey stole a glance at Andy who had moved closer to Carl in order to support the bus driver. The back end of the bus slid and a chorus of screams filled the air. Tracey leaned on the seat in a half sitting, half standing position. Her attention focused on the scared faces of her players. One of the freshmen was actually crying.

"Ladies, please remain calm. We'll be home soon and then we can all forget this ride." Turning, she looked at the windshield wipers flapping wildly but not seeming to help clear the snow. Andy shot her a look of concern. Carl let out a swear word and down shifted the large yellow vehicle. There were a multiple number of red lights and emergency vehicles in the road way ahead. The bus slowed as the gears of the transmission strained and fought the powerful engine.

A flash of lights from the left hand side of the bus caught the occupants by surprise. A large black Cadillac Escalade barreled along side the large passenger vehicle at high speed. "Crazy son of a bitch!" Carl called out to the driver of the passing car. At that moment, the driver must have seen the emergency response trucks ahead and quickly changed lanes, cutting off the bus.

"Hold on!" Andy screamed, his voice high and full of fear. All eyes darted to the front of the bus where the SUV was sliding across the snow covered highway. The icy roads and the high rate of speed caused the SUV to spin, doing a number of pirouettes and finally hitting the guardrail on the right hand side median. The black truck careened off the center divider, bouncing back into the lane in front of the bus. With the diesel engine roaring and the air brakes screeching, Carl fought to slow the twelve ton bus down.

Tracey watched as the scene in front of her played out in slow motion. Carl steered the bus to the right in an effort to avoid the out of control SUV. The bus's front driver quarter panel connected with the Escalade's front passenger side bumper. Sounds of crunching metal and screams of

teenagers filled the air as the passengers lurched out of their seats. Tracey landed against the metal frame of the windows. Her teeth rattled as upper and lower jaw clamped together. She felt pain as she touched her fingers to her chin, coming away with a burgundy stain. They were in trouble.

Smoke bubbled from the smashed front end of the SUV as it spun out of the path of the bus. Sparks and metal against metal scraping flew from the passenger's side as the vehicle slammed against the tri-level barrier rail. The rail peeled away from the posts like the skin of a banana. Carl jerked the wheel to the left with such force his head hit the window to his left. Blood poured out of the gash and down his face. His adrenalin pumping, he overcorrected the vehicle. The error sent the bus into the left lane of the two lane highway. The side of the bus rode on the cement barrier, scraping and screeching as it finally ground to a halt about twenty feet from the emergency trucks. Taking a deep breath and verifying they were actually stopped, Carl slumped over in the driver's seat clutching his chest.

Gray eyes watched as a number of emergency personnel ran towards the crash site. Standing on wobbly legs, Tracey looked at Andy's stunned face as he knelt next to Carl.

"Andy?" Tracey called over the screams and cries from behind her. He nodded and gestured towards the players. She quickly turned to see the scared shocked faces of her players. "Zoey?" The coach placed a hand on the senior point guard's shoulder.

"You're bleeding." Big blue eyes filled with tears. "Ms. Campbell." Zoey reached out to touch her face, but the Biology teacher stopped her. Tracey knew she had a nice contusion and would be sporting shades black and blue for a few days.

"I'm okay. What about you?" Zoey held on to her right shoulder. "Did you hit the side?" Zoey nodded knowing her tears were from being scared rather than the pain. "Let me check on the rest of the team."

Commotion at the front of the bus grabbed her attention. EMTs were at Carl's side, administering treatment. Tracey saw the emergency exit at the back of the bus open up. A police officer stood at the open passage way with more EMTs. Tracey saw the blood on the broken window next to Tabitha Timmons. Tabby sat holding her left hand in her lap. Silent tears streamed down her cheeks. Tracey grabbed the scarf from around her neck and wrapped the junior's hand up.

"Hey Tabby." Tracey eased into the spot next to the freckled faced player.

"It hurts." The player cried and leaned a shoulder against the coach.

"Keep pressure on it. Just like First Aid class...remember. There are people here to help. Just be strong for a little while."

"I want my mom." The girl cried out and began to sob. At a lost of words to comfort the student, Tracey found Zoey standing next to her.

"I'll sit with her." Zoey took Tracey's place. As the coach continued down the aisle way checking on players, she stopped half way back when she saw Michelle Stanley holding her leg, wailing in pain, her jaw tensed as her hands wrapped around her upper thigh. The odor of fuel and burning hit her senses as she looked out the window. Outside against the backdrop of falling snow she watched as sparks flew from the Jaws of Life as it cut through the metal frame of the black Escalade. The firefighters shouted at each other as the frantic chaos of the scene unfolded.

"We need everyone out!" The tall dark skinned officer yelled from the back of the bus. "Just like a routine fire drill kids!" His soulful eyes reached Tracey, the only adult standing in the back of the bus. His gaze went to the SUV and back to Tracey.

"Okay, one at a time." Tracey addressed her players. "You've done this hundreds of times. If you need help, just stay put." Tracey watched as Zoey led Tabby to the back of the bus, helping her teammate out the exit. Counting the heads left in the seat, there were six people on the bus. Carl and Andy had been taken out the front entrance.

"Lady you need to get off. Now!" The eyes of the officer in front of her spoke of the dangerous situation unfolding outside.

"Not until they're all off." Tracey held her ground. She had gone up against men like the officer in front of her before. "You are wasting time, sir. Let's get them off."

"Lady!" The cop persisted.

"My father is a Rear Admiral and I will not leave my team behind. Understood!" The inflection in her voice reflected her years of growing up in a Naval household. The police officer backed away, focusing his attention on the injured students on the bus. Tracey stood in the seat in front of Michelle as she was placed in an immobilizer. Odds were the star center's leg was broken. Tracey turned and ran up the aisle to her seat. She needed the briefcase the staff carried just in case of emergency.

"Coach, don't leave me!" Michelle's frantic voice filled the interior of the bus. Finding the briefcase on the floor, she rushed back to her player's side. There was no way she was going to leave her side. The EMTs quickly removed Michelle from the bus and loaded her into a waiting ambulance. Tracey finally exited the vehicle as the officer she had confronted helped her out the exit.

"Rear Admiral?" He asked with an eyebrow raised in question.

"And three brothers..." Tracey flashed him a smile and heard the small escaping of a whistle. Her father was a retired CFO. The rank of Admiral delivered the punch she needed at the time.

"That's one woman you don't want to mess with." Lyle Sands commented to his co-workers. He actually felt sorry for the players if they ever pissed off this woman.

Tracey found Andy engaged in a heated conversation with a Lt. Eckhart from the fire department. The Lieutenant pointed towards the SUV and back to the bus.

"Mr. Morgan, we need to split up the students. There is just no way can one hospital accommodate all of the injuries. I've spoken to Dr. Graham at Jessup. They took the bus driver. County is handing the driver of the SUV."

"Andy, he's right there. One ER can't treat the victims. I'll go with Michelle to Jessup. You go to County. We can figure out a game plan from there." Tracey pulled her jacket tighter around her collar. It was getting colder outside and arguing with the Lieutenant was not helping.

"Thank you, Miss. You may want to get your chin looked at while you're at Jessup. Ask for Dr. Graham to coordinate anything you need between the hospitals." Tracey absently touched her chin. She had forgotten the cut and bruise with everything going on.

"Once you get there figure out what girls you have and fax over the releases to County. I can start calling the parents. "

With a plan set in place, Tracey headed towards the ambulance Michelle was being treated in. She swore the female EMT she passed by checked her out.

Giving the attractive coach the once over, Pam Farmer stood outside the bus doors waiting for her services to be needed. The dried blood on the woman's chin did not detract from her beauty. Hair the color of cinnamon with a mix of red highlights was wind blown and swept back from her face. Her high cheek bones were flushed with color from the low temperature. Now she was sitting in the EVR, holding the teen's hand, whispering words of encouragement and strength. Pam milled outside the ERV doors waiting for an opportunity to speak with the woman. After overhearing a few words, she knew they were heading to Jessup. She was assigned to County and would not get a chance to meet the woman.

"Rich...switch runs with me." The female asked her co-worker as he scrambled to shut the doors. The bald man looked back at his patients and shook his head.

"Back off Pam. I swear you're worse than a guy." The bald EMT shut the door and the truck sped off to Jessup.

Sirens were in full gear as the ambulance took off from the crash site and Tracey held tight to Michelle's hand. The EMT smiled at the coach and asked for the teen's hand. Tracey loosened her grip, letting the man put an IV in. Letting out a deep breath, she leaned against the side of the truck. Closing her eyes, a flash of the bus hitting the SUV haunted her. They should have called the game. They should have closed the highway down. Thoughts were running through her head like a run away train, building steam until an explosion resulted. Cupping her hands, she rested her face against them. The pain of her chin injury caused her to flinch.

"Do you want me to check that out?" Mr. Clean as Michelle dubbed him asked as he saw the coach wince.

"I'll get it looked at Jessup." She turned her head and looked out the window at the white flakes coming down steady. Trying to empty her mind of the events that had happened in the past sixty minutes, she thought of her father. He would be proud of her today. Not leaving the ship until all the players were out. There was no way that cop was going to get her out of the bus with her players still there. A small laugh escaped from her lips as she thought of what Piper would say to her once she heard the story. The six foot hundred eighty five pound, eight year veteran of the Baltimore Police Force would have a few choice words for her friend. Even the large muscular mass of Piper would not have gotten her off that bus until her kids were safe.

"Did you see what happened?" Mr. Clean asked as he removed the blood pressure cuff from Michelle's upper arm.

"The SUV lost control. It cut into our lane and Carl." Her eyes misted up with unshed tears at the thought of the driver. "Carl tried to keep control of the bus but the SUV hit the wall and came back into the road." Tracey closed her eyes. She lost her thought pattern for a moment as she realized she may have knocked harder than she thought against the window pane. "Were you at the other accident?"

"No, I got to the scene just after your accident happened. I do think Melanie and John took the driver right away. I can ask them when we get to Jessup."

~

"Who's next?" Running her fingers across the dry erase board that served as the central nervous system of the ER, Holly looked up to see the desk clerk with two telephones up against his ears. The night of the blizzard was taking its toll on the entire staff. Nurses and doctors couldn't make the trip through the storm to get to work. Watching the snow continuing to fall, Holly wondered how the staff was going to make it home. The county emergency services decided in their ultimate bureaucratic wisdom to finally declare a state of emergency and close the highways down. Only medical personnel and protective forces were allowed on the roads. Once the state of emergency was declared, standard procedure was for Emergency Services to route the trauma cases evenly between the two area Trauma 1 Centers, Jessup and County. Holly wiped her last patient's number off the board, waiting to see what exactly was next on her list. Even the best of her administrative staff, Musah, whose usual demeanor was never affected by the chaotic environment, was hanging on by a thread. His long thin fingers hit a number of key strokes as he tried to retrieve information from the computer.

Loud angry voices came from the waiting room as the face of a patient was smooched up against the glass partition. Holly dropped the chart on the desk and headed to the source of the commotion. Her attention immediately focused on a tall muscular woman dressed in a police uniform who had a patient against the wall his arm pulled behind his back and high enough to dislocate the shoulder if the officer wasn't careful. Her partner was at her side urging the patient to continue his behavior knowing full well he was antagonizing the subdued man.

"Leave the macho shit in the street Xena!" Holly's voice boomed over the arguing cops. "I've got enough trouble tonight." The two stunned officers looked at the blood covered doctor in green

scrubs. The man was immediately pulled from the plexiglas window. "What's his issue, Officer Piper?" Holly said as she got close enough to read the name on the uniform of the tall woman with the sandy blonde hair cut just above the neckline. The small snicker from the cohort was not missed by the doctor.

"States he's got a sprained wrist." Piper raised her eyebrows at the humorless physician. Angry brown eyes reflected the tone of the Emergency Room for the night. There was no additional stress needed.

"I'll have someone take him to radiology. Try not to batter suspects in my ER." Holly turned around and looked at the handcuffed suspect. She called an order to Musah who nodded his head and point to the two cops to bring the patient to the desk.

They walked towards the desk. Their hats secured on theirs heads and smiles plastered on their faces.

"That woman called you Xena." Darrell Williams slapped his thigh in a fit of laughter.

"She's clueless. I'm more like Gabrielle." Piper hissed through her teeth, she felt as if she had just been chastised by Sister Margaret Mary her second grade teacher.

"On steroids." Williams chimed in his teeth showing bright against his dark skin. The officers laughed as they escorted their charge to a private waiting area.

"Curtain 3!" Musah yelled at her as she passed the admissions desk grabbing the chart he held out for her. She was finished with the law enforcement officers. *Give me a break*, she silently thought. *Enforcement, maybe*. Holly adjusted the scope around her neck noting the amount of blood that covered her scrubs. With a sigh, she went to the locker room for a clean set. She didn't have time for this shit tonight.

Grabbing a new medium sized top from the bin, she stripped out of her soiled top and bottom and donned the clean garments. After a quick pit stop in the bathroom to relieve her bladder, she leaned on the sink, looking at her reflection in the mirror. This had to be the toughest shift of her career. Her short spiky blonde hair was in such disarray, it could have been fashionable. Her cheeks were sunken in and dark circles under her eyes were obvious signs of sleep deprivation. Splashing cool water on her face, cool brown eyes staring back at her, she wondered what waited for her on the floor. She needed sleep. She needed a life outside these cinder block walls. "My job is my life." her mantra for the past couple of years. No wonder she had no social life and her last relationship ended badly. She resolved to find herself a new mantra.

Her last relationship, a complete disaster which involved cohabitation with Pam Farmer, an EMT for the county, ended few months ago. The paramedic flirted endlessly and quite openly with Holly until finally the doctor agreed to go on a date. The charming blonde paramedic got her in bed on the first date. Embarrassed and eighteen months and at least two confirmations of infidelity later, Holly called a halt to the relationship. When Pam was telling her latest conquest

her name was Dr. Holly Graham. Holly hit the roof. If Holly wanted to date the entire population of patients and staff, she'd do it on her own, not vicariously through her ex-girlfriend.

Her social life before Pam consisted of a number of women who she saw on and off for a few months. She never got overly involved. No one held her interest long enough to think about a possibility of long term relationship. Even in high school and college, she was trying to figure out where she fit in. Accelerated through grade school, she graduated high school by fifteen and tried to keep her life together. College was a nightmare. Because of the age difference with her classmates, she never received a second glance. By the time she was nineteen, Holly knew she preferred women to men. It was hard for a gawky teenager to get a date in college, even harder for a lesbian. Always a head taller than most women she met, Holly lived most of her academic career as an ugly duckling. She took up swimming. Every morning, she would venture to the campus pool. Before long, she traded in her long hair for a newer fresh shorter spikier style. Her long limbs filled out with new muscles. Before she knew it, she hardly recognized her image in the mirror. She started dating. Nothing ever serious, more or less a release of tension, she referred to it as. She liked the women she went out with, but was never into them. There was a little spark but not the "wow factor" she was looking for. A few dinners and some basic needs satisfied, Holly would break it off.

The women who she did spend time with seemed to report to their mothers immediately that they had landed a doctor. Most women found out she was a doctor and immediately tried to take advantage of her title and money. Little did they know she had loan after loan. She wasn't a millionaire. She lived very modestly. Her house was a fixer-upper house in a not so nice area of Baltimore. She was close to Mount Vernon but still not in the desired area.

In walked Pam, "Charmer Farmer" as the staff called her. Pam was different. She snuck up on Holly. Somewhere in the first six months of dating, Pam moved in. They had conversations around Holly's hours and workload. Together for almost two years, it was last summer when Holly noticed Pam was never around. They stopped sleeping together. Pam said Holly's hours messed with her sleep schedule, so she moved into the spare bedroom. Soon the routine became passing by each other in the foyer as one was leaving and the other was getting home. Holly began to focus on work and not the relationship. Pam's focus was set on a nurse in Pediatric Unit.

Fourth of July weekend, Holly switched her schedule and went home early to surprise Pam. Coming off a tough shift at the hospital, Holly felt the need to reconnect with her girlfriend. Walking in the door, she heard hot and heavy noises coming from the guest bedroom. Spread out on the queen bed, Pam was going down on her new girlfriend. The Peds nurse's legs were wrapped tight around Pam's head. Her cries of passion compared Pam to an almighty spirit were more than Holly could handle. Bowing her head, she should have listened to Mel, her best friend and EMT who worked with Pam. She should have remembered her pledge to her best friend not to get seriously involved with Pam. Finding the EMT and the nurse in the throes of passion was the final straw. Rumors floated around the hospital about the sexy charismatic EMT, but Holly refused to listen to them. Mel worked with Pam for a number of years, and tried to warn Holly to be careful. Mel harped one too many times about Pam's extra activities, causing the friends to have huge falling out.

The ped's nurse was unaware of the relationship between Holly and Pam and screamed when she saw the doctor standing at the foot of the bed. A heated argument ensued, with Pam holding a sheet against her naked frame. The nurse made a quick exit, scooping up her clothes and out the door. When Pam tried to follow, Holly's temper got the best of her and she grabbed the sheet. She wanted Pam to endure the embarrassment she was. Pam held the sheet tight against her chest as she called out to the fleeing woman. When the woman's name was called out again, it occurred to Holly just how tired she was. Wanted Pam out, she just wanted her to leave. Preferably in her birthday suit. Finally conceding, Holly let go and held her hands up. "Just take it." Were the last words she spoke to Pam.

Standing at the door, she watched as Pam climbed into her car with the nurse and left. The Egyptian cotton sheets had been a birthday gift from Pam, a gift that no longer held value. At the time Holly's words were referring to the sheet. Later she would realize that it was more, she let Pam into her heart and she broke it. Pam moved out that afternoon and Holly spent the 4th by herself, watching the fireworks on her back porch, crying and getting quite drunk. In the weeks following the break up, Holly made up for lost time by dating anyone she found the least bit attractive. When she started to date a nurse, Carmen in the cardiac unit, the casual fling became a full blown stalking case. Carmen would "stop by" the ER all the time, trying to spend time with Holly. Her possessiveness and jealousy of the ER doctor began to interfere with Holly's work and the care of patients. Holly filed a complaint with the Human Resources department.

Just before Thanksgiving, Holly heard Carmen was released for performance. She made a resolution not to date anyone affiliated with the hospital. She hadn't gone on a date since the Carmen incident. Paranoid and untrusting, Holly decided her best bet was to remain hopelessly single. It had been quite some time since she had slept with anyone. No wonder her dreams were becoming more and more erotic. She needed to go out and find someone to fulfill a weekend of anonymous, no strings attached sex. Glancing at her watch, the night was still young and the waiting room was still filled. She needed to get moving.

Dressed her third set of scrubs of the night, white tennis shoes covered her throbbing feet. She couldn't wait for this shift to be over. Holly grabbed the chart from the slot on the wall next to the door. Opening the heavy wooden door into a common room with four beds, she glanced up at the girl who was crying. The girl was around sixteen or seventeen. *Just what I don't need.* Holly was not very patient with crying females and this one looked like a piece of work. Lying in the bed closest to the window, the young woman stared outside at the snow falling.

"Hello. I'm Dr. Graham. Are you.." She flipped the chart to look for the girl's first name. The diagnosis was a broken left femur, *Stanley, Michelle* "Michelle?" Holly raised the film and placed the x-ray on the light box. The back light flickered on after a couple of seconds. She had the full attention of the teenage on the bed. "Are your parents here?"

"No. We were on the way home from the basketball game. Some moron cut us off and we crashed." The venomous remark and anger the teen projected took Holly by surprise. This teen had more going on than a broken leg.

"Did you win the game?"

"Yes." Holly's question was answered by the frazzled looking brunette who walked into the room. "Personally, I would have rather lost than see anyone hurt."

Holly stopped looking at the teen and turned to the figure who entered the room. The woman was in her late twenties or early thirties and very attractive. Long cinnamon brown hair was pulled back in a ponytail and hung to her shoulders. From the cut on her chin and the puffiness under her eyes, she was having a stressful day.

"From the film it looks like a clean break, but see this little speck here. This is a possibly a piece of your bone." Holly ran the tip of her pen over the line in the femur highlighting the break. The woman stepped closer to view the x-ray. The sweet scent of citrus and flowers filled Holly's senses. She guessed the source was from the woman's perfume or shampoo. Holly turned to see the concern in the stormy gray eyes next to her.

"Will I be able to play again?" The teen's voice cracked as she waited for Holly's answer.

"Yes, but not this year. Looks like it may have been your last game this season. I'm sorry." Holly knew it was not what the patient wanted to hear, but they rarely did. "I'm really sorry." Holly moved to the side of the bed and placed her hand on the teen's healthy leg. "Your mom." Holly gestured towards the woman standing at the end of the bed. "May want you to have a specialist review the films tomorrow or Monday."

"Excuse me." The woman looked at Holly. Her eyes were silver and seemed to dance over Holly's face and piercing her soul. "I'm her coach." Tracey stated she hoped the doctor did not think she was old enough to have a seventeen year old child.

"I apologize. I just thought that you were a parent or..." The doctor quit talking while she still had some sense of common sense. "It's been a long day, Coach." Holly extended her hand. "Holly Graham."

"Tracey Campbell." Tracey felt the warmth engulf her hand. She thought for a moment. "Dr. Graham?" Tracey watched as the tall blonde doctor nodded. "I was told to find you by Lt. Eckhart. We were in a crash. The team. The bus. Oh my God." Tracey put her left hand to her forehead. Holly was quick to notice that there was no wedding band on her ring finger.

Holly listened to the amount of words that were flying from the coach's full pouting lips. They did appear very kissable and Holly was having a hard time concentrating on what was being said.

"Wait...wait." Holly held her hands up as the brunette continue to spew large amounts of information in a very short amount of time. "Slow down. What do you need?" Holly questioned as her mind raced. *Me... sure I'd be happy to oblige.* Shaking the unprofessional thoughts from her head, she raised her brown eyes to meet the quicksilver color of the coach's. How quickly did they change color? They were still gray, but a lighter penetrating color replaced the storm clouds.

"I need to get these releases over to County." Tracey held up a stack of papers. The soft doe eyes of the doctor glanced at the pile.

"Certainly." Holly nodded and gestured for Tracey to follow her as she the door open for the dark haired woman to pass through. As they walked down the white tiled floor of the hallway, she studied the teacher. Her frame stood slightly shorter than Holly's stature. Holly was slimmer from long hours of work and not eating properly. Running on coffee and adrenalin became the norm, versus sitting and having a meal or a snack. The teacher looked healthy and fit. A narrow waist and broad muscle mass in an athletic body yet very feminine. "Are you here by yourself? Any other coaches?"

"Yes, Andy, my assistant coach. He went with the other girls to County. Is there a phone I can use? I know we can't use a cell phone in here, but I need to get a hold of the parents and..." A soft chuckle came from the figure next to her. Tracey stopped and placed a hand on her hip. "I don't see the humor in this."

"Ms. Campbell do you realize you said about thirty words with a run-on sentence without taking a breath?" She paused and looked at gray eyes boring into her. "You will be much more effective if you slow down for a moment and take a breath. Please tell me you don't teach English."

"Biology." The whisper of an answer came from the teacher. The answer made the corners of Holly's mouth turn upward. Their eyes met again. Holly could feel the heat rising to her face, through her body and into her loins. How long had it been since Pam moved out? When was the last time she had gotten laid?

They reached the admissions desk, which appeared to be in total chaos. "Not good. Come this way. We'll try Plan B." Holly held open the stairwell door and they climbed to the next level. Across the hall from the stairs and over three doors to the left, a plaque with Dr. H Graham hung next to the door. Sliding the key into the knob, Holly turned and pushed open the solid oak door, revealing a large comfortable office. Towards the window was a large desk and credenza made from cherry wood. Matching bookshelves housed numerous hardbacks and binders of medical information. Completing the set was a smaller round table with four chairs near the door with the latest AMA Journal in the center. Under the large window were numerous plants that could have been tokens of appreciation from families or patients. Holly walked towards the credenza where a small coffee maker and a pitcher of water were sitting. Along the wall with the bookshelf sat a large chair and a very large cushioned couch which could accommodate the frame of the doctor.

"There is a fax machine behind the wall there. A small bathroom is also in that cubby. Feel free to use the phone and the couch if you desire. If you want coffee, this isn't bad. It taste like heaven compared to the cafeteria slosh. "

"I don't want to put you out." Tracey felt like an intruder in the doctor's personal space.

"Tonight has been tough on everyone. I think my Admission Clerk is about to kill someone so please, I feel much safer with you here." Holly didn't hesitate to let the attractive coach use her private office. In the ten years at the hospital, she never felt compelled to let anyone use her office. *Admit it, you think she's cute. Straight, but cute.* Holly sighed, knowing her thoughts were true. "Make yourself at home. I think there is a club sandwich in the frig if you are desperately hungry. Sorry, that's all I have to offer." The pager at Holly's hip began to shriek. "Shit." Holly

muttered as she looked at the read out. The ER was paging her. "I have to go." Holly gave the coach a wave and headed down the stairs to the sound of an Ambulance entering the bay.

"GSW to the head!" The call from an EMT filled the hallway as soon as Holly hit unit floor.

~

Chapter 3

Replacing the phone in the cradle, Tracey ran her hands through her hair in frustration. She winced as she hit the tender spot above her right ear. She must have smacked the window pretty hard. What was it her father said, good thing she had such a hard head? Finally she got hold of Andy through Allison. Very grateful she was at Jessup being treated like a Queen, instead of at County where Andy was accused of being a pedophile. The hospital staff raised questions about his relationship with the team. Why he was alone with all the under aged females.

The girls were shaken up for the most part, their injuries were minimal. Michelle's broken leg was the worse injury on the team. She was tucked into her hospital bed in a private suite. Her father, Geoff Stanley was some big wig with the county and was able to get to the hospital despite the roads being closed. From the report she received via Allison, Tabby needed six stitches in her hand and was in extreme pain. Zoey dislocated her shoulder, and they popped it back into place in the ER. Zoey passed out from the pain and was sedated. Tracey's main concern was Zoey. She knew Mrs. Pope was a single mother and worked more than one job. She hoped she could get to the hospital.

The Maryland DOT area closed the highways just after the accident happened. Tracey was thankful they were on I-195 and not I-95. The larger highway was said to be worse than the bypass they were taking on the way home. Parents frantically looked for ways to retrieve their children after finding out they were safe and sound. Most a little bumped and bruised, but for the most part healthy. Except for Carl. She wondered what happened to the bus driver. He was whisked away so quickly from the accident scene. She wasn't sure what hospital he was sent to. She recalled the EMT saying something about the driver being sent to Jessup. She hoped he was doing alright. He didn't seem to be doing well at the scene. His heroic effort saved them from seriously being hurt, the bus could have easily turned over or gone off the road. Maybe she would ask Dr. Graham to see if he was at Jessup.

Dr. Graham had been extremely nice to Tracey. Going out of her way to make sure the coach was taken care of. Tracey smiled for a moment. There was warmth in the doctor's voice and touch that made goose bumps rise on Tracey's arms. Again, she was thankful she was in heaven at Jessup not the hell Andy was going through at County.

After she contacted the parents, Tracey called her mother. The ringing of the line buzzed back in her ear. On the third ring, it was picked up.

"Tracey!" The frantic voice of Ellen Campbell came over through the receiver. "Mom, I'm fine." She felt a wave of dizziness pass over her for a moment. Gripping the edge of the wooden desk

she waited for the odd feeling to pass. "A little scratch on the chin, nothing big. Some of the girls weren't so lucky." Tracey went on to describe who was injured and what happened.

"How are you getting home sweetie?" Tracey turned to look out the window. The snow had lightened up but still continued to fall. She really hadn't thought of that. Her car was in the parking lot at the high school with a foot or more of snow on top of it.

"I may see if Piper is on duty. She might be able to swing by in the morning." Tracey eyes went to the couch in the office. It looked comfortable. It was a hell of a lot better than the hard plastic chair Andy was sitting on.

"Well, stay there if you can't get home. Oh, your photo from the yearbook and some of the video from the holiday tournament ran on the news tonight." Tracey cringed. Thinking about the photo. It was not one of her best. One of her friends saw it, started laughing and ask if she flew in on her broom that morning. Her hair was very puffy. Not remembering when the photo was taken, Tracey knew it had to have been a humid day.

Ending the call with her mother, she stood up and went to the credenza. Did she really want to have another cup of coffee? The doctor was right, it was much better than the black liquid from the cafeteria. In her private space, Holly Graham didn't reveal much about herself. A few personal items were scattered about the office. A diploma from the Maryland State Medical School hung on the wall, below it an undergrad degree from Kent State University in Ohio, the university made infamous for the National Guard opening fire on student protesters decades earlier. Tracey ran her hand over the year of graduation. A quick math calculation, she decided that the doctor looked very good for her age.

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Nurse Rollins entered the suture room and received a polite smile from Dr. Graham as she stitched up a nervous gang banger's head. "Rollins, can you do me a favor?" Holly batted her soft brown eyes at the older nurse. After ten years, she knew what requests she could get away with from the overbearing woman.

"Have you seen this place?" The response was what she expected but a quick flash of a smile over the kit placed in front of the doctor and patient.

"I've seen it Sandra. Which is why I'm stitching up Mr. Biggy here." With the comment, the young black man flashed his silver grill to the stout nurse. Holly chuckled as the nurse's reaction to the patient's teeth. "I have a special guest using my office. Can you check on them?" Receiving the request to go to Dr. Graham's office, the nurse looked at the doctor as if she was insane. When Holly flashed those big doe eyes at her with a raised eye brow, the nurse dismissed her with a wave of her hand.

"Just so you know I'll do it when I want to do it. Not going to be running your personal errands for you."

"She'll go right up there. Can't stand not knowing what's going on." Holly confided in her patient. "You need to stay out of trouble." She thumped her finger against the wound on the teen's forehead. "You got lucky this time." Holly had treated Biggy on more than one occasion. Dr. Martinez wanted to turn the teen into the police. After the incident in the triage area with the cops, Holly didn't want any more trouble tonight. Biggy was a good kid, just put in a place where his choices were limited. His mom, a crack addict, left Biggy in charge of three siblings. He did his best to keep them together and out of trouble and foster care. Unsure who his father was, he made do with his options. The street was where he made his living doing what he needed to keep a roof over his family's head and food on the table.

Rollins pushed her index finger into the center of the number two button of the elevator. Her white shoe tapped impatiently against the tile. Who would Dr. Graham let use her office? Tonight was crazy but the attending barely used the work space, let alone allowed someone else to use the workspace. When Rollins entered the second floor administration wing, she noted the eerie silence compared to the chaos ensuing every hour on the hour in the ER. Knocking lightly on the wooden door, she stuck her head in to see the guest sitting at the desk with the phone pressed to her ear. Rollins stifled a grin. The woman was attractive. Rollins cleared her throat as the woman leafing through a day planner raised her eyes.

As soon as Rollins laid eyes on the teacher, she understood why Holly offered her the office. Holly was smart as a whip when it came to treating and diagnosing patients. When it came to her personal life, the blonde was lacking in any sense. Pam Farmer was a no good piece of crap who dragged Holly and her name over the coals for the last six months. The no good player was messing with her favorite doctor. She couldn't wait to catch the EMT on the street somewhere. She'd give her a piece of her mind and a good smack to the back of the head.

"Miss?" She waited for the visitor to acknowledge her. "I'm Sandra Rollins." The head nurse watched as the woman naturally smiled a greeting even though she looked as if she had been run through the ringer. "Dr. Graham asked me to check on you. Do you need anything?"

"No, but thank you for asking. I've gotten a hold of all the students' parents and faxed the consent forms to County. Please let Dr. Graham know how grateful I'm for using her office."

"Can't say in the ten years she's been here she 's ever let anyone use her space. Got this office a couple years back when she got the staff slot. Consider yourself lucky Miss?" The question rolled out. Tracey stood and extended her hand in greeting.

"Campbell. Tracey Campbell, I'm the coach of the basketball team that was involved with the bus accident."

Rollins moved further into the room, taking the offered hand. She had been in the office a few times. A handful of pictures and a few personal items were scattered around the office. Sandra moved to the photos lined along the bookshelf. Mostly pictures of the staff and friends of the doctor. She picked up the one of Melanie and Holly at the lake. Both dressed in casual clothes, sunglasses popped on top of Holly's head capturing Mel planting a playful kiss on the doctor's cheek. It was well known that Dr. Graham preferred women. There were a few comments from

the staff, but nothing that wasn't squashed once they worked for the well respected physician. "Believe me, I know. My assistant coach is at County on a hard plastic chair next to a payphone." They both started to laugh as Tracey swung the comfortable office chair back and forth in a nervous motion as she stood behind it. Sandra nodded in approval of the spunky woman by Holly's chair. She could see why the doctor offered her office to this woman. Maybe if the cards were right, the doctor would find some luck in her personal life. Tracey took in the information the nurse provided. "Doctor Graham has been working here for ten years? She doesn't appear to be that old." Tracey stopped swinging when she realized the nurse with the ebony hair and toffee skin was studying her.

"She's been here that long. She ain't a spring chicken. That woman knows her stuff. Been with her since the first day she set foot in the ER. All wet behind the ears." Tracey laughed whole heartedly with the vision of the captain of the ER young and vulnerable. She caught the wise gaze of the nurse.

"I find it hard to image Dr. Graham being wet behind the ears." Tracey joined Rollins by the bookshelf. The photo of the doctor with a cute woman kissing her cheek was beautiful. There was a sparkle in her eyes and mischief. She looked happy. Tracey wondered if the woman in the photo was more than just a friend. Her gaydar had begun pinging strongly when she walked into Michelle Stanley's room and saw the striking figure looking at the x-ray.

"Sometimes she still is when it comes to life outside this building." Rollins stated as she set the photo back on the shelf. "Not sure if Doc will get up here tonight. Still seems to be a full night ahead of us. Authorities have shut down the roads and County isn't accepting anymore patients. It's us." Rollins proudly carried the burden of caring for as many patients as possible. They never closed the doors. "You might want to take advantage of the couch. I don't think you're going anywhere for a while."

"Thank you Nurse Rollins." Tracey called after the exiting woman. She picked up the photo and sighed. The doctor, a gorgeous looking woman, was in a relationship. Examining the photo closer, she wondered where it was taken. The background reminded her of the area around Maxie's cottage. Her mother would approve of a doctor. It didn't matter who Tracey dated, Ellen Campbell rarely approved of Tracey's choices in dates. Maybe her mother would actually give a positive reaction if she started to date a doctor. Familiar faces of the staff and the ER area were in most of the photos. An extremely beautiful looking Holly dressed in a formal tight fitting sage colored dress, her arm wrapped around a very dashing looking dark haired man in a tuxedo. The Human Rights Campaign banner hung behind them with a date of two years ago in the lower right hand side of the photo. The man looked familiar but she couldn't place him. She glanced at the red digital numbers of the clock on Dr. Graham's credenza. Eleven thirty. Where had the day gone? She looked at the falling snow and then to the couch. She wouldn't be going anywhere soon.

Tracey slipped off her shoes and lay on the couch. She closed her eyes. The crash flashed into her mind's eye. She sat straight up on the couch. How could she sleep? Were the kids having the same trouble she was? Rubbing her gray eyes she tried again. Pulling her jacket over her chest, she settled on the couch and closed her lids, praying the visions would go away.

~

The light from the hallway filtered into the dark room as Holly slipped into her office. The digital read out put the day close to sunrise, if the sun decided to show up this morning. Her attention went to the form huddled on the couch. A leather coat covered the teacher like a blanket. Holly cursed, she should have sent a blanket up to the Coach to use. She went to the closet and found a clean lab coat. Crossing to the sleeping figure, she covered the woman with the lightweight coat. It wasn't much but it was better than nothing. Holly pulled her chair out from the desk. Slipping off her tennis shoes, she raised her stocking covered feet to the flat surface of the cherry wood. She closed her eyes and leaned back the high leather office chair and quickly fell asleep.

~

A scream filled the office, bringing Holly out of her slumber. Disoriented for a moment, she lost her balance in the tipped back office chair, falling flat on her back. "Oomph." A loud squeak escaped from the doctor's lips. The scream had startled her and her knee jerk reaction had her lying on her office floor. Slowly assessing her condition, when she was certain all fingers wiggled correctly and her back was intact, she rolled to her knees. The figure on the coach was rocking back and forth, releasing small sighs as she did so. Holly knew Coach Campbell had been involved in an accident yesterday. By late evening, she realized she had treated the most severe injuries from the bus accident. Tracey and the students came away with minimal injuries. When the cries got louder, Holly scrambled on her knees over to the teacher who was experiencing a bad REM cycle.

"Hey! Ms. Campbell!" Holly sat on the edge of the couch and tugged on the coach's arm. The teacher rolled over, her eyes wide in fear. She flung herself into Holly's arms and her frame was engulfed in Holly's caress. She held the scared woman in her arms, rubbing her hands down her back for comfort. The educator's body shook with fear as Holly whispered words to soothe the nightmares away. Leaning into the arms of the coach, she held the woman's shaking form until the quiet cadence of sleep took over. Sitting there with Tracey in her arms, Holly continued to stroke the span of her back, trying to memorize the soft landscape. Guilt tugged at her conscience, she was enjoying the moment and the feeling of the soft warm body pressed against hers. She pulled back to study the sleeping teacher. A small butterfly bandage was hastily stuck to the chin of her heart shaped face. Her eyes were closed, but Holly could visualize the stormy gray irises. As she settled against the arm rest, Tracey snuggled against her chest, sending an unfamiliar feeling of peace through her body. Holly relished the feeling and relaxed. She fell asleep the instant she closed her eyes.

A distant hum infiltrated the dream state Holly was enjoying, the persistent noise joining the slight vibration against her hip. Coming to her full senses, Holly felt the weight against her chest. A dark headed woman's face was pressed against the swell of her breast. She didn't mind Tracey's presence, but she knew the woman would be embarrassed at their current position. Trying not to wake the sleeping form, Holly lifted her hips slightly to create space. The teacher immediately pulled her back, sliding her thigh between Holly's legs pressing against her core. *Jesus!* Holly bit her bottom lip. Her libido was in over drive and the attractive woman wrapped around her torso pushing against her was not providing any relief. A gasp must have escaped as

Tracey's head lifted as silver eyes bore into Holly's soft brown ones. There was a glimmer in the teacher's eyes that quickly disappeared when she realized where she was positioned and her body was pinning Holly to the cushion.

"Oh... I'm... how?"

"You were having a nightmare last night." Holly shifted as Tracey eased her body off her. "I just came over to make sure you were okay and well, exhaustion took over." Holly stretched her arm, trying to get the circulation back in the limb. Tracey sat up, running both hands through the long dark threads on her scalp. Her eyes went to the window and the light shining through. Her gaze dropped to the overturned office chair behind the desk.

"What happened?" Tracey asked as she turned back towards her seat mate.

"I was sleeping in the chair and you screamed...last night...this morning. I fell over." Holly felt the rise of heat to her cheeks.

"Are you hurt?"

"Just my pride." Holly ran her hand along her hip, grasping the pager on her side. She yawned and looked at the read out. "I have to make a call." Holly stood up her back popped and snapping in her knees echoed. "I brought you some scrubs to change into if you want." Neatly stacked in the center of the table was a set of sea foam green scrubs.

"What time did you get into the office?"

"Four-ish. Not bad, three hours of sleep." Her eyes looked towards the digital clock. "If I can get home, I have a couple days off coming." Holly crossed to the desk and picked up the phone. "This is Doctor Graham." Holly listened to the voice on the other end. Her eyes went to the figure waking up on her office couch. "Thank you. I'll let her know." She chuckled and set the phone down. "You're a popular person. There is a cop and a parent looking for you. Not sure if you're in trouble or not young lady, but you may want to see who is waiting for you in the lobby." Holly turned to the window taking in the peaks of white that covered the landscape. For once she was appreciative of her gas hog SUV. She turned to Tracey. *Would this be it?* The teacher obviously had people concerned for her and waiting on her. A couple of hours of cuddling against the teacher would serve as a lasting image in Holly's memory bank.

"Well, if I don't see you, good luck with the season, Coach."

"Oh..." Tracey stood up the white lab coat slipping to the floor. "A...thank you Dr. Graham. You don't know how much this, you have helped me." She bent to pick it up just as Holly reached for it also. Their heads collided, each giving a little groan.

"That was a bad idea." Holly said as she pressed her hand to her forehead. Tracey folded the white coat and handed it to Holly. "I'm glad that you and your team are okay." Taking the coat, she put it in the closet next to the bathroom. "If you need anything, don't hesitate to call." Holly

grabbed the stethoscope from the table and went to the office door. "It was very nice to meet you, Tracey."

"Dr. Graham...Holly." Tracey called out to Holly as she started out the door. "We are going to have a couple more games this season if you feel like..." Tracey rolled her eyes, knowing what person in their right mind would enjoy watching a girls' high school game. "Stopping by to watch us play."

"I'll think about it." Holly said as she looked at the teacher's chin. "I wish I had seen this earlier." Holly reached out and touched the wound. "Who ever did this needs to go back to school."

"I did it." Tracey admitted. "It was crazy in the ER and I didn't want to bother anyone with this."

"It wouldn't have been a bother. You may have a scar." Holly pulled a pen light from her pocket. "Sit down." It was an order more than a request. "What aren't you telling me?" Holly directed the brunette to the chair. She took the small light and looked into Tracey's eye for reflexes. She took her hands and ran them along the sides of Tracey's skull. The teacher backed away as Holly hit a tender spot. "You hit your head?"

"On the window." Tracey confessed. She was feeling fine. The dizziness at the accident did not reoccur. "I was a little bit dizzy at the accident but I.."

"Tracey, you should have said something. You could have a slight concussion." Holly chastised her. "Do you have anyone at home?" Holly's face reddened. Her professional concern for the woman's well being could have easily been misunderstood.

"Nope. My folks live in Silver Springs. Got a couple brothers and some friends, but no one at home." Tracey smiled at the doctor teasing her. "What about you?"

"What?" Holly stepped back. She saw the glimmering gray eyes starting at her.

"I was looking at some of your photos and you look good with the red head." Holly looked at the photos on her desk. "I mean, you look happy."

"Oh..." Holly said as she remember the day she and Mel were at Deep Creek camping with a group of friends. "That's Mel. We're good friends. She might be downstairs. I think she worked at your accident last night."

"Carl." Tracey whispered the name of the driver. "The bus driver, he was taken away from the scene first. Do you think you can see what happen with him? He kept the bus on the road." Tracey began to shake thinking about the accident.

"Hey... hey..." Holly wrapped her arms around the emotional teacher. "I'll check on the bus driver. The kids are good. A little roughed up but not anything time won't heal." The warmth from embrace was intoxicating. Her hands ran the length of Tracey's back. *What was she doing? This teacher had gotten closer to her in the past twelve hours than anyone ever had.* Her heart

beat fiercely in her chest. She needed for her brain to start working again. Sleep deprivation paralyzed her brain. In the ten years at Jessup, she never crossed the professional line with a patient. Going against moral and ethical standards could ruin careers and lives. A lesson she learned in a previous life. Yet the attractive woman in her arms made her want to forget the oath she took.

"I'll check for you. On Carl?" Holly disengaged her body from Tracey's with a groan of disappointment when her arm brushed against the coach's breast. "If I don't see you be careful going home. If you get a headache or the dizziness returns, I'd suggest seeing your physician."

The teacher nodded her head. Holly did not want to be a physician at this moment. She wanted to know this beautiful woman sitting in front of her. Their eyes met again. Intense was the only word that Holly could use to describe the feelings she was having.

"You have the most intriguing beautiful eyes I've ever seen...liquid silver." Holly realized she had spoken her thoughts aloud. Tracey blushed and turned away.

"Thank you. Some of the kids say that my eyes are evil looking." She laughed nervously. "I'm glad you don't think that way."

"I'm...not being very professional. I usually don't let patients use my office."

"I'm not your patient." Tracey chimed in.

"That's a fine line." Holly got to her feet. "Why don't you clean up? I'll go see if I can find information on Carl?"

"Parker...mid sixties white."

"I'll leave the information at the admissions desk." Holly pulled Tracey to her feet.

A wave of disappointment rolled over Tracey as she watched the tall blonde leave. She wanted to get to know the beautiful intriguing doctor who had been overly accommodating. Gathering her things, she placed them in a neat pile on the cherry table. Making a quick stop in the small bathroom in the office, she turned on the light and gasped at her appearance. A large yellow-bluish bruise ran along the length of her face, from under her hairline to her jaw. On her chin was a neat sterile strip holding the slice together. Her hair was fussed at every angle and standing on its own in the back. *Now I know why she ran.* Tracey ran the water, splashing her face and gingerly touching the discoloration. Out of her bag, she grabbed her brush and tried to tame the locks into a presentable style. Fixing the ponytail she wore earlier, she pulled her hair back into a long mane.

~

Holly found Musah running the administration desk when she ventured back to the ER floor. She waited while he finished up his phone call. When his tired blood shot eyes turned towards her, she offered a comforting smile.

"Going home soon?"

"More like finding a bed here. Power is out at home."

"Any word on the GSW?" She asked.

"He is out of surgery and stable."

"Good. On that note I am out of here." Holly pulled the stethoscope from around her neck.

"Hey Doc." Musah called out before Holly could escape. In his long fingers he held a slim piece of paper. "You got a note."

"Yes?"

"I don't like being your messenger service." His smile broadened as he picked up the ringing line. Holly stepped away from the desk and unfolded it slowly. The handwriting was neat and scripted. Holly's chest pounded, she could only hope. Her eyes scanned the name at the bottom.

Holly,

Go home and get some well deserved rest. I'd like to treat you to dinner.

Call me.

Tracey

The phone number was written below her name. Holly smiled and suddenly didn't feel quite as tired.

~

"So what was with the mystery note passing at the hospital?" Yvonne Piper asked as she pulled her police unit down the freshly plowed street. Piper and Geoff Stanley waited for Tracey in the hospital lobby. Piper was taking her home or to her parents. Mr. Stanley ranted about the lawsuit he was filing against the school system for negligence. He spewed about his daughter's health and her college basketball scholarship being in jeopardy. Tracey was the coach and had never been contacted by schools recruiting Michelle.

"I met someone." Tracey repressed the slight giggle. She felt like one of her students.

"No shit." Piper said as she turned the wheel of the cruiser into the police station. She glanced at her passenger. "Any details to share?"

"Please Piper, I froze and have no details to share. I had to leave her a note at the desk. She may not want to call me." Tracey confessed. She didn't have the nerve to be turned down by Holly. If

the doctor called, she would know her intuition was right. If not, she wouldn't have to face the rejection. They pulled into a clear spot in the garage, Piper's Jeep Wrangler close by.

"What ever you do, please tell me it wasn't Dr. Graham." Piper said as she got out of the car. The look on Tracey's face said it all. "Shit."

"Why?"

"She doesn't really care for me." Piper didn't want to let Tracey know about the incident in the ER. "She called me Xena."

"Xena?" Tracey raised an eyebrow like she did when her students were misbehaving. "Were you doing something you shouldn't been?"

"I'm a cop. I do what is necessary."

"Right." Tracey had heard one to many stories from Piper of the years to know better. "Where was Darrell?"

"Forging relationships?" Piper smiled at her explanation of her partners actions.

"God help us."

~

Chapter 4

Holly drove her beat up CRV through the streets and back roads of Baltimore. Most of the roads had been left untouched by the plows. She put the small SUV in four wheel drive and trucked down the alley that ran behind her house. She hit the button for the garage door and pulled through the knee deep snow. Holly had to put a shoulder to the main door to open it against the weight of the snow. Growing up in Ohio, she had seen her share of snowfall. Gripped in her hand was her over night bag, the one she usually carried back and forth between the hospital and home. She made certain no snow fell on it. The last thing she wanted was for the note she left on top to get wet and the numbers run. She did memorize the digits, but she wanted to keep the note.

She struggled through the snow and up her back porch. If one of the Rose boys was around, she'd pay him to shovel the snow off her walks. Stomping her booted feet on the back porch, she opened the door to her house. There wasn't much to the house. The back porch led to a mudroom off the kitchen, the sunken living room ran the length of the house and a small sitting room was in the front of the house. Upstairs had two bedrooms and a bathroom. There was another shower in the basement that creeped Holly out. She bought the house dirt cheap a few years ago from the county as they were trying to revitalize the neighborhood. Her kitchen was a demo from a home show that had been held at the convention center three years ago. A worker from the convention center got a little careless with a nail gun. Holly was stitching him up when he mentioned all the

deals on the demos. She got the name of the contact and haggled with the guy over the kitchen. In the end, she landed a gourmet set up at a pauper's price.

Holly grabbed the receiver off the wall mount and dialed the number as she shed her coat and boots. Unwrapping the scarf from her neck she glanced at the clock on the microwave. Ten-thirty, she calculated sleeping time in her head. If she got hold of Tracey, she could see if the teacher wanted to meet around six-thirty for dinner. Her next shift was Wednesday so she had a few days to make up for sleep time. The ringing at the other end went unanswered. *Crap*. When Tracey's voice chimed in, Holly wanted to play it cool.

"Hi Tracey, this is Holly, umm Doctor Graham. I got your note. That was a very nice surprise. I'm not sure what your schedule is but if you're free this evening, I was going to stop by Johnny's Diner around sixty-thirty seven o'clock tonight. It's the old style silver bullet one off Eutaw Street. I'm pretty bushed so I'm going to catch a nap. If you want to meet up, that would be great. Call if you can't make it. My number is..." Holly rattled her cell phone number off. She hoped the teacher would at least call her back. She checked the thermostat and headed to bed. She silently prayed Tracey would accept her offer.

~

The small bell above the entrance way chimed as Holly pushed through the door. Pausing a second to allow her senses to take in the familiar sights and smells of the diner. Her mouth began to salivate from the smell of bacon sizzling on the grill. She picked the diner because Johnny's was always open. The owners, Jerome and Patsy Rankle lived next door to the restaurant. Johnny, the restaurant's namesake was Patsy's grandfather. His dream still lived on through the couple. Pasty stood at the formica countertop which ran the length of the kitchen. The older woman's eyes automatically lifted to the door when the bell chimed. The smile that formed on her face was not the practiced smile of a restaurant owner.

"Miss Holly! Visiting your old friends on such a cold evening?" Patsy took Holly into her arms and gave her a full hug. Holly towered over the small elder owner. "It's been too long. You have to stop more often." She started taking Holly's coat off. "Look at you still too skinny. You need to eat more. Put some meat on those bones."

"I missed you too Patsy." Holly said as her coat was hung on a metal hook near the kitchen entrance. In a booth away from the windows, Tracey sat with a steaming cup of coffee sitting on the table in front of her. "I'm meeting a friend." Holly gestured towards Tracey.

"She just got here. She's a cute one." Patsy took Holly's arm in hers. "Not trouble like that last one you had." She and Pam had breakfast once at Johnny's. Pam hated the diner. Holly winked at Patsy as she disengaged her arm from the owner's. She trusted Patsy's judgment. There had been too many days when the woman treated her to a meal when all the poor student could afford was a cup of coffee. Holly remembered almost crying when Pasty placed a plate of pancakes in front of her. She never forgot the owner who made certain she didn't starve.

"Hi." Holly said as she slid into the booth across from Tracey. The bruise on her chin was a deep blue with hints of yellows. "Ouch." Holly pointed to her own chin in reference to Tracey's injury.

"Hi. And yes, it hurts. I'm not kidding." She stated when she saw the smile creeping up on Holly's face. "I'm not taking another one of these for the team."

"How's the head?"

"Are you being a doctor? Because I thought I was meeting a friend?"

"Sorry." Holly held up her hands. "No medical questions will pass over my lips for the rest of the evening."

"Better." Tracey said as she took a sip of coffee. "They do have the best coffee." Tracey stared for a moment. The interaction with the small woman working the register and the tall doctor had her wondering about their relationship. "From the greeting you got, I will assume that you are a frequent customer to this fine establishment."

"I was here a lot during school. I spent many a night in that booth with a pot of coffee and a medical book." Holly pointed to the far booth in the corner. "Patsy is the owner and she looked out for me. I wasn't a punk kid. I never caused any issues."

"How old are you?" Tracey had been wondering the answer all night.

"Thirty five in July. You?"

"Twenty nine. You've been at Jessup for ten years." Holly nodded. Tracey quickly did the math in her head. "How old were you when you became an Chief Resident ?"

"Twenty-eight." Holly watched as Tracey struggled to figure out the years and education. "I finished high school when I was fifteen. There was some crap going on with my family so I didn't start college until I was sixteen. I finished my undergrad in three years and went into medical school."

"You knew you wanted to be a doctor?"

"Pretty much." Holly leaned back as Patsy placed a cup of coffee in front of her. She poured a little into Tracey's cup as a warmer. The menu in front of the women remained untouched. "Give us a couple more minutes." Holly let Patsy know. "Nothing else ever caught my interest. What about you? Always wanted to be a teacher?"

"I didn't at first, but I thought about people who I admired. My teachers were the first people who came to mind. Little pay, little reward, but they continue to do it."

"My dad was a teacher." Holly heard the bitterness in her voice. She didn't realize she still had strong feelings about the profession. It had been a long time since she had talked about her

father. She could feel her stomach tighten and her pulse race. She tried to push the memory into the past where it belonged.

"English?" Tracey laughed.

"Mathematics." Holly felt the regret for letting the bit of information about her father slip.

"Is he retired?"

"He's dead." Holly swiped the menu from the table. She hadn't intended to let her emotions get in the way. She hadn't thought about her family in a long time. There was no point in beating a dead horse.

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not." Her harsh tone had gray orbs looking at her strangely. "I was emancipated from my parents when I was fifteen." She explained watching Tracey's reaction to the declaration. "I don't want to talk about it. I don't know why I told you about my dad." Holly was angry for letting the information slip out.

"What's good here?" Tracey said sensing the blonde across the table was not comfortable. She picked up the menu and looked at Holly over the worn and grease-stained parchment.

"I'm sorry." Holly sensed Tracey's withdrawal. "Maybe... I'll tell you the story but not today. Ok?"

"I'm gonna hold you to that Dr. Graham. Besides, this doesn't count as dinner. I was hoping I could take you out or cook for you."

"If you are offering a homemade meal, your offer is accepted." Holly pulled Tracey's menu down. "I'm a breakfast person so the French toast is great, but it's the thicker pieces of bread, Texas toast."

"Sounds great." Tracey said as she reached across the table and squeezed Holly's hand. Holly breathed a sigh of relief as warm fingers touched hers. She didn't want to scare Tracey off. This was their first meeting. Patsy took their orders and they continued to talk through their meal.

Two hours later, the women sat at the booth, Patsy stopping by to fill up the ceramic cups. When Tracey motioned to stop, she smiled at the owner. "I'm going to be up all night and I have school tomorrow."

"Maybe you'll get a snow day." Patsy chuckled.

"I wish, or play hooky."

"You did just go through a traumatic accident." Holly teased but she saw the flash of concern fall across Tracey's face. "Are you having troubles?" She thought about the nightmares in her office.

"That is a doctor patient question." She wagged a finger at her companion. "And you are never going to be my doctor."

"Why? She is a great doctor!" Patsy scolded from another table. Holly cringed. She knew Tracey meant that there was a fine line between patient and physician.

"There are lines I will not cross Patsy." Holly smiled at Tracey as she spoke to the nosey woman a couple tables away. "What about your next game?"

"Wow that's going to be ugly. Michelle is out. Zoey is out. There goes two of my starting line up. My back up forward has stitches. I seriously doubt anyone of us wants to set foot on a school bus any time soon. We're going to play but it's not going to be a pretty sight."

"I'd like to see the team play and you coach. I didn't enjoy my high school experience."

"Graduated early." Tracey recalled. "Did you get shoved into a locker?"

"Nope, too tall. Garbage cans are a whole different experience." Holly could laugh now but having tapioca pudding slide down your pants was an experience she would never wish on anyone.

Digging through her purse, Tracey pulled out a small tri-colored schedule, the Bayview Senators mascot printed boldly on one side. A number of dates and times ran along two of the rectangles. Scanning the schedule quickly, Tracey realized they only had a few games left. "There's a game Thursday." She handed the schedule to Holly.

"Not many options left." Holly looked over the dates. She would be working for most of the rest of the games. She glanced at the dates, noting Valentine's Day was a couple weeks away. Maybe she'd see if the teacher wanted to go to dinner on the special day. Get through tonight, she may not like you afterwards, Holly's thoughts rattled through her head. Her not so stellar track record with dating had her thinking negatively. "There is a Tuesday game I can probably get to." The date was over two weeks away but she could probably get out of work by the time the ball was tipped off.

"Let me see." Tracey looked for the date. "Glenn Bernie at home. That will be good." Tracey was a little disappointed she wouldn't see Holly for at least two weeks. Just meeting someone and wanting to get to know them was never really a priority for her. Today after she got Holly's message, she cancelled her plans to stay at her parent's house for dinner. When Ellen questioned who she was going out with, Tracey smiled and shrugged her shoulders. She couldn't remember the last time she cancelled family dinner for a date. *Call if you can't make it.* Holly had said in her message. Tracey wondered if the doctor was concerned about being stood up.

Next Tuesday, Holly thought. She'd try her best to make the game. For some reason, she wanted to spend more time with Tracey. She had a hard time settling after her shift, she couldn't stop thinking about the teacher. When she finally fell into a deep sleep, she recalled the feel of brunette in her arms. How in the morning, gray eyes danced over her face in slight confusion. Tracey's beautiful face marred by the nasty greenish yellow bruise on her chin close to hers as she fixed the bandage. It had been a long time since a woman caught her attention. Tracey Campbell just didn't catch it, she demanded it. Sitting across from the woman instead of enjoying her company, Holly was thinking about the ten days between. The game seemed a long way off.

"Can I call you?" Holly asked in a teasing manner. She knew Tracey had to work the next morning and didn't want to interfere with her schedule.

"Absolutely." Tracey offered her a quick smile. "I should get going. I have to grade tests and return them to the kids tomorrow. I promised them." A quick glance to the clock on the wall confirmed it was going on nine o'clock. They had been hogging the booth at Johnny's for nearly two hours.

"I got this." Holly said as she grabbed for the check from Patsy. "My invite, my treat." She explained as she pulled her wallet from her back pocket. Taking a few bills out she flipped it over and left it on the table.

"Next time is my treat." Tracey slid from the table. She was dressed in faded jeans and a caramel colored sweater.

"I thought you were going to cook for me?" Holly said as she slid out to stand next to the coach. "I'll take you up on it if the offer still stands."

"It does, but I may be a horrible cook."

"I'll take my chances." They slowly made their way to the coat rack. Holly pulled her Gore-Tex jacket off the hook as Tracey gestured to the leather bomber jacket. Holly helped her put it on and savored the feel of Tracey's shoulders beneath her fingers for a moment. "Thanks for meeting me out."

"Thanks for asking me." Tracey hesitated. She wanted to spend more time with the doctor but tomorrow was a school day. "Do you live in the area?" Holly smirked.

"What?"

"So close I walked over." Holly explained. "I bought a run down house when the city was selling crack houses at auction. It's about five blocks away."

"Walked on a day like today?" Tracey was surprised that a professional like Holly would even think of walking and lived in a neighborhood like Mt Vernon.

"I didn't always have a car." Holly struggled.

"Let me give you a ride home. I wouldn't feel right letting you walk home."

"Thanks, that would be great." Holly was elated. She could spend a little more time with Tracey. Tracey didn't question why Holly chose to live in the inner city of Baltimore while most professionals fled to the safer suburbs. Very frugal with her money, Holly took the rundown stone front house and completely gutted it. Most of the renovation she had done herself. She hired a contractor for the electrical and plumbing. These areas, she didn't have the time or the knowledge to take on. She knocked down walls and rebuilt framework. The project took close to five years, but the payoff was worth it.

"So your house, is it redone?" Tracey pulled her hair from her jacket collar as she headed towards the door. She stopped suddenly and turned to Patsy. "The food and service was fantastic." She gave a small wave to the owner and headed out the door the bell chiming as she exited.

"I like her." Patsy said as Holly watched the brunette hop into the driver's seat of a red Jeep Cherokee.

"Me too."

"Don't mess it up." Patsy scolded her as Holly followed Tracey's lead and headed to the car parked on the street.

The interior of the Jeep was freezing. Tracey rubbed her hands together as she watched her breath swirl in front of her. Maybe she should have warmed it up. This was not the neighborhood to leave a car running. Her eyes followed Holly through the restaurant door, her jacket not zipped and a smile on her face. She was laughing at something Patsy was saying. Tracey watched as she opened the door and slid her tall frame into the passenger's seat, shutting the door quickly behind her.

"It's cold." Holly cooed as tendrils of breath circulated in the air.

"You should zip up your coat." Tracey said but her eyes were focused on Holly's chest. Her nipple peaked under her Under Armor jersey. Tracey felt the heat rush to her face and her center. Breaking her eyes away, she found Holly studying her in amusement. "You'll catch a cold."

"Yes, doctor." Holly smiled, knowing she had busted Tracey checking her out. It made her feel good. "Remember, I've seen your work before." Holly reached out and touched Tracey's chin. "You hit this pretty good. Wait 'til it starts with the purple and green shades."

"Great, I'll color coordinate my outfits." Tracey put the truck in drive and looked towards Holly. "Which way?" With quick instructions, they traveled the five blocks to Holly's house. Tracey pulled in front.

"Wow, this looks really nice." Tracey said as she took in the beautiful two leveled home. The front porch was large and mostly free from snow. The walk way was shoveled, but blowing snow

covered it again. A few scattered lights illuminated the windows throughout the house. She was able to make out some details. The entire front of the house was made out of large sandstone pieces. Six stone steps led to a large oak door with a pewter glass window. The windows on the second floor were of the same design. A large bay window was next to the door, revealing a sitting room with an overstuffed settee and antique table. A number of house plants along window ledge let Tracey know the plants in the doctor's office were more than gifts.

"Do you want a quick tour?" Holly didn't want to push. If Tracey had to get home or felt uncomfortable, she'd let it go.

"Sure, if you don't mind." Tracey reached for her door handle before Holly could answer. Getting out of the car, Holly tried to remember the status of her house. She came right home after her shift this morning and fell asleep. Waking up she went to meet Tracey at Johnny's. She didn't know what she would find.

"No promises on the cleaning. Maid's been off since 2000." Holly tromped up the front steps, happy that her neighbor Joey Rose had shoveled the walk and steps. She quickly opened the multiple locks with her key and opened the door for Tracey to enter. "I have the lights on timers." She turned to a small white panel to push in the security code. "This way it looks like someone is home."

"I love the glass work." Tracey studied the integral craftsmanship. The hardwood floors ran through the entrance way and into the other rooms, another touch that added to the beauty of the house.

"I went to West Virginia to get them from a house they were tearing down. The pewter windows are one of the original home designs. You can't get them at Depot."

"I bet not." Tracey ran her hand over the matching oak staircase. The refinished spindles and railing curled up to the second floor. To the right of the foyer was a dining room with the bay windows and plants. Directly in front of the front door was the staircase, to the left a small hallway led to a sunken in living room with a fireplace. A flat screen television was positioned across from the sectional leather couch. A soft beige Berber carpet covered the floor.

"I like to sit on the floor a lot. Hardwood floors wouldn't work well. This room and the bedrooms upstairs have carpet."

"That big a couch and you'd rather sit on the floor?" Tracey questioned.

"It's a comfort thing." Holly confessed. At one time in her life, she had a chair and table. The chair was so horrible she'd rather sit on the floor. She still did to this day. "Do you want anything to drink?" Holly brushed past her on her way towards the kitchen.

Tracey followed, taking in the details of the crown molding and attention to detail Holly had encompassed in her remodeling. When she took a step up into the kitchen, she was amazed, as if a kitchen from a designer was placed into Holly's home. For someone who didn't cook, this lay-

out was a far cry from that. A center island with a five gas burner stove top ran diagonally across the kitchen. A large number of cabinets, along with a pantry, were along the wall. A split window was over the sink with a great view of the backyard. It was a kitchen designed for a chef. "I'd love to have this kitchen." Tracey commented.

"I got a deal on it. There was a home show in town. I made some contacts and I was able to get a deal on it. Doesn't happen often." The look she received made her explain further. "That I get lucky."

"Maybe your luck is changing." Tracy reached out and touched her sleeve. Just as she was about to continue, her cell phone chirped loudly. Stepping back a few paces, Tracey looked at her phone. She smiled and lifted the phone to her ear. "Hey there. I see you survived." Tracey saw Andy's name on the LCD.

"God I wish I would have went to Jessup and you got stuck at County." Andy whined. "I didn't get home until one and I just crashed."

"Allison called to let me know you made it home and to give me an update on the kids."

"Yeah, she said that. Everyone is good from what I know. It took Mrs. Pope a while to get in to the hospital. She finally made it. I didn't get a call from her so I will assume Zoey is okay."

"Good to hear. I was worried about her. So what's up?" She leaned against the kitchen counter as Holly opened the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of water.

Holly held the bottle up as if to ask Tracey if she wanted some. Tracey signaled her to wait a moment. Listening to the person on the other end of the line, she shook her head. The conversation was brief and when it ended Tracey looked like the cat that swallowed the canary.

"What is it?"

"Do you have any wine?" Tracey asked as she moved closer. Holly visible gulped as Tracey's fingers touched her forearm. "It seems that school is canceled due to inclement weather tomorrow."

Taking a few seconds to realize what the teacher said. Holly put the water back and grabbed a bottle of Pinot Grigio. On the counter she had a nice Merlot resting. "Red or white?" Holly asked as she held the bottles in each hand. Tracey took the bottle of white and examined the label. She did the same with the red.

"Isn't that a Billy Joel song? Bottle of Red, Bottle of White?"

"I think it's a line from a song." Holly watched as Tracey put the white back in the subzero refrigerator.

"Red is good." She said as she handed the bottle to Holly. "You need help?" She asked as she took in Holly's shaking hands.

"How about you pour and I'll get the fire started." Holly put the corkscrew and glasses on the counter. She touched Tracey's shoulder with her hand. She liked this. Instead of saying goodnight, they had the rest of the evening together. "If you want me to pull your car into the driveway, I can. It's around back and a little tricky to find."

"Could you? That thing is finally paid off and if something happens to it..." Tracey confided. She held out the keys to Holly. Their fingers touched sending a jolt of electricity through them. Holly couldn't hold back the smile.

"What are you smiling at?" Tracey asked her.

"You." Holly moved closer and wrapped her arms around Tracey's waist. Holly was lusting after the gorgeous woman who stood in her kitchen and needed to get her libido in check. She wrapped her arms loosely around Tracey's waist. "Thank you for coming to dinner with me."

Feeling Tracey's arms come around her waist, Holly lifted her hand to touch her face. Her fingers traced along Tracey's jaw line to her lips. She looked for any hesitation from the teacher before she leaned in, replacing her fingers with her lips. A soft slow exploration began as their lips touched. They looked for their bearing in this new sensation. The kiss started slowly. Holly felt Tracey move closer and push her thigh between the vee of her legs. She wanted this. When mouths opened, sharing of a long, languorous kiss, Holly stepped back, breaking the spell. Her heart pounded against her chest as she tried to settle down. She didn't want to overplay her cards. This was their first date, if it was a date. Tracey's eyes were filled with question and concern. If just looking into those silver irises could set her heart pounding, Holly could only image what it would be like to touch Tracey.

"I'll start the fire and move your car." Holly stammered as she let her fingers touch Tracey's. Giving them a quick squeeze, she retreated to the living room to light the gas fireplace. A flick of the switch and blue and white flames engulfed the hearth. Slipping on her coat, she stepped on to the porch, letting the winter weather cool her body temperature. Shoving her hands in her coat pockets, she ran down the front steps to the truck. Knocking her knees on the steering wheel, she cursed as she slid the seat back. She'd have to remember to move the seat back if she ever drove Tracey's truck again. The truck rolled down the road and around the corner. Holly took the sharp turn carefully as she maneuvered the Jeep down the access road to her driveway and garage. Pulling the Jeep as close to the house as she could, she tried to mirror her steps in the snow from this morning's trek from the garage to the house. The foot steps she had made earlier were filled with fresh snow. Maybe she should send Tracey home, before the weather turned again. If not, maybe the teacher would be stuck overnight. Holly preferred the second thought.

The backdoor led into a mudroom off the kitchen. Slipping her snow covered boots off, Holly hung her jacket up and ventured into the kitchen. The wine cork was sitting on the counter top. She set Tracey's keys down on the table. She heard the soft sounds of music coming from the

living room stereo. Walking with stocking feet across the kitchen tile and into the living room, Holly leaned against the door jam and watched Tracey looking through her CDs.

"Truck's moved." Holly said as she watched Tracey jump from the sound of her voice. "Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you."

"It's okay, I didn't hear you come in." Tracey held a few CDs in her hands, an assortment of music. "I hope you don't mind." She held the disks in her hand.

"Not at all." She liked the fact Tracey had put on All my Life by K-Ci and Jo-Jo. The mood was set, a little romantic music, wine, a fire and a beautiful woman. Holly was living out a fantasy. She hoped this time Rollins would not be shaking her awake.

"Would you like to dance?" Tracey asked as a slower song was starting to play. Tracey was on her feet reaching for Holly's hand before she could answer. They held each other close in the center of the living room, moving slowly to the music, their clasped hands held high close to Holly's shoulder. Holly held on lightly at Tracey's waist. Tracey rested a hand on Holly's back.

"This is nice. I've never danced in my living room before."

"At my parents, my mom made my brothers dance with me for practice. I never got too lead."

"Do you want too?"

"Not tonight, maybe another time." Tracey leaned in and pressed her cheek to against Holly's shoulder. "You're ..." Tracey didn't finish her thought, instead she turned her head and kissed Holly's shoulder. The music continued as they swayed back and forth. Holly's hand moved to the small of Tracey's back, making small circles. She liked the feel of this woman in her arms. "You have to be exhausted." Tracey murmured as she stroked a hand down Holly's back. She pulled back just a little to look at Holly.

Holly stroked her hair lightly, then leaned towards Tracey placing a small kiss on her waiting lips.

"I'm okay." She pulled Tracey closer and continued to speak. "I've seen thousands of patients and I'm really glad you weren't one. I'll always remember this storm. The shift you came into my ER. I'm so glad you came to Jessup."

"Eighteen hours ago I was going through the worse day in my life. My team was in an accident. My best player broke her leg. Carl was badly hurt. Now I think that everything was meant to happen."

Slow down, slow down, Holly repeated in her head. Holly placed her hands on Tracey's waist. The teacher's arms went around her neck. They held tight to one another staring into each other's eyes.

"This has never happened to me before." Tracey whispered. "You are making it very hard for me." She leaned forward and buried her face in Holly's neck. Holly held her tighter, savoring Tracey's perfume. Dancing silently until the song ended. Holly couldn't hold back the smile when Tracey leaned in on tip toes and kissed her. Holly twined her fingers with Tracey's and led her to the couch. The fire was giving off a little heat but for all purposes, it was for decoration. They sat in the corner of the couch with the best view of the fireplace. The bluish flames licked at the protective metal curtain. Holly basked in the warmth of Tracey curled up next to her. Their fingers still meshed together.

"Any ex-girlfriends or boyfriends I should be aware of?" Holly asked as she pulled her hand free and wrapped it around Tracey's shoulders.

"A few girlfriends. Never had a boyfriend. I've been out since I was fourteen, at least to myself. I broke the news to my mom when I was sixteen. My dad a year later."

"That's pretty early to know."

"That's how I felt. It's how I've always felt. We were living in Jacksonville, Florida just off base. My dad was stationed there for a couple of years. When he was transferred to DC, I was crushed."

"A girl."

"Yes, a very pretty Latino girl with big brown eyes and a great smile. She was pretty stacked too as I think about it."

"You like 'em stacked?"

"No, I like brown eyes. Soulful gentle brown eyes." Tracey leaned forward and grabbed the wine glass off the table. She handed one to Holly and picked up the other. "A toast."

"To?"

"New friendships."

"I like that." Holly smiled as she lifted her glass to her lips. She liked the feel of Tracey's warmth next to her.

Tracey clinked her glass against Holly's, grateful to the storm for not having to work tomorrow. There would be no way she could sleep tonight. She was wound like a top, feeling bold and brazen. It had been such a long time since she even found anyone she was attracted to. Here sitting next to her was this wonderful sweet woman who had been nothing but nice to her in the midst of chaos. She thought Holly was attractive yesterday while panic and hysteria were all around them. Sitting next to the doctor, she realized it wasn't just Holly's looks that attracted her. There was a strength and confidence the doctor conveyed at the hospital. Never once with all the activities around her did she lose her cool. From their conversation, she knew there was a bit of

unrest regarding the doctor's family. Tracey wondered what could have happened to cause Holly to separate from her parents at such an early age.

"What about you? Any skeletons in your closet?"

"There are a few. As for ex-girlfriends, I got out of a semi-serious relationship last summer."

"What happened?"

"I caught her in bed with a woman."

"Jesus."

"At least it was the guest room." Holly shrugged her shoulders. There wasn't much she could do about Pam. "I had a stalker at work for awhile. It wasn't very pleasant. I had to file a complaint against her."

"You worked with her?"

"She was a floor nurse." Holly felt Tracey relax a little bit more as the fire and closeness of bodies made a cozy environment.

They sat for a while in the stillness, only an occasional noise from the fireplace or the snow falling from the roof breaking the silence. Tracey moved so that her head was resting on Holly's shoulder. Wrapped in the warmth of each other's arms, they enjoyed the moment. There was no hustle and bustle of the ER. No pages or phones ringing, just two women enjoying each other's company.

"Do you have plans for your snow day tomorrow?" Holly asked quietly, her cheek resting on Tracey's head.

"One hundred and thirty tests to grade. If I am here tonight, I know I can get work done tomorrow afternoon. I'm having dinner at my parents' tomorrow night." She sat up a little, looking into Holly's eyes. "You're welcome to come over for dinner. One more person is not a big deal."

Holly felt the color fade from her face. This was only their first pseudo date and she was being invited to meet the family, she didn't know what to do. She shifted uncomfortably on the couch, she could feel the beads of sweat forming on her forehead and upper lips. Her stomach rolled as she debated the possibility of meeting Tracey's parents.

"You can pass." Tracey rescued Holly from her on-going internal debate. "Some days I don't even want to go."

"Maybe another time." Holly breathed a sigh of relief. She wanted to get to know Tracey a little more before she was put up for examination by her family.

"You were freaking out." She heard the laughter in Tracey's voice as she felt the brunette's body move with small chuckles.

"If there is one thing I know, we have a big difference of opinion on family." The doctor commented.

"I like mine. You don't like yours." Tracey said in a matter of fact tone. Sensing that Holly would rather not talk further about the family issue, Tracey let it drop. There was no hiding that for Holly to emancipate from her parents, she didn't have the best family life. She emancipated herself, yet her father was dead. Tracey wouldn't push the issue. If Holly wanted to tell her, she would. Pulling her fingers loose from Holly's hand Tracey stood up. Shocked brown eyes looked up at her.

"Are you leaving?" The disappointment of the night ending could be heard in Holly's voice.

"I like you." Tracey leaned towards the doctor and let her lips brush over Holly's. Holly placed a hand at the back of her neck and pulled her closer, increasing the intensity of the kiss as she did. Tracey placed her hands on Holly's thighs so she would not tumble onto the blonde. Tongues danced and Tracey could feel her knees starting to sway. Pulling away breathless, Tracey found her voice. "If I stay, we will continue what we were just doing." She touched her hand to Holly face. The doctor pressed her cheek into her palm.

"I know." The soft sexy voice responded.

"I'm not ready." Tracey gave her a weak smile. "I hope you understand."

"Oh." The single word reply had Holly back on her haunches. Tracey was being completely and brutally honest with her. She didn't share herself lightly. Holly felt her chest constrict for a moment. She saw the far off stare Tracey was giving her. She was going to blow any chance she had with her. "I understand. I mean. I do understand." She was crushed by Tracey's decision. Yet, she didn't want to just have a quick roll in the bed with the teacher. She wanted more than just one date with a fast sex and loads of regret the next day.

"You do?" Tracey met her gaze again.

"I do." Holly knew Tracey was right. It would be better for them if they took some time to get to know each other. The last thing she wanted was regrets. "I'd like to see you before Tuesday. If you want to, that is."

"I'd like that." Tracey stepped back as Holly got her feet. "I can call after dinner at my parents."

"Sounds good." Holly said as she watched Tracey get ready for the ride home. She stood at the open back door, not caring if the heat escaped into the January night. She wanted to make sure Tracey was able to get the Jeep out and be on her way. When the brunette lifted her hand and waved goodbye, Holly mirrored the action. Tuesday was a long way off.

Chapter 5

The sun peeked out from the late January skies. Holly leaned her tall form against the brick wall of the hospital. She had her arms wrapped across her chest as the lab coat she had on did not protect her from the elements. A smile crept across her face as Mel Watkins approached with two tall Styrofoam cups in hand. "If that is a caffe latte from the Grinder, I will marry you right now!" Holly said as Mel held up two cups.

"Promises, promises. You're too picky and you're not my type." Mel said as she handed her one of the cups. She had just come in on a run. She took the bus to Grinders while her partner filled out paperwork. "Besides, there are millions of women who have yet to have an opportunity with me." Mel put a hand behind her stocking covered head and struck a pose worthy of Madonna. Holly laughed as she tipped back the cup and took a sip. "What are you doing tonight?"

"I'm going to a basketball game." Holly looked up at the cool gray skies of winter. She had a long day ahead of her. Tonight she was looking forward to seeing Tracey.

"U of M?" Mel asked wondering if the University of Maryland had a game tonight. She usually followed the women's sports but couldn't remember.

"No, Bayview High School." Holly explained. She watched the confusion look sweep across Mel's face. Bayview was a small community outside Baltimore County near the shore of the Chesapeake Bay.

"Why the hell are you going to a high school basketball game?" Mel leaned her backside against the wall next to Holly. There was a gleam in her friend's brown eyes. Mel met Holly a few years ago when she started working as an EMT for the city. They became friends after Mel had an extremely difficult case and lost her first patient on a run. A motor vehicle accident pinned a young woman about Mel's age against a cement pylon of a bridge. The woman was awake at the scene and spoke her last words to Mel, the EMT heard the fear in the woman's voice but promised her she would live. The victim died during transport. The small woman lost her composure and disappeared. Holly found Mel huddled in a fetal position in a supply closet, crying. She let the new EMT cry out her frustration, they went out later that week and Mel got shit faced. Since then the two women had been best friends. Holly was invited to a number of functions with the Watkins family.

"Do you remember the bus accident?" Holly asked the shorter woman standing next to her. Mel nodded and took a drink of her latte. "The coach invited me to a game."

"The coach." Mel nodded. "Is she cute?"

"God, yes. She's gorgeous."

"Good for you. Is she PLU?" Mel's code for "people like us" was a way to convey a person's sexuality without creating a stir in public.

"Yes, she came over last Sunday."

"Really? Did you go to church together?" Mel suppressed her smile.

"No, we met for dinner at Johnny's."

"Planned?"

"Sorta."

"What did Patsy say about her?" Mel asked knowing the owner of Johnny's had a soft spot for the doctor. Patsy treated Holly like a daughter. Mel knew Patsy hated Pam and gave Mel an ear full. Mel warned Holly about Pam, but her extremely intelligent friend was clueless with matters of the heart.

"Said she was better than Pam, I think she liked her." Holly thought about how Patsy complimented Tracey as she left the dinner. She recalled the feel of Tracey's hand on her arm. Her lips on her mouth, the way she tasted. Holly felt her core stir with desire. Tracey had put on the brakes, stopped the heavy petting session and walked away. Although Holly was frustrated, she still was frustrated, she respected Tracey and her decision.

"A felon would've been better than Pam. Is she a felon? God I hate that woman. What the hell were you thinking?"

"Who knows? I think it was lack of sex."

"And this coach?"

Holly let her thoughts drift to Tracey. A week ago she was sitting on her couch making out with Tracey like a teenager. Tonight would be the first time she would actually see the teacher. There had been a few telephone calls but with her schedule and Tracey's coaching schedule, they had only spoken twice. "She's a teacher." Holly said.

Mel immediately spewed her coffee across the snow covered pavement. "What?" Mel wiped her face with a glove covered hand. "A teacher! Are you kidding me?" Her face and voice was full of surprise.

"What's the big deal?" Holly was irritated by Mel's reaction. Mel knew about her parents. . About her father, Don, being accused of being inappropriate with a student and his suicide just before the trial started. How her mother, Rita, dumped the family and transferred to a bank in Chicago. Holly was fifteen when her life fell apart. If it wasn't for Jordan Norwood, she probably would have lost it. Instead, she picked herself up and forged on. She never looked back. Not even when Don committed suicide. Four years ago, Rita walked into the ER. Holly gave her the once over

and walked away. When Rita ran after her, Holly told Rollins to call for security. She disappeared into a restricted area leaving her mother to stare at a closed door.

"Your dad...I mean you." Mel stopped for a moment to formulate the correct response. "Holly, your dad was a teacher and if you're interested in a teacher, it may bring some unresolved issues."

"My dad?" Holly looked at her best friend, confused. "What the hell does he have to do with Tracey?"

"Tracey..." Mel nodded her head at the teacher's name. "Nothing really, I just don't want to see you hurt."

"Mel, my dad was accused of fucking around with one of his students. Somehow I don't think Tracey has to deal with anything like that." Holly recalled Tracey backing away from her. Her stance on sleeping together was very clear. Holly didn't fault the brunette. If Tracey wanted to wait, she would wait. Jesus, it wasn't as if they actually had a date. Not every lesbian needed to fall into the sack on the first date.

"I just worry about you." Mel said as she gave Holly a light punch on the arm. "Oh my!" Mel whistled through her teeth at the tall blonde police officer walking towards the entrance.

"Oh great, trouble." Holly mumbled at the cop who roughed up the suspect in custody in the ER. "Officer." Holly greeted the blonde.

"Doctor Graham." Yvonne Piper met the brown eyes of the doctor, then shifted her gaze to the smaller EMT with expressive hazel eyes. There was a small upturn in the EMT's mouth.

"No trouble today." Holly warned the cop as she passed. The blonde nodded and turned her back to the entrance as the doors slid open.

"On my best behavior." The officer saluted the pair and walked into the ER.

"My heart be still." Mel placed her free hand over her heart and closed her eyes as she leaned her head against the wall.

"Oh no. That one is nothing but trouble. I caught her and her cohort slamming a guy against the glass." Holly recalled confronting the police officers. "I called her Xena."

"She doesn't look like Xena. D'Anna Biers..yeah."

"Who the hell is D'Anna Biers?"

"Number Three on Battlestar Galactica. You know Lucy Lawless, Sci-Fi channel."

"You watch too much TV."

"See what happens when your sister works for the cable company? I can't help it we get every channel under the sun."

"I don't have a sister." Holly stated. She had gone out with the Watkins sisters on more than one occasion. Mel lived with her older sister, Michelle. "When is the wedding?"

"July. There was no way Michelle was going to have another June wedding."

"Number three." Holly smirked as her beeper went off. "Shit. I've got to go. Thanks for the coffee." Holly headed for the doors.

"Number Three went inside. His name is Beau."

"Beau?"

"It's a southern thing. They say third time is the charm." Mel said as she waved to the blonde disappearing through the doors. She waited a few minutes before going into the ER in search of her partner John. She hoped Holly was okay with the teacher. She was just happy to see her friend interested and dated someone other than Farmer. Throwing her cup in the trash container, Mel went in the hospital in search of John, but keeping an eye out for the infamous Number Three.

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The clock on the wall had moved less than five minutes since her last glance. Tracey craned her neck towards the windows of her class room. This was the longest day of her teaching career. She glanced around the room at the students who were busy working on the Genetics test. She could see the panic as some students read over the questions. She knew number three would have some of them scratching their heads. She watched as Michelle Stanley tried to sneak a peak at her neighbor's paper. Tracey cleared her throat and watched as the teen shot her eyes back towards her paper. Since the accident, Tracey had noticed Michelle and Zoey Pope stopped talking to each other. Zoey, on the other hand, was working through the problems and started on the backside. The two teens were complete opposites, so it didn't surprise Tracey that their friendship didn't last. Michelle was the daughter of a prominent county official and Zoey was raised by a single parent. Michelle could afford to go to any college she got accepted to. Zoey, on the other hand, had the grades to get into the school of her choice. The financial aspect would be the only thing holding the little blonde with the pixie hair cut back. Tracey knew Sophie Pope. The single mother worked hard, holding down two full time jobs in order to make a good life for her daughter. Zoey worked part-time at the pizza shop a few blocks away from Tracey's apartment.

She wished this day would finish. She was as nervous as a bride on her wedding day. Tonight, Holly would be at the game. She didn't know why she felt the flutter of butterflies in her stomach. This was the first time she had a potential girlfriend come to one of her games. The abrupt way she left Holly could have the doctor running the other way. They were both adults, but if Holly was looking for something quick and easy, she better look elsewhere. Tracey had many admirers through high school and college. She learned quickly that most of her dates

wanted to get into her pants as quick as possible. They weren't interested in her. She was a conquest for them. Tracey preferred the old fashioned slow and steady courting period. Her relationships were always kept at arms' length until she was ready to move to the next level. Holly was the first person she was interested enough in to bridge the personal and professional gap. Inviting the doctor to the school and game was a big step for Tracey. Holly was the first woman she wanted her parents to meet, her brothers to accept, and the idea of the not having the blonde in her life was driving her crazy. Normally, she wasn't an insecure individual. She knew she was a confident, well adjusted person. Her personal life never was that important. She had women she dated. No one ever evoked the intense feelings Holly did. Ten days ago, she met Holly. She slept in her arms on Saturday night and returned to those arms the next day. She felt safe and secure in Holly's arms. An hour had not gone by where her thoughts didn't drift to the tall blonde doctor. She prayed Holly would show up tonight, she needed to see her. They spoke on the phone and the memories of being held were imbedded in her brain. She knew she would have to face the consequences of walking out last Sunday. She wondered what would have happened if she had thrown her old fashioned ways out the window and spent the night with Holly. Her conscience would be riddled with thoughts of what Holly would think of her the next day. Was she being a slut? Did she really like Holly, or was it the title of doctor that grabbed her attention. Instead, she drove home and woke up alone in her apartment to a snow covered landscape and tests to grade.

Her personal life was limited to her family and a few friends she had made while living in Maryland. Being part of a naval family, Tracey quickly learned not to get attached to people. Every four to six years, the family pulled up and moved to the next base. From Bangor to San Diego, Tracey had lived on every waterfront the US offered. The stint her father, Frank, did in Italy was without the family. Her mother, Emily, refused to have the children overseas. Instead the family stayed in Jacksonville, Florida so her brother David could finish high school. Emily put her foot down when it came to bringing up the children. The final stop for the Campbell children was Maryland. Frank had a position at the Pentagon and worked at Annapolis for a period of time. Chris, Tom and Tracey were able to go to high school in Bowie, Maryland. David enrolled at Florida State University. Chris quickly joined his older brother in Tallahassee when he graduated. Tracey and Tommy were a year apart and went on to attend University of Maryland. Tracey had a basketball scholarship as a Terrapin. There were a few out of state schools who were extremely interested in having her attend. Traveling for most of her childhood, she wanted to stay in Maryland and be close to her family.

Her family was such an important part of who she was. She loved them. She couldn't image being on her own at sixteen. She looked at the faces of her students. She doubted any of them could ever survive in the world without the support of their families. Yet Holly spoke of having no support and being emancipated from her parents at fifteen.

The doctor had found her way. Tracey wondered how smart Holly was. To graduate from college by the time most students were entering university. Holly was accepted into a prestigious medical program when she was nineteen and finished with her residency by the time she was in her mid twenties. Tracey recalled her mid twenties and how school was not her first priority. Her grades dropped during a semester and she was placed on academic warning. One look from Frank was all she needed. She stopped the late night social hour and found the library as a source

to assist in her study time. Every weekend she went to her parents' for coffee or a meal. This last week she and Frank went to lunch at Gunning's and watched a basketball game. Holly had no family. No one she was close with. Pasty at Johnny's kept a watchful eye out for her and the nurse at the hospital seemed protective of the doctor. Somehow Tracey doubted Holly was the cause behind the separation from her parents. She would have to wait for Holly to feel comfortable enough to tell the story. She just hoped the doctor would tell her one day.

Her eyes dashed to the clock on the wall. "Ten minutes folks." Groans from the seniors filled the air. "Eyes on your own papers." Tracey said with a smile as she watched Cole Hanson try to look at Zoey's test. The handsome football player was shot down by the girl. Tracey laughed, the boy was clueless. "Problems Mr. Hanson?" "No Ms. Campbell." He mumbled as he scribbled an answer in the blank space.

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Nine days, over two hundred and sixteen some hours. Holly thought as she pulled her six year old Honda CRV into the parking lot at Bayview High School. Time dragged by and it felt like forever since she had spoke to or saw Tracey . On her back porch a week ago Sunday, she waved goodbye to the teacher. Since then, there had been multiple phone calls but each time they missed each other. She fit the car comfortably between two large piles of plowed snow. She was late. A common theme in her life, but she really wanted to get to the game on time. A MVA just as she was ready to sign out for the night delayed her leaving by two and half hours. She glanced at her watch. Hopefully she would be able to watch most of the second half. She couldn't wait to see Tracey. There was a roar from the gymnasium as she entered the school building. An elderly gentleman was doing double duty of watching the entrance and the game. He stood at the open door watching the blue uniformed players put up a three pointer.

"I'm a little late." Holly confessed as she reached in her back jeans pocket for her wallet. She had on a vest with a red University of Maryland hooded sweatshirt under it. Her jeans were stone washed denim with a little bit of fray at the knees, inseams and cuffs.

"They're not doing too good. The wreck banged them up pretty good." The man said as he flip opened the small metal money box.

"I know I was one of the treating physicians." Tracey handed him a couple of ones.

"You're Dr. Graham?" Holly nodded. "Coach Campbell has you on the guest list. Go on in." He refused her money. His sharp tipped pen making a check mark next to Holly's name.

"Thank you."

"No. Thank you." The man said as Holly made her way into the gym. The florescent overhead lights glowed on the shiny hard wood floor. The brightness of the wide open area caused Holly to pause for a moment to let her eyes adjust. In the center of the floor, the Bayview Senator stood ready to do battle. The man's green and black robe danced under the glaring lights.

Standing to the side of the walkway for a moment, Holly tried to find the best spot to settle into without disturbing the game or the fans. Looking across the playing floor, she watched as Tracey paced the sidelines. The coach was yelling directions to her players as she tracked back and forth in front of her bench. At the end of the Bayview bench sat a number of players dressed in street clothes. Sitting closest to the action, Holly recognized Michelle Stanley. Her leg elevated on a chair, a large cast covered most of her leg as a pair of cut off pants covered her other leg. A smaller freckle faced girl sat near the end, an ace bandage wrapped her forearm. At the end of the bench sat a blonde with a sling holding her left arm in place. They were a very lucky group of young ladies. The accident could have seriously injured any of them. School buses were not designed with the safety of the students in mind. The bruise on Tracey's chin was still visible, but it looked as if the coach had tried covered it with makeup. There was still a brownish yellow tinge to her skin. The ugly mark did not deter from Tracey's beauty. Tonight, she was dressed in a navy blue skirt suit with a shiny silver blouse under it. Her three inch navy pumps clacked against the hardwood as she started to pace again.

On the bench, a man with a buzz cut reached out and touched her arm. The coach stopped pacing and leaned over to listen to what the assistant was telling her. He showed her a diagram on his board. Tracey nodded in agreement and turned to call the play to her point guard. After receiving the acknowledgement from her player, Tracey let her eyes wander towards the entrance to the gym. She flashed Holly a quick smile before she was back to business. If Holly hadn't been watching the coach closely, she would have never noticed the smile. She felt her insides warm. If the brunette could do that with a quick smile, Holly knew she was falling quick and hard. Just as Tracey had turned away, Michelle Stanley shot a look towards the entrance. Holly saw the teenager's cold steely stare boring through her. The girl had some issues. The blonde with the sling looked towards the entrance, although her gaze was more out of curiosity. She scanned the crowd, her eyes stopping on Holly for a little while, then moved on. The blonde did not have the same negative reaction to the doctor's presence.

Feeling a bit uncomfortable standing in the open, Holly ventured into the stands. The fans from both sides cheered for their respective teams, Holly moved to an area free from crowd. She climbed a little higher in the stands and sat down near a lone woman who occasionally rooted for Bayview. Holly sat down in the same row a few seats away. She pulled her hair free of her collar, checking the dampness. In her haste to get to the game, she did a quick towel dry for her hair after her shower. She ran her hand through the damp locks and looked at the scoreboard. She made it half way through the third period. She was late, but she didn't miss the game. She wasn't going to miss the chance to see the coach either.

Bayview was down by ten and by the way Tracey was waving her hands, she was frustrated by her teams' play. Just as the opposing team was about to launch a three pointer, a player from Bayview stole the ball and ran the floor to an open basket. The player threw up a lay-up which hit the bottom of the rim and ricocheted out of bounds. The crowd groaned in disappointment.

"It's okay Jill!" The woman near Holly yelled to the teenager who stood with her head bowed.

"Tough miss." Holly said aloud.

"She hasn't played much. With the accident, she is getting more time."

"How many were hurt?" Holly tried to recall how many of the students she treated, but there were so many patients in and out of the ER that night, they all blended.

"Michelle and Carl were the worse. I think about six were hurt in some serious manner. That's not including Coach Campbell. She said she didn't want anyone to bother with her."

"I tried to fix her chin but it was almost twelve hours later and her patch job was. Let's just say, she better stick to teaching."

"You're Dr. Graham?" The woman scooted closer as Holly nodded. "I'm Allison Morgan, Andy's wife." The woman extended her hand and Holly shook it. "Thank you taking care of Tracey. She was in Club Med compared to Andy's treatment at County."

"It was a pretty crazy day at all the hospitals. I'm sure they did everything they could at County."

"That is so politically correct." Allison let a small laugh out.

"Thank you." Holly knew she went out of her way to make certain Tracey was taken care of. A plastic chair pulled up to a pay phone would have been most people's options at any hospital.

"I heard Carl was recovering nicely. His wife Millie is waiting on him hand and foot. I told Andy not to get any ideas." She stopped mid-thought as a foul was called on a Bayview player. "Shoot, that's her fourth." Allison commented about the player. She put her elbow on her knee and fisted her hand against her chin. "Oh, Molly's going to have to go in. She's a freshman they brought up to varsity to help out."

"At least she can get some experience."

"You're very politically correct." Allison chuckled.

"Guilty." Holly smiled. "Too many years dealing with hospital bureaucrats."

"It was nice of you to come to the game." Allison kept her eyes on the movement on the floor. Andy made a comment earlier about Tracey being fidgety before the game. He said he chalked it up to the first game after the accident. Allison was betting the coach's nerves had something to do with the blonde sitting next to her. She smiled when Andy stuck his head up over the crowd to smile at her. She still got the tight feeling in her stomach when he looked at her. She played with the diamond on her left ring finger. She landed a great guy.

"Did you know Tracey before the accident?" Allison tried to engage the doctor in conversation.

"We met at the hospital." Holly eyed the woman with the Bayview jacket on. "We hit it off right away. Some times traumas connect people."

"Tell me about it. My parents met at a fire."

"Was anyone hurt?" Holly looked a bit shocked.

"I think the steaks my mom was cooking were lost. She was cooking dinner for her boyfriend and set the kitchen on fire. My dad was a fireman on the call. He does all the cooking, needless to say." Allison saw the doctor chuckling at her story.

"You're joking."

"God no, my mother is not allow near the kitchen. All the men cook in my family. My brother, Simone is head chef at Tuxedo's."

"Really, I've always wanted to go to dinner there." Holly thought about the trendy Baltimore restaurant near the inner harbor. Tuxedo's was the hottest place in town. Reservations were impossible.

"Let me know, I'll get you in. He's my little brother, I still have some pull with him." Allison teased.

"Seriously?" Holly felt her heart speed up just a bit. If she could pull off a reservation at Tuxedo's on Valentine's Day, she knew she would impress Tracey. "I'll keep it in mind." Holly said just as a loud horn sounded. The clock was glowing with zeros across the board.

"That's game." Allison stood. "Very nice to meet you Dr. Graham, hope to see you again."

"It's Holly and it was nice to meet you too." Holly said as she watched Allison start to walk towards her husband.

"Come with me. This way we can catch the coaches before they go into the locker room." Allison stopped at the bottom of the stands watching the teams and coaches exchange handshakes. Holly stood next to Allison as the team exchanged pleasantries after the game. Michelle stood at the end of the line, slapping hands with the other team. The girl with the sling smiled and spoke quietly with the other team as she used her good hand to shake. When the injured players came towards the locker room, Holly tried not to react as the girl on crutches looked her up and down. The hard look Michelle threw her way made Holly's defenses go up. The pure hatred of those green eyes on her made Holly wonder what issues the teen was dealing with. The small blonde behind Michelle gave her a smirk. Tracey followed close behind. After she shook the opponent's hands, she came to stand with Allison and Holly.

"Hey there. Sorry the game wasn't our best."

"I enjoyed what I saw. I had an emergency at the hospital." Holly explained. She was having a hard time looking directly at Tracey. She was afraid her emotions would be easily read.

"Did you eat dinner?"

"Not even lunch."

"How about getting some pizza if you're up for it? Allison, are you hungry?" Tracey saw the sparkle of a smile on Allison's face.

"No. Andy and I are good to go. Enjoy yourselves. Tracey, you should probably change?" Allison gestured to the coach's suit. "Why don't I give Holly directions to your place and you can meet her there."

"You're a doll." Tracey said as she gave Allison a one arm hug and a quick wink to Holly. "See you there." Tracey gave a quick wink to Holly and headed into the locker room. Holly felt her cheeks flush.

"Shit." Holly let the word slip out as she watched Tracey's rear.

"You're not that politically correct." Allison answered giving her a quick wink.

"Guess not." Holly smiled as she crossed her arms over her chest. "Allison, can you see if your brother can get me a reservation on Valentine's Day?"

"Got a date?"

"I'll let you know tomorrow." Holly smiled and followed the woman out of the school and into the parking lot.

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The red Jeep Cherokee turned into the apartment complex driveway. Holly was leaning against her car waiting. She was thankful that Allison led her to Tracey's apartment. Allison said that she had a key to the apartment if Holly wanted to wait for Tracey inside, Holly declined, feeling a little weird about going into a place she had never been before. She did ponder why Allison had a key. Tracey pulled into an empty spot not too far from the door and got out of her car. Opening the rear door, she pulled out a duffle bag, hangers with dry cleaning, and a brief case. Turning she smiled at Holly.

"Did you find it alright?"

"Allison let me follow her right to the front door." Holly grabbed the dry cleaning from Tracey. "Give me this. How the heck do you open the door?"

"I can be resourceful." Tracey smiled sweetly as she swept past the doctor towards the main door. "I'm on the second floor." All the buildings were only two stories high and in a nice area of Linthicum. "Allison wasn't bothering you, was she?" Tracey looked over her shoulder to Holly carrying her dry cleaning.

"No, she was very entertaining. Thank you for getting me in for free. You didn't have to do that."

"It's a perk of being the coach." Tracey stopped at just inside the door of her apartment, opening a door quickly and throwing the duffle bag inside. She turned towards Holly and took the hangers of dry cleaning out of her hands. She stepped into her dining room and opening a closet door, she hung the clothes inside. Her briefcase she set on the small square dining room table. "Do you want anything?" Tracey turned to see Holly leaning against the door smiling. "What?"

"Your place is very neat and clean." Holly smirked looking at the spotless living space that reminded her of a photo in American Living magazine. "My place probably disgusts you."

"It doesn't." She walked up to Holly she ran her fingers up the center seam of the vest. "You want to know why?" Holly visible swallowed as Tracey continued to run her fingers along the vest. "Because you are the best part of your place." She leaned towards Holly, bringing their lips together. A tentative meeting of emotions and newness, as lips tasted and explored. Holly was pressed against the entrance door, Tracey pushing against the length of her. When they finally broke apart, they started at each other of a moment. "I missed you." Tracey said as she touched Holly's mouth with her finger.

"This has been a really long week."

"You're not kidding." Tracey stepped back. Holly pulled her back into her arms and kissed her soundly. Tracey pushed away, laughing. "How does pizza sound?" Holly nodded. "In or do you want to go out?"

"In, if you don't mind." Holly said as she regained her composure. Her head was reeling and her heart slamming against her chest. After Tracey's exit last week, she took matters in her own hands. Holly recalled the steam filled shower, her head slightly tilted as the hot water rushed over her body. She closed her eyes as images and thoughts of Tracey danced in her mind, the woman was the only thing she could think of. Tasting the water cascading over her lips she felt the rush of Tracey's kiss. She began to caress her body with a hand towel. She imagined the slight curve of Tracey's hip touching her hip as they danced together, Tracey's eyes staring at her intensely as they silently wondered what was going to happen between them. Touching her breast, Holly imagined how it felt to have Tracey's hands on her body. How she would caress and kiss her. She grazed her fingers over her nipples. They instantly hardened. With the gentle strokes of a new lover, she fondled her breast. Pulling and teasing as the aching and need was felt in her clit. She closed her eyes. Letting her hand wander farther south, she felt the slickness of her own need. She stroked with her fingers sliding over the smoothness and contours of her center. She ached and throbbed, rocking as she touched her clit again. She came hard, calling out Tracey's name. Shuddering as quiver after quiver claimed her body. Gaining her bearings, she closed her eyes as she stood under the hot water, her head limp against the shower wall. She couldn't wait to see Tracey. She felt another wave of excitement ripple through her body.

Holly felt her face flush with the heat of her thoughts. She stood three feet away from the woman who haunted her all week. She was a bit embarrassed by where her mind wandered to. She repeated her shower experience more than once in the last nine days.

"You okay?"

"Yeah." Holly let out a held breath silently, wondering if Tracey could read her thoughts.

"In is better. Can you order while I change?" Tracey asked as she pulled a menu out of a drawer the kitchen island. Papa Nick's Pizza menu claimed they delivered until midnight.

"Sure." Holly watched Tracey's shapely rear disappear down the hall. Holly opened the menu and went over her options for pizza. She grabbed the phone from the cradle and stopped just before she went to dial. She took the cordless down the hall towards what she assumed was the bedroom. Knocking lightly on the slightly ajar door, it opened wider, revealing Tracey clad only in a lacey bra and thong. God! Was the first thought running through the doctor's head. She had seen many specimens of the female anatomy, Tracey was clearly in the top ten. "Ahh!" Holly stumbled on her words as she quickly turned her back towards Tracey. "Sorry, but what do you want on your pizza? I was going to order a veggie but I wasn't sure."

"No onion." A soft voice whispered in her ear, as she felt Tracey's hair slid across her shoulder. Her scent lingered in the doorway. The warmth of a hand pressed against her lower back.

Holly nodded and dialed the phone. She placed the order for delivery and when the guy on the other end asked for the address, her mind went completely blank. She felt Tracey pull the phone from her. The coach quickly answered the question. "We have forty five minutes." Her tongue lightly grazed Holly's ear. "What do you think we can do to kill time?" Holly turned to see Tracey standing close dressed in a white oxford her lacey bra still visible from the open buttons. Wind pants covered her legs.

"I don't know if I'll survive." Holly was honest. Their last meeting had her wanting Tracey. If they went into a hot and heavy make out session, Holly would surely not endure another nine days.

"I know." Tracey put her hands on Holly's shoulders. "It was a very long week." Holly couldn't hold back any longer. She pulled Tracey close and crushed her mouth to hers. Going with the momentum, Holly backed Tracey up to the queen size bed and pushed her down on the mattress. Their mouths never losing contact, Holly held her weight off the brunette with her arms. Their legs slipped between one another. Holly caught Tracey's lower lip between hers and tugged lightly. She heard a quiet laugh. As the heat in her gut was boiling over into full blown passion, Holly was quickly flipped on to her back. Instead of receiving a kiss, as Holly expected, Tracey hovered over her, staring. Shifting her weight to one hand, Tracey let her fingers explore Holly's face. They caressed every pore, leaving in their trail tingling flesh that yearned for more. Tracey's eyes sparkled silver, the color of mercury, clear and pure. Lost in Tracey's eyes, Holly felt as if the world had finally shifted in her favor and all was right.

"You're a beautiful woman." Holly said as she ran her fingers over a stray lock of chestnut hair, savoring the feel of silkiness between her fingers. She thought she saw Tracey's eyes start to tear up, but she wasn't sure. A woman as beautiful as Tracey had surely been told she was beautiful before.

"Thank you." Tracey said as she buried her face in Holly's neck. Fighting back the tears, she thought how sincere Holly's words were. She had been complimented on her looks many times, yet looking at Holly's face and seeing her expression was overwhelming. Tracey skimmed her lips over the hollow of her throat. Tasting the saltiness of skin and smelling the scent of lilacs.

"Tracey?" Holly's voice was strained.

"Hmmm." The response was a trail of kisses followed the up Holly's neck back to her lips.

"Is it to soon to make plans for Valentine's Day?"

"No."

"Good. Would you like to go to dinner with me?" Holly asked as she tasted the saltiness of Tracey's skin.

"Absolutely, I'd love to." Tracey felt a hand slip under her shirt and to the plane of her stomach. She wanted to feel Holly's hands on her skin. "God Holly..." Her head fell back offering more flesh to Holly's lips. Lost in the haze of feelings, the chiming of the buzzer reached the far recesses of Tracey brain. "No."

"Pizza's here." Holly chuckled as she rolled away from Tracey. Her heart was pounding and she needed to get her emotions under control. She was close to losing it. A groan followed by a hand on her belly, Tracey moved into a sitting position.

"I'm going to hurt someone." Tracey placed her feet on the floor and growled as she shoved off the bed to answer the visitors call.

"Me to." Holly replied to the empty room.

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~ With All of My Heart ~
by Catherine Burke

Author's Note: Here we are again....I thought I'd try this again.

Category: Orig. Uber Alt.

Rating: R / NC-17

Summary: Doctor Holly Graham was going through the motions. Taught to rely on no one but herself, she toiled through the medical school and settled into a position at one of Baltimore's top trauma centers. Tracy Campbell had looks, a career, a loving family and loyal friends. Yet, her love life was lacking. Pursued by many a suitor, she never found what she was looking for until a snowy night on a Maryland highway.

Comments/Disclaimer(s): This is an original story. The story and characters belong to me. They are not to be used or reproduced without my express written permission. I have posted an similar story on another site under the kato5568@aol.com email....This is me. These characters are mine and not swiped from someone else. It good to know people are looking out for us!

This story depicts a love/sexual relationship between two consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it.

Special Thanks: To J Brownell for ideas suggestions and getting me to actually post this. Kerrie who was able to beta and get this story back to me a very short time. Living half way around the world does have its advantages. Time differences worked well for us. I'd like to give a shout to Powerbab, who actually writes about Cleveland where we live. We'll get together at the coffee shop soon.

I'm posting this in chapter blocks. Life gets in the way at times. Hope you enjoy. You can reach me at burkcatherine@aol.com

Chapter 6

The outside of the building was deceiving. It looked small. On the inside, there were eighty foot tall scaling walls. Spattered across the face were climbing holds as climbers scattered like ants struggling to make it to the top. A man with black harness crisscrossing his back rappelled his way down the face of the center wall. Tracey tilted her head back as she watched his decent.

When Holly asked her to meet her at Earth Treks, Tracey had no idea what the place was. She called her brother, Tom, who began to chuckle.

"Why are you going there?" He asked.

"It's a date of sorts." Tracey didn't like the tone in her brother's voice. She could imagine the smirk on his face. "Tom, what is it?"

"Do you like this person?" Knowing his sister's fear of heights, he teased her. "Yes, I do. I like her a lot." Tracey heard her voice soften as she thought about Holly. "Tell me Tommy."

"It's a rock climbing center." "Oh shit." Tracey felt the queasiness in her stomach and her anxiety level rose. "I'm not canceling on her."

"Wow, she must be something special." Tom whistled into the phone.

"She is." Tracey said as she stood looking at the giant indoor walls spotted with different colored hand holds, her hands on her hips and her gym bag slung over her shoulder. She came right from basketball practice to the center, she didn't have time to fix her hair or worry about makeup. This was the only time she would be able to see Holly today. Holly's friend, Greg was covering the ER for a few hours so she could get to the center and spend time with Tracey.

"She is what?" Holly's voice filled her ear. Tracey turned to see Holly dressed in a tight fitting North Face shirt and bike compression shorts, on her feet a special pair of shoes.

"Worth it." Tracey said. "I'm not sure what I was thinking when I accepted." Tracey's eyes moved across the climbers and rested on Holly's face. "This is one of the most interesting dates I've ever been on."

"It hasn't even started." Holly laughed. "Are you okay with this?"

"Holly, I have an issue with heights."

"Heights?"

"Yes, I'm scared of heights."

"I didn't know. This is a bad idea." Holly's fears of making Tracey uncomfortable were showing.

"It's a great idea. I'll just stay on the small walls." Tracey placed a hand on Holly's arm. "Besides, I need to overcome some of my fears." Holly gave her a weak smile. The day was not going as planned.

"Come on, I'll show you the locker room. I have a lesson scheduled for one o'clock. I wanted to make sure you're comfortable on the walls so I arranged..." Holly ran her hand through her hair in frustration. She knew Tracey was athletic and thought rock climbing would be a great date. "I didn't..."

"Holly, it's okay." Tracey smiled at the blonde and tried to put her at ease. She tugged at the hair at Holly's collar. "It's going to be fun."

Fun was an understatement. Fifteen minutes into the lesson with Colton, the college aged instructor, Tracey was swinging back and forth in front of the wall face. She enjoyed the process of trying to beat the wall face. Her face stern in concentration, she didn't even realize she was twelve feet off the ground. Having the rock wall in front of her gave her the stabilization of having some control of the situation. When she scaled the eighteen foot wall, she got to the top and look down at Holly and Colton. She let out a laugh and pumped her fist in the air. Holly started her way up the wall and in a few minutes she was at the top next to Tracey. The blonde was greeted with a kiss and two very strong arms wrapped around her waist.

"This is great." Tracey pulled back from Holly and gazed into her eyes.

"Want to try the bigger wall?" Holly gestured towards the one of the bigger slabs. "Or we can try the ones with the overhangs."

"Let's stick to the slabs. I'm not sure about the overhang." Tracey peaked over the edge. "Are you going to help me down?"

"Do you need my help?"

"Not sure if need is the word. I'd like to make sure I get back down in one piece." Tracey adjusted the harness.

"I'll make sure nothing happens to you even if I have to carry you down." Holly teased as she touched the scar on Tracey's chin. "Ready?"

They climbed different walls for three hours. Tracey knew her body would be screaming at her tomorrow, but today she was happy to spend time with Holly doing something the blonde enjoyed. As they climbed wall after wall, Tracey's eyes continued to roam the landscape of the doctor's body. The way Holly's shirt would stretch over the taunt muscles of her shoulders sent Tracey's mind into a sexual tizzy. As Holly reached for a hand hold, the tendons on the back of her hand stuck out as the doctor's ability to hold her weight with just one hand amazed Tracey. Tracey imagined what it would be like to run her hands across the vast plain of Holly's back. How it would feel to have Holly hold on to her with her hands. By the end of the session, the teacher was trying to cool her libido.

"I hope you had a good time." Holly said as she grabbed a towel from the locker and wiped down her face. She began to stow her things in her duffle bag. "I'm going to shower at the hospital." The doctor was looking a bit peaked.

"Holly, are you okay?" Tracey watched the doctor's face drop slightly.

"Not really." Holly huffed and leaned her backside against the metal lockers. "It's a bit embarrassing."

"What?" Tracey said as she mirrored Holly's stance against the lockers on the opposite side of the locker room isle.

"I can't shower with you right now. Don't get me wrong, I would love to." Holly ran her hand through her sweat dampened hair in frustration. "Tracey, I am so turned on right now, I don't think I can act like a reasonable adult if we were both naked." Holly's neck and face broke into a crimson color.

"Good to know I'm not the only one." Tracey smiled and closed the distance between them. "Scrubs do you no justice." Tracey reached out and placed a hand on Holly's forearm. "That's some body you've been hiding."

"Ohhh.." Holly leaned her head back against the lockers. "Are you trying to kill me?" Holly looked down into Tracey's silver depths. "I have to work every night this week. This is the last time I will see you until next Saturday. We have a date, remember." Holly had arranged with Allison to have reservations Valentine's Day at Tuxedo's. Holly was going all out to make sure the date was special.

"I can stop by the hospital on Wednesday." Tracy ran her fingers up and down Holly's forearm causing the fine hairs to rise with her touch. "Saturday is a long way off."

"It's like a week away." Holly smiled at her joke. "Are you going to your parents for Sunday?"

"No, there is a softball meeting at Johnny's at ten. We get together before the season to figure out if we need more players and who the sponsor will be. The last couple of years, we've gotten Gunning's to sponsor."

"They have great food." Holly commented, knowing the bar was a landmark in Baltimore. "Depending on what time I get out, I could stop by Johnny's to say hello." "Just hello?"

"Maybe more." Holly dropped her eyes to Tracey's lips. She looked around the locker room and found a crowd of women in the mist of dress. "God, I want to kiss you." Holly confessed.

"I want to do more than just kiss you Dr. Graham." Tracey teased as she turned away grabbing her towel and shower bag. "If you change your mind, I'll be in the shower room." Tracey didn't turn back as she heard Holly release another groan. She didn't think she was strong enough to resist the blonde if she did follow her. Soon, Tracey thought. She just needed to make it through the week.

~

The group of women had pulled three tables together so they could sit together. Sunday morning brunch at Johnny's was on the schedule for summer softball team every few months. This was the first time the team was getting together since before Thanksgiving. They would have the same conversations. They'd talk about the games they won and lost. Who would be this year's sponsor? Did they need more players? Who was returning to play next summer? Tracey smiled at Patsy as she passed the register on her way to the tables. Maxie waved at her and pulled her coat off the chair she was saving for Tracey. Piper sat across from them.

Tracey's smile illuminated the room. She was grinning ear to ear. Her date yesterday was still on her mind. Her night was filled with dream after dream of Holly making love to her. Taking her in ways she never thought of. This morning, she woke in mid orgasm. Her hand between her legs, her fingers buried deep in her center. She came hard. Images of Holly danced in her head. She wanted the blonde. This feeling was new to her, but she wanted Holly touching her, to feel her weight of on top of her, making her lose control. In her relationships she had never had these feelings before. Her previous girlfriends turned her on but Holly ignited her soul. With Holly she had a need, a craving to be with her. She knew just thinking about Holly made her wet.

"What's up?" Piper asked as she took in the smile and flushed face of her friend. "You look...." Piper was going to say turned on but decided against it, since Maxie was there. She loved Maxie but she was still trying to rekindle the relationship she once had with Tracey.

"Happy." Maxie said as she pulled out the chair for Tracey. Tracey took her coat off and settled it on the back.

"I am. God I'm so happy." Tracey said as she sat in her seat. The waitress came around with the coffee pot as Tracey flipped over her cup. "I've never felt this way before."

"The doctor." Piper looked across the table at her friend. She leaned back in her chair and watched Tracey's face light up. Dr. Graham seemed to make her friend happy.

"What doctor?" Maxie asked as she played with the creamers, building a small pyramid.

"I'm dating someone. Her name is Holly and she happens to be a doctor." Tracey knew she had to be blunt with Maxie when she spoke of dating. The banker still held a romantic interest in her. They remained friends, but Tracey wondered if Maxie was aware of how possessive she sounded and how jealous she acted.

"She's probably a chiropractor. Are they really doctors?" Maxie lifted her coffee for a sip. She stole a glance at Tracey who looked at her with a raised eye brow. "What?"

"She's an Attending at Jessup in the Emergency Room." Tracey silently wondered why she felt the need to defend Holly. If Maxie was her friend, she would be happy for her. "And she's great. Yesterday, she took me rock climbing at Earth Treks. It was so cool. She arranged for a private lesson and then we spent the afternoon climbing. It was a blast."

"Sounds like work." Tracey ignored Maxie's sarcastic remark. If her friend wasn't going to support her, then she wouldn't give her the satisfaction of a response.

"It sounds like fun to me. You seem like you had a good time." Piper could see the excitement in Tracey's eyes. They were now a light gray color like a piece of high sheen silver.

"I had great time." Tracey sat back in her chair. She didn't care that her legs ached and her ass was so tight she had to use the heated seat in her car for the trip to the dinner. "I had a really great time. It was the best date I've been on in a while."

"That was a date? Getting all sweaty and climbing up a wall? I'll pass." Maxie was showing her irritation.

"If I didn't know you better, I'd say you're ..." Piper glanced at Maxie and back to Tracey. "Enjoying spending time with her."

"I can't stop thinking about her. Jesus Pipe, I just see her and I want to do things. I've never felt this way before."

"Jesus." Maxie said in a huff as she spilled her coffee. Tracey's former girlfriend gave her a slight frown as she stood up quickly to find a towel. The pout Maxie gave Tracey was added to the list of pathetic looks the brunette had given her since their break up. "I need to get a towel."

"I think you're falling in love." Piper smiled as the realization hit Tracey. "It's known to happen."

"Oh my god. I think I'm... I want to sleep with her." For the first time in her life, Tracey was falling in love and it felt really good.

"That's good."

"No, that's bad. I've told her my feelings on sleeping together. She actually understood. I can't change my mind."

"Why not?" Piper laughed. "Do you think she wants to sleep with you?" Tracey smiled and nodded the redness climbing up her neck as she recalled their conversation in the locker room.

"Oh I think the feeling is mutual." Tracey smiled.

"That is sad." Maxie said as she scraped her against the floor pulling it out. "This woman takes you rock climbing and goes to see a high school basketball game. What kind of dates are those? Has she taken you to dinner?"

"We came here on our first date." Tracey smiled at the memory of the snow storm weekend. Her eyes glanced to the booth they sat in. "And we got pizza one night."

"Wow Tracey, you're slipping. If this woman is a doctor, don't you think she should take you to a nice restaurant?" Maxie eyed the owner who seemed to be hovering after she cleaned the table.

"They were great dates Maxie. It doesn't matter how much a meal costs, it's the quality of the company. I happen to really enjoy spending time with Holly. She could be dirt poor and it wouldn't matter to me."

"Do remember the night I took you to La Rubino? That was a great date." Maxie said as she leaned back and stared at Tracey for a moment.

"I remember you getting drunk, talking loudly and trying to make out with me in the middle of the restaurant. Yes, I would say I remember Maxine." Tracey watched the scowl on her friend's face. Patsy hid the smirk on her face as she walked to another table with the coffee pot ready for refills. "You and I seem to have a difference of opinion on our former relationship. Maxie, we are friends, if you can't deal with that, then I don't know what to tell you." Tracey had been fighting off Maxie's advances for the past two years. They had only dated a few months and at the time, Maxie was a big drinker. She said it was summer time and boating season, but Tracey knew better.

"Don't get in a huff Trace. I'm teasing." Maxie commented as she took a sip of her coffee. "Ellen will be happy that you landed a doctor."

"My mother doesn't know yet." Tracey had mentioned meeting someone to Ellen. There was no way she was going to push Holly into meeting her family before she was ready. Holly almost passed out the first time Tracey mentioned a family dinner. She wasn't about to do that again. Besides, I'm the one whose opinion counts."

"So when are we going to meet her?" Maxie asked, her tone a little casual and cocky to be of a friendly nature.

"Piper's met her once or twice."

"What?" Maxie almost flew out of her seat. It was scary how the banker got jealous of Piper and Tracey.

"Oh chill out." Piper said as she tipped her chair back. "She's a doctor. I ran into her a few times at the hospital. I think I knew her before the little school teacher did."

"Hey!" Tracey got defensive and smacked Piper on the arm. The two women seemed to forget that she was closely approaching thirty "I am not the little school teacher, Yvonne."

"I could have you arrested for assault." Piper rubbed her arm. When her given name was called out, Piper knew not to push Tracey. The teacher's temper was legendary. Piper wasn't sure if it was growing up with three brothers or in the military, but once Tracey got pissed, she was a force to be reckoned with. Tracey didn't lose her temper often but when she did, look out.

"I dare you to try." Tracey eyes suddenly darted to the window as a tall blonde figure passed by. When Holly entered the diner, Tracey could see the dark circles under her eyes. Last night's shift must have been trying.

"Are you on drugs?" Piper asked as Tracey's expression changed from being pissed to a goofy smile. Tracey ignored her but her eyes followed the newest customer. Piper turned in her seat to see who Tracey was enamored with. The tall blonde ER doctor walked up to the counter and began to speak with the owner. "Oh well, look what the cat dragged in."

"Who's the blonde?" Maxie strained to look over Piper's shoulder. "Not bad, a little too tall and skinny." Just as Maxie finished, Holly turned to face the table. "I got dibs."

"Oh, you are too late." Piper said as she turned back to her friends. Tracey was staring at Holly, a smile worthy of an Ultra-bright commercial plastered on her face. "Trace, you are so gone."

"I know and it's great." Tracey stood when Holly kissed Patsy on the cheek. When the doctor headed towards her table, Tracey met her half way. "Hello." There was a moment of awkward silence.

"I don't want to say hello because I've filled my promise and I want to spend a little bit more time with you." Holly shrugged. "You look great."

"You look like shit." Tracey touched Holly's face with her hand. "Did you have a busy night?"

"Horribly busy night." Holly recalled the trials of the evening. "I need to get a few hours sleep and then go back in."

"You need to go home and sleep. Why are you here?" Tracey looked in to deeply sad dark brown eyes. "Why?"

"Because you, Ms. Campbell, are the only sanity I have right now." Holly blew out a breath. "Tracey, I wanted to see you." Tracey took a hold of Holly's hand and led her to the table. She pulled up a chair between hers and Maxie's.

"This is Maxine Kendall and that mug is Yvonne Piper. You may recognize her."

"Hello." Holly held out a hand for Maxie who shook it. She took a closer look at the woman across the table. "Officer Piper, seems we keep crossing paths."

"Dr. Graham, always a pleasure." Pipe knew the doctor could recount a few incidents in which her friends would question her behavior. She did what she needed to do to keep the thugs off the street.

"So Dr. Graham." Maxie started. Tracey felt the hair on the back of her neck stand up. Maxie was going to bait Holly into some type of argument. "How did you meet Tracey?" "Umm... at the hospital." Holly didn't like the dark haired woman who sat to her right. She knew this was one of Tracey's friends but there was something about the way she looked at Tracey, as if she was jealous. Holly would ask Tracey about her later.

"What the hell were you doing at the hospital? Are you okay?" Maxie lashed out at Tracey without hesitation.

"Yes, it was after the bus accident." Tracey explained, wondering why Max didn't remember.

"You weren't hurt."

"I wasn't, but I had students I was responsible for." Tracey felt Holly's thigh press up against hers."

"I recall you were." Holly touched the small scar on her chin. "I treated some of the students." The doctor explained as she let her hand drop from Tracey's chin. "How do you know each other?"

"We dated." Maxie grinned like the Cheshire Cat as Holly fidgeted uncomfortably in the hard wood chair.

"Please, you dated Tracey for a month if that." Piper exclaimed, sensing the doctor's uneasiness.

"Two." Maxie corrected her.

"Whatever." Piper dismissed her friend with a wave of her hand. "We met playing basketball in high school. Tracey was the big bad player and I was sent to guard her."

"More like manhandle." Tracey recalled the rough and tumble blonde from a rival high school. "We ended up playing on an AAU summer team together when we were seventeen."

"It's been hell ever since." Piper crossed her arms over her chest and bore her eyes into the teacher. "We met Maxie playing softball about six years ago." Piper lifted her coffee cup to her lips. Patsy came around with her coffee pot.

"Would you like some coffee Miss Holly?"

"No thank you. I'm not staying."

"That's too bad." Maxie smirked. Tracey stood and took Holly's hand. She shot daggers at Maxie. "What?"

"Pipe, let me know if I need to do anything. I'm going to see Holly home." Tracey pulled Holly to her feet.

"You're an asshole." Piper said as she threw a creamer at Maxie.

"What did I do?" Maxie placed a hand on her chest pleading innocent as Tracey and Holly passed by her. Tracey smacked the back of her head.

"I'll call you later." Piper said with a wave of her hand. "What the hell are you trying to prove?" Piper looked at Maxie. "You keep it up and she'll never talk to you again."

Holly followed the pissed off teacher out the door of the diner and into the parking lot. As soon as they turned down the side of the building Tracey turned to face Holly and pushed her up against the wall. She pressed her lips and body against Holly's. She let go all of the frustration she had felt in the last twenty four hours. She wanted Holly to like her friends. Maxie's behavior pissed her off. If she felt uncomfortable, Holly had to feel uncomfortable. When Holly's arms wrapped around her and pulled her close, Tracey felt a peacefulness settle through her body. Holly's hand went to the back of her head, smoothing her hair in a soft caress. They separated for a moment. Looking into each other's eyes they both had goofy grins on their faces.

"I'm sorry."

"For kissing me?" Holly asked her hand cupping Tracey cheek the pad of her thumb caressing her skin.

"No, for Maxie."

"She's in love with you." Holly sensed Maxie was still after Tracey. "She doesn't hide it well." Holly observed. She was having a hard time keeping her feelings for the teacher under control now. She understood why Maxie loved the woman standing in front of her.

"I don't want to talk about Maxine." Tracey leaned in and kissed Holly again. She nipped at Holly's lower lip then held it between hers. She heard Holly sigh and pulled back. "Let's get you home and into bed."

"That's the best offer I've had all day." Holly put her hands on Tracey's hips. "Where is your car?" Tracey pointed to the front lot. "Lucky you. I'm in the back. Do you want to drive me home? I can leave my car here and walk over later."

"Can I stay with you for awhile?"

"Of course." Holly looped Tracey's arm in hers as they walked towards the red Jeep. "I just don't want to waste your day."

"Spending time with you is not a waste." Tracey pulled on Holly's arm. "There is nothing else I want to do."

"You may change your mind when I'm snoring and drooling on you." Holly teased as she let Tracey's arm go and went to the passenger's door.

"Not a chance."

~

Holly closed the drapes in her bedroom after she changed into a pair of sweat pants and a Ravens t-shirt. Tracey stood in the doorway, her hands holding on the door jamb. Holly threw her a quick smile over her shoulder. "Are you sure you want to stay?" She asked.

"Yes." Tracey came to her side and touched the hem of Holly's t-shirt. "Besides, I wanted to tuck you in."

"I put some sweats in the bathroom." Holly grabbed some clothes in case Tracey wanted to change. "

"Thanks. Is it okay that I lie down with you for awhile?" Tracey suddenly felt shy.

"God, yes." Holly placed her hand at the back of her neck and pulled Tracey's lips to hers. "Sleep, Ms. Campbell, that's all.

"Darn." Tracey snapped her finger and walked into the bathroom. She changed her clothes. She looked in the bathroom mirror. Her face was flushed. She pulled a Jessup hospital t-shirt on and

a soft pair of sweat pants. "Sleep..." Tracey repeated as she ran her fingers through her hair. *What did you do this weekend? Well, I actually crawled into bed with my new girlfriend and slept.* Tracey mimicked her thoughts in the mirror. There was nothing wrong with what she was doing. She opened the door and saw Holly lying in the bed. Going to the opposite side of the bed, Tracey lifted the covers and slid between them. Holly turned immediately and pulled her into her arms.

"You feel good." Holly murmured as she tucked Tracey's head under her chin and felt wonderful to have the teacher in her arms and bed. "Thank you."

"For?" Tracey snuggled closer. Their legs and arms intertwined.

"Being here." Holly said as she kissed the top of Tracey's head. "For being you." Tracey felt Holly's form relax and heard the steady cadence of her breathing. Tracey closed her eyes, amazed that she had found such a wonderful woman.

Chapter 7

The front door of the Campbell household was rarely used. Family and friends knew to use the main door off the garage. As Tracey closed the door behind her, she tried to recall the last time she actually used her parents' front door. Stomping her snow covered feet on the mat just inside the garage door, she slipped off her shoes and went inside. Immediately, she was engulfed by the warmth of the fire burning in the family room. This past week, she missed family dinner because she was sleeping in Holly's bed. *Sleeping...* being the operative word. She had slept in Holly's arms and missed dinner. Ellen was not happy. The message Tracey retrieved from her phone was distant and guilt ridden as only a mother could do. To make up for her absence, Tracey promised to have dinner with her parents tonight. She coached practice right after the bell rang and was able to get to her parents just as the grandfather clock in the hallway chimed six o'clock.

"Tracey!" Frank's voice boomed through the kitchen and into the family room. Tracey wasn't sure if it was from her dad's hearing going, but he always seemed to talk loudly.

"Hey Dad." Tracey called back as she hung her jacket up on one of the hooks just inside the doorway.

"Pumpkin, can you grab a load of garlic bread out of the freezer?"

"Sure thing." It never failed, no matter how many times she came over there was always an errand to run or something to get just after she took her shoes off. With the quickness of a rabbit, she popped into the garage and grabbed the bread out of the overstuffed chest freezer. Shivering, she stepped back into the house. She was ready for summer.

She wondered if she and Holly would make plans for summer time, weekends away, maybe camping. If Maxie was behaving maybe they would go to her cottage for Memorial Day. For the first time in her life, Tracey was making future plans that involved someone else. In the past, she always felt as if dating someone else took time away from her family and friends. With Holly,

she wanted to share that time. Make plans, look forward to seeing her in the stands at her softball game. She wondered how Holly spent her time in the summer. Did she like to camp? Was she involved in sports? There was some certainty that she did not spend time with her family. Tracey thought about the difference in the way they were raised. Her house always had a surplus of food. Even when she and her brothers were out of the house, Ellen still shopped as if she had to feed an army. The freezer was always filled. Holly didn't have that luxury. She had no furniture and when she did, the doctor sat on the floor because it was a comfort. She drank coffee at Johnny's because that was what she could afford. Patsy looked out for her because she had no one else. It saddened Tracey to think about how Holly had no family and no one to really look out for her. The thought of meeting the Campbell clan scared her. Tracey wondered if it was a defense mechanism. She let Holly set the pace. If she wanted to meet her family, she would let Holly decide.

Frank kissed her cheek in greeting as he took the frozen loaf from her hand. "You missed Sunday dinner." She could hear his silent tsk tsk in her head.

"I know. I heard it from mom every day which is why I'm visiting mid week. Where is she?" Tracey surveyed the kitchen. There was no sign of Ellen.

Beaming proudly, he smiled showing off his dimples, "Upstairs, I'm in charge of dinner!" Tracey cocked an eyebrow at the silver haired man in front of her - the look she often gave her students if they were misbehaving. "I just have to pull it out of the oven."

"So in other words, mom made it and you are cooking it?"

"Again, I'm in charge. You should be happy I am letting you eat." Frank teased as he pulled the garlic loaf from the bag. "She's in the sewing room."

"Keep up the good job. I'm going to run up and say hi." Tracey patted him on the cheek and headed through the house. She went through the hallway which her old bedroom was off to the staircase that led to the second floor where her brothers' rooms were. Ellen made David's room into a sewing room since he was off at college and never really lived in the house.

Seated at the sewing machine feeding a piece of material through the foot was Ellen Campbell. There was no doubt which parent Tracey resembled. They shared the same eye color and facial features. Although Ellen's hair had some gray running through it, the color was the same as Tracey's.

"Hi mom." Tracey said as she sat down on the day bed facing her mother.

"Good Lord, look who decided to visit. I was being to get a complex. My only daughter blowing off her family three weekends in a row."

"I was here on..."

"Not for family dinner." Ellen cut her off.

"Mom."

"You meet this new woman and you no longer have time for your family." Ellen continued to scold as she pulled what appeared to be a child's dress into her lap and began to remove stitches of thread.

"Her name is Holly. I was here the day after the snow storm. Dad and I had lunch during the week. I'm here tonight."

"You cancelled the night of the snow storm, calling saying something about canceling because something came up. Yesterday, I hear about your date from Tommy. You can't even share details with your mother." With a small huff, Ellen put the dress under the foot and started the machine.

Tracey could tell her mother was hurt. "I just asked Tom about the place. I didn't tell him how the date went."

"And this past Sunday?" The inquisition continued.

"Softball meeting." Tracey felt the flush on her face. She could never lie to her parents without getting caught.

"All day? Please, I know Vonnie. She would leave after an hour. Yet my daughter stays all day and cancels dinner with her family."

"I spent the day with Holly. I finally met someone I really like and I want to spend time with her. That's why I haven't been to dinner." Tracey propped her elbow on her denim covered knee and leaned her chin on her fist.

"Tell me about her, this Holly woman who you are spending time with. I know she works at the hospital. That's about it." Her mother's gray eyes softened as she spoke. "She seems to have caught your fancy." Tracey couldn't help the smile that appeared on her face.

"My fancy? She's definitely got that and some. She's a doctor." Ellen quit working on the dress, setting it down and focusing her attention on her daughter. She noticed her daughter's eyes light up as she began to talk about Holly. There was a bit of mischief in them. She hoped Tracey found someone she could fall in love with.

"She's a doctor." Ellen repeated. "Continue, what's her last name? Where is she from? How did you meet?" Tracey saw the interest in her mother's eyes. She went on for a good twenty minutes about Holly. Her excitement was bursting through her voice and body language. Ellen was about in tears from laughter after Tracey told her about their date at the climbing center.

"She didn't know I was afraid."

"True. You're not scared of many things honey. I'm glad you had a good time." Ellen stood up when the small buzzer on the table sounded. "So when do we get to meet her?" She asked as she

went to the door way. "Frank! Take the pan out of the oven." Tracey giggled as she heard her father mumble something.

"This is where I'm not sure of what to do, mom." Tracey straightened in her seat. She ran her hands through her hair. "From what I gather, her home life was not great. She wasn't raised in a house full of love and laughter like I was. She has no concept of family. She associates family with pain, loss. She turned white as a ghost and started to hyperventilate when I asked her to Sunday dinner. I want you and dad to meet her but I don't want to force her."

"She'll come around. If she likes you half as much as you like her, she'll meet us eventually." Ellen assured her. "I would hold off on your brothers'. They can be a bit intimidating."

"And what would you call dad?"

"More intimidating." Ellen chuckled knowing Frank would pull full military rank on the woman if she didn't come around soon. She knew the relationship was new and knew her daughter very well. If they continued on the path to bliss, Holly would have to meet Frank Campbell soon.

"The boys better know what's good for them." Tracey's brothers teased her mercifully when she was younger. They seemed to want her to find someone. All of the boys were settled down and starting families.

"We want you to be happy. You've meet someone who makes you happy and we want to meet her." Ellen planted a kiss on the top of her head.

"She does, very happy."

"Good let's check on your father before he ruins my lasagna."

"He said he was in charge."

"And we will continue to let him think so." Ellen helped her daughter to her feet and wrapped a protective arm around her waist. "I can wrap some food up for Holly if you want to take it to her."

"Thanks mom. I'm sure she'll appreciate it." Tracey gave her mother's waist a squeeze.

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Standing at the admission desk, Holly wrote final note in a chart and handed it to Musha, whose eyes were directed down the hallway. "Wow." The only word he uttered. Holly's interested piqued, she turned to see what he was staring at. Tracey was walking towards them, her winter coat open to show off her long legs. She wore a pair of jeans and a soft gray sweater.

"Hey!" Holly said to the clerk who quickly turned away. She shoved another file in his hands and walked to meet Tracey. "This is a surprise." "Surprise, I told you I'd stop by." Tracey held up the Tupperware container. "Ellen sent food, if you are interested. It's a family effort."

Holly's mouth went as dry as the Sahara. Once she found her voice, she was able to say, "Yes, we can go to the cafeteria or my office."

"The scene of the crime." Tracey commented as she looped her arm in Holly's. "What crime?" Holly questioned. *Where you stole my heart* was the comment on the tip of Tracey's tongue. Instead she opted for, "Capturing my interest."

"You make it sound like a bad thing."

"No, Dr. Graham, it's a good thing, a very good thing." Tracey pulled her closer as they stepped in the elevator. Holly leaned in, meeting Tracey's lips just as the doors shut. Pulling away from the embrace, Holly looked into Tracey's stormy irises. "Hi."

"Hi yourself."

"Are you having a good week?"

"Much better now. How about you?"

"A little slower than normal. People are staying in and behaving because of the weather. The cold makes people stay indoors." They exited the lift and walked to Holly's office. Tracey leaned on the wall as Holly fumbled with the lock.

"Did you eat already?"

"At my parents. They've been after me to stop by."

"I thought you had family dinner every week?" Holly recalled Tracey stating something to that effect.

"I've missed the last couple." She confessed, stepping into the office as Holly held the door open for her. A *déjà vu* feeling came over the couple as if they stepped back a few weeks ago. Holly took in the brunette who stood in her office. Mirroring the image she had posed weeks before.

"Feels weird, doesn't it?" Holly asked as she looked at Tracey's back. The teacher stood in the middle of the office hugging herself. She stepped behind her and stood close. Her fingers touched her shoulder and swept her hair away from her neck. Holly pressed a small kiss to Tracey's neck. She felt the quick intake of breath.

"No. A little strange, but not bad. I'm glad we met." Tracey took hold of Holly's hand and held tight. "Tell me why you've missed time with your family?" Holly whispered in her ear. She knew it was a sensitive spot.

"I wanted to spend time with you." Tracey leaned back into the warmth of Holly's frame. Holly's hand on her waist secured her, holding her tight.

"Please don't blow off your family for me. Promise me you will not do that." "Holly, we barely see each other and I..."

Holly turned Tracey to face her. Taking the container of food from her hands she set it on the small table. Returning to her spot in front of Tracey, she took her hand again. "I'm switching schedules so I'm working mostly days. I want to spend time with you also. Not just sleep with you." Holly's face turned red. "That's not what I meant."

"You don't want to sleep with me?" Tracey raised an eyebrow. "Maybe I should rethink my plans for this weekend." There was a look of panic that passed across Holly's face.

"Please don't." Holly lowered her head and at their linked fingers. Her heart was pounding against her chest. Tracey wasn't exactly teasing her, but she didn't come right out and say what she planned for the weekend.

"Hey." Tracey placed two fingers under Holly's chin and lifted her head to meet her eyes. "I'm ready. And I am not changing my mind."

"Really?"

"Really." Tracey gently pressed her lips to Holly's. "Believe it or not, it's been very hard for me." She saw the hesitation in Holly's brown eyes. "I know our date is Saturday night." Tracey reached in her coat and pulled out a key for her apartment. There a slight hesitation in her voice. "If you want to come over after your shift Friday night." Tracey put the silver key in Holly's hand. "I've got chaperone duty at the boys' game so I should be home by eleven. I just want to see you." She held off saying she like waking up in Holly's arms, in her bed, and next to her. She didn't want to scare her off.

"I'll be there." Holly let her lips slip briefly over Tracey's.

"Are you hungry?" Tracey led her by the hand to the table. "Dad cooked, mom made it."

"Sounds like a team effort. Sounds like an interesting dinner."

"It always is." Tracey opened the container and slid it across the table. "Do you like lasagna?"

"I like anything homemade. Didn't you promise to cook me dinner?"

"I think the deal was cooking in your kitchen. You can help." Tracey opened her purse and pulled out a package of plastic silverware. "I brought you a fork. Ellen actually sent it."

"I told you my cooking skills are limited. Flipping a grilled cheese, scrambled eggs, very limited." Holly said as she took the offered fork. "This looks good. Please thank your parents."

"You can use a knife, chop some veggies for me." Tracey watched as Holly dug into the gooey mess of noodles, cheese and meat. Holly chewed as she nodded her head.

Tracey leaned back in the chair. Holly was enjoying the food.

"God... this is good." Holly mumbled as she wiped her face with the napkin. "It's been such a long time since I had a homemade meal." Holly licked her lips. "Tell your mother thank you." "Don't forget Frank, he cooked it."

"And your dad." Holly saw the sullen expression cross Tracey's face. She quickly covered it up and smiled saying.

"I will."

"Every thing okay?"

"I want you to meet them." Tracey added quickly, "Some day."

Holly nodded. She could see the uncertainty in Tracey's eyes. They hadn't spoken about family since the night at Johnny's Diner. She didn't have the wave of nausea that washed over her the first time. Tracey didn't push her to meet her family. In fact, she seemed wary to bring up the subject of family.

"I'll let you know when I am ready." Holly commented to ease the tension in the air. "I can't promise anything." It was Tracey's turn to nod. The softening of her features did not escape Holly's eyes.

"Thank you for at least considering the thought." Tracey spoke softly when Holly continued to eat. Maybe one day she would be able to introduce Holly to her parents. If luck was on her side, maybe her brothers too.

The familiar squeal of Holly's pager sounded mid bite. As if an automatic response, Holly rolled her eyes. She wished she could get through a meal without being called away for an emergency. She knew their time for the evening was up. "Crap." Holly set her fork down and reached for the lid of the container. Tracey took it and placed it in the mini refrigerator in Holly's office. The pager squealed to life a second time.

"I've got to go." Holly was hesitant for a moment. She reached over and cupped Tracey's cheek. She gave her a quick kiss just as the over head public address system sounded.

"Dr. Graham to the ER stat... Dr. Graham to the ER stat."

Tracey walked with her to the door. "Dinner was good, but the company was great. Thanks for stopping by." Their quiet meal interrupted. "See you Saturday." Holly said as she hesitated at the door. "Is it me or does Saturday seem such a long way off?"

"It does." Tracey ran her fingers along Holly's forearm. Tracey looked into the tawny eyes to see the brightness in them.

Holly's lips curled into a smile as she said, "I'll see you when I get off work." She held the silver key in her hand over her head as if in a triumphant victory gesture. Tracey leaned against the door frame as she watched Holly's form retreat to the stairwell just as another PA announcement called her name.

Chapter 8

Practice was brutal. No matter what drill or set play Tracey asked the girls to run, they screwed it up. The underclassmen and third string were her core players since the accident. She had to walk away from Molly Dorsey when the sophomore went the wrong way three times in a row. She glanced towards Zoey who sat on the side lines, dribbling a ball with her good arm. There was a remote possibility the senior could return to the line up by the end of the season. They still had ten games to go. The girls were giddy and not concentrating because of tomorrow night's Valentines' Day dance. Tonight the boys' team was playing at home against Greenville.

Tracey had chaperoning duties tonight at the game but she wasn't scheduled for the dance. Instead, she would be chaperoning at the prom in May. Saturday night while her team was at the school dance, Holly would be taking her out for a night on the town. She had no idea where Holly was taking her but she could hardly wait.

Tracey smiled at the memory of Holly holding the key over her head as she rushed off to the ER. Friday was finally here and almost over. In a few hours, she would see Holly, if she was lucky. Tonight she couldn't get the team to settle down so she made the girls run their asses off. By the end of practice, she couldn't wait to clear them out of the gym. Most of the girls opted to go home to get ready for the boys' game or a night out. Tracey hoped her practice exhausted them to the point they were too tired to venture out.

With the gym and locker room clear, Tracey went to shower in the women's locker room and get ready for the boys' game. It would save her time between running home and coming back to the school. Making certain the bolt was set on the door, she recalled the time when the boys' team from Baltimore South almost walked in on her at an inopportune moment. In her office, she stripped out of her clothes, grabbed her bottle of shampoo and conditioner and headed to the semi circle of showers. Turning on the water spigots, she tested the cascading water with her hand. When the water was at the desired temperature, she removed her towel and folded it over the barrier wall between the showers and the locker room. Tracey began to wash. She ran her hands along her arms and across her torso. She leaned her head back under the water pressure. Blindly reaching for the shampoo, she poured some into her hands and began the task of washing her hair. She let her mind wander to Holly. Feeling the warm spray against her skin, she wondered what it would feel like to be touched by the blonde. It would happen soon. That was her plan this weekend.

Over the last three weeks, their relationship had grown. She really liked the doctor and wanted to get to know her better. The night at her apartment, they made out like teenagers on a first date.

Holly was a great kisser and Tracey got lost when she felt Holly's body against hers. Tracey didn't want to stop any more. She wanted to go farther. This weekend she definitely knew they would. She could have slept with Holly the weekend of the storm, she could have easily been swayed to stay the night and continue their exploration. Holly didn't argue or pressure her when Tracey pulled back. She didn't want to look at their first time as a *Wham bam thank you ma'am* moment. For some couples it worked. Tracey wanted to make sure Holly was a person she wanted to be with. Too many lesbians fell into the attraction first, relationship second. The three serious relationships Tracey been in, she waited at least six months before she slept with her girlfriends. Some of her dates looked at her like she was crazy when she pulled back. Deep down, Tracey knew she was old fashioned. She didn't want a quick roll in the hay. Holly was the first person she instantly wanted to sleep with. Most of the women she went out with she had some attraction to. They were forty watt light bulbs compared with Holly, who was burning brighter than the sun. Many dating experiences ended because of her no sleeping together idealism. A few women thought she was crazy and never called back. Holly wasn't like that. The night at her apartment, Tracey was more than frustrated when the pizza guy showed up. Holly quietly touched her face and said "I'm not going anywhere." She was different with Holly. She made her want to sleep with Holly. The burning attraction between them was evident. Tracey wanted more. This weekend was their time. She didn't think she could wait any longer. Valentine's Day was tomorrow and Tracey knew she was looking forward to it as much as Holly.

Tracey moved the lather through her hair and suddenly felt the hair on her arms rise. It was as if someone was in the showers with her. She tried to open one soap filled eye but the sensation burned. She cursed and reached for her washcloth. She covered her breasts with her hand and wiped the soap out of her eyes with the other. She did a quick survey of the shower room. There was no one.

"Hello!" She called out over the sound of streaming water. She waited a few moments. Silence answered her.

"Hello!" Tracey called again, still no answer. "Christ... you're losing it." Tracey chastised her paranoia. She rinsed her hair and quickly finished her shower. She grabbed her things and walked to her towel. Set on top of her towel was a single red rose. Tracey quickly grabbed the towel and wrapped it around her body. She knew someone was there. She felt it. Even now, she felt as if someone was watching her.

"This isn't funny." Tracey called out, her voice echoing in the hollow alcoves of the locker room. She didn't need this. A fleeing thought that Holly may have placed the rose there crossed her mind. There was no way Holly would leave the hospital, drive twenty minutes away, and never say a thing. Holly would have let her know she was there. Maybe one of the girls stayed behind and Tracey didn't realize it. Her gray eyes scanned the showers and the locker rooms. There were no foot prints on the cement floor. The locker room had several mini dressing areas. A person could have easily hidden in one of them. Tracey's eyes slid over to the vents in the room. She still wasn't certain, but she swore she could sense someone watching her.

Bang! The boiler kicked on and sent a rush of air through the releases. Tracey held her towel tight to her chest. Throwing the rose into the trash can, she pricked her finger on a thorn. Tracey

put her finger in her mouth. "Shit." She swore at her own stupidity. She quickly ducked into her office, closing and locking the door behind her. Shaking off the uncomfortable feeling, she wanted to go home, forget about the rose and creepy feeling in the shower. She wanted to get lost in the comfort of Holly's arms and kisses.

~

Very early on Saturday morning, Holly pulled into the apartment complex. Her shift was finally over. There had been a hundred things that had happened but the only thing she could think of was Tracey. She had the next three days off and planned to spend every minute of them with Tracey. On Wednesday, the coach stopped at the hospital to drop off a late dinner. Alone in her office, they were able to spend some time together. They realized they wanted to spend more time with each other and Holly even mentioned changing her shifts. She never had a reason to not work. Even with Pam, the overnight shifts never interfered with the relationship. For Tracey, she would change her routine. She'd give up nights and hours at the hospital.

Tonight would be their first real date. She made reservations at Tuxedo's, compliments of Chef Simon Ellison, Allison's brother. She reserved a room at the Pier 5 Hotel on the harbor. Holly ventured into the parking lot and through the door of Tracey's building. Dawn was hours away. Tracey gave Holly a key on Wednesday. The teacher was quite funny about it. Holly smiled, remembering how Tracey was stammering over her words as she handed over the key.

At the apartment door, the key slid into the lock and the door opened. The small apartment was spotless. *What did Tracey think when she walked into my place*, Holly thought. Holly smiled at the thought of kissing Tracey. They were like a couple of teens, trying to control their emotions. Holly knew she was holding back. She didn't want to scare Tracey. Yet, the feelings she was having were surfacing. Holly hoped she would be able to see more of the teacher once school was out for the summer. Between games, work, practices and emergencies, they rarely were able to schedule time together. Tracey asked for time the first day they kissed. Holly respected her request. After the day at the climbing center and snuggling in bed together last Sunday, Holly's sexual frustration was at an all time high. After the kiss in the parking lot at Johnny's she swore she thought Tracey was just as frustrated as she was. Now she was sneaking into Tracey's bed at three in the morning. Falling asleep exhausted didn't really constitute sleeping together, Holly thought as she put her jacket on the back of a chair at the kitchen island. On the counter, Tracey had left a note telling her to make herself at home. She had grabbed a quick shower at the hospital. She touched her hair, still slightly damp when she ventured out of hospital. Setting her bag down on the floor next to the island, she had an overwhelming need to just hold Tracey. Keep the brunette close and make sure her feelings were real.

The bedroom door was slightly ajar. Holly stopped at the door to watch Tracey sleep. In her career, she witnessed a number of people sleeping. None of them would she ever describe as sexy. Tracey was sexy. Quietly walking into the room, she came to the side of the bed. Lifting the covers slightly, she slid in. Tracey automatically scooted towards her. Holly wrapped an arm around her, holding tight from behind. Tracey snuggled back against Holly's chest, pulling her arm closer. Warmth engulfed Holly as she brushed a kiss against Tracey's temple.

Tracey knew the moment Holly opened the apartment door. All night, she waited to see her. In a fit of nervous energy, she got home from the game and cleaned the apartment until it was spotless. Their brief meeting on Wednesday didn't pacify the growing need to spend time with her. Holly had a full shift ahead of her but she made the time for Tracey. Nervously, she gave Holly a key to her apartment. Not wanting to freak the doctor out, she wasn't certain what Holly's reaction would be. When Holly told her she would see her when she got off work, Tracey couldn't wait for Saturday morning. Tracey used every ounce of her will power not to grab Holly and have her way with her.

She felt Holly slip into bed, the dampness of her hair, the smell of her citrus shampoo, the feel of the soft cotton sweats she wore. Holly usually wore sweats after her shift, unless she was going out. Tracey curled into Holly's arm and snuggled up against her chest. The kiss to her temple sent Tracey's heart racing. Turning to face Holly, Tracey silently conveyed her thoughts to the blonde. Savoring the look Holly was giving her, Tracey couldn't help but glance at Holly's lips. She wanted to kiss her. Tell her how much she missed her. Staring at one another in the silence of the morning, they moved towards each other and kissed. Tracey's desire increased as their lips touched. Her hands stroked Holly's back and pulled her closer.

"I missed you." Tracey finally said. Her fingers gently caressed Holly's breast. A peak formed as Tracey traced a lazy circle on her shirt. When Tracey touched her finger to the peaked nipple, she heard a gasp from Holly.

"I thought you were asleep." Holly whispered. She could feel Tracey's breath on her face. Wednesday she was so keyed up after Tracey's visit she didn't care that the ER was slammed with case after case. Tonight she had a mission to clear the board and get to Tracey's apartment before sunrise. She made it. "Did I wake you?"

"I've been waiting for you." Tracey confessed, her fingers at the neck line of Holly's top. "I can't stop thinking about you."

"Every lull I had tonight, you were in my head." Holly smiled in the darkness. Their faces silhouetted by light from the lamp in the parking lot.

"I hope that's a good thing."

"Yes it is." Tracey touched her lips to Holly's, leaning in and deepening the kiss. She felt warmth course through her body as Holly's grasp tightened around her. She felt Holly's leg slide between hers. Their kisses deepened as Holly's hands went to Tracey's hair, pulling the strands between her fingers. Holly felt Tracey's lips move to her neck then to her ear. She shuddered as warm breath tickled her ear. Goose bumps rose on her arms as she laughed out loud.

"Stop." Holly whispered as Tracey continued to kiss the sensitive place. Tracey pulled back and held her body on her hands. She stared down at Holly.

"I want..." Tracey said as she pressed her center against the doctor's thigh. "I want you to touch me."

"Tracey." Holly squeaked as she felt Tracey's center against her thigh. If the brunette continued to touch her, she was going to explode. "Sweet Jesus." They had messed around a few times. Leaving Holly to fend for herself after Tracey departed. "Are you sure? We can wait."

"Do you want to wait?"

"No!" Holly practically screamed. "I hoped this weekend, but I thought it would be after our date."

"Get me drunk and take advantage?"

"I'd rather you be sober." Holly ran her hands along Tracey's satin nightshirt. Bodies moved against each other in a slow rhythm.

"I think about you a lot."

"I think about this a lot." Tracey smiled down at blonde who was smiling like the cat who ate the canary. "You too?"

"Guilty." Holly confessed. "What are you planning to do to me?"

"What do you want?" Tracey flipped her hair over her shoulder out of her face as she leaned in for a kiss. Straddling Holly's hips, Tracey sat back as Holly's shaking fingers tried to undo the buttons of her top. The satiny material slid through her fingers easily, causing some distress on the doctor's part. "You are shaking." Tracey took the hand in hers. Turning the palm over, she gently laid a kiss on the sweating surface.

"I'm nervous." Holly released the breath she was holding. "Usually it's easy for me to remove clothes, a pair of scissors and they're gone."

"How about some help?" Tracey grabbed the hem of her shirt and pulled it over her head.

"Better." She saw the glazed over look in Holly's eyes as the doctor stared at her bare chest. Instinctively, her hips began to move as Holly's hand cupped the underside of her breast, the pad of her thumb caressing the hardened peak. Holly rose to a sitting position as her head lowered to the cleft between Tracey's breasts. A trail of hot kisses led from one breast to the other and back again. Tracey's body began to dance to the song Holly was playing. When Holly sucked a nipple into her mouth, Tracey put her hands on her shoulders for support as her head rolled back from the sensations filling her body.

"Why is it you still have too many clothes on?" Tracey's hands filled with fistfuls of material as she pulled the sweatshirt over Holly's head, throwing it to the floor next to her shirt. "Better." Tracey ran her fingers through Holly's hair and pulled the doctor's lips towards hers in a searing kiss. She felt Holly's fingers touch the waistband of her panties and slowly ease them down. Lips covered every inch of her neck and dipped into the hollow of her collar.

"I need to feel you against me." Holly murmured as she lifted her hips to pull off the rest of her clothing. She backed off for a second, looking for hesitation in Tracey's face. There was none. She moved closer, kissing her deeply and pulling the teacher closer. Their bodies touched for the first time, skin against skin. The friction of breast against breast peaked sensitivity. Holly felt Tracey's weight fall against her as she tried to bring her closer. The void which filled her heart receded. In a move worthy of a pro wrestler, Holly flipped their position. Tracey began to moan beneath her as she hooked her feet around Holly's calves. Holly felt her wetness running between her thighs as Tracey's warmth met her. Pushing her hips into Tracey's center, Holly knew if she went too fast, she would explode. She wanted this moment to linger, to be etched in her memory. Suddenly gray eyes were staring up at her.

"Tell me I'm dreaming."

"I'm having the same dream." Holly pulled back, moving her hands to fondle Tracey's breasts, kissing, stroking and suckling each one, her tongue nipped and circled as the erect nipple popped free of her mouth. Tracey's movements began to mimic the rhythm Holly had set. Tracey arched backwards as Holly continued to kiss her breasts, her neck, and her lips. Gasps for breath emanated from Tracey. Holly pulled Tracey's hair from her face, weaving her fingers in the dark tresses and pushing her back against the mattress, hovering over her. The trail of kisses and touches moved further south. They moved together, rocking in waves as need overwhelmed. Tracey's fingers touched whatever flesh she could reach with eagerness. Holly's lips were warm and tugged at her breast, softly at first. As she flicked her tongue across the taunt nipple, the action caused Tracey to twist away with excitement.

"I need..." Tracey's fingers tangled into the doctor's hair, urging her to the nether region. Holly continued to tease as she flicked her tongue against the warmth of Tracey's abdomen. When Tracey began to push at her shoulders, Holly chuckled against the soft flesh. Inhaling the exhilarating musky scent, she let her fingers wander the coarse springy landscape. Holly let her mouth follow her fingers. She felt Tracey's legs locked around her back. Fingers glided through Tracey's folds as Holly explored her core. Her fingers stroking as she went, looking for reactions from the brunette whose eyes were closed as her head rocked back and forth. Leaning into the glistening wetness, Holly's tongue touched the sensitive skin. Tracey shot off the mattress, her legs tightening on Holly's body. "Jesus!"

Holly licked and suckled until she felt Tracey begin to pant. Her cries increased and Holly knew she was close to sending her over the edge. With her fingers, she entered the warm cavern and was greeted by muscles collapsing on her. Holly's tongue replaced her fingers, tasting the warm sweetness the teacher offered her. She licked, sucked and pressed deeper into Tracey's valley. Juices were flowing as she lapped the delicate fruit. She caught Tracey's nub between her teeth and playfully nipped. As her tongue circled her clit she heard Tracey stifle a scream. She placed her mouth on the bundle of nerves, giving the clit the reverence of a Goddess. Tracey's hands were wrapped in her hair and urged her on. Continuing her homage, she felt Tracey's fingers claw at her head as the pressure mounded. Holly thrust hard with her tongue and fingers.

"Oh God! Oh God!" Filled the bedroom as Tracey screamed out and began to shudder. Tracey felt the room spin and white light flashed across her eyes. Her body pulsated as if it were charged

with an electrical current. Holly continued to touch her deeper and deeper she stroked and touched the delicate flesh. Tracey felt Holly's body convulse in orgasm, following Tracey into the bliss.

"God, you have to stop!" Tracey finally called. Sucking on the clit as the convulsions stopped, Holly pulled back and kissed the delicate flesh of Tracey's inner thighs, resting her cheek against one. "Come here please." Tracey waved her hand in the air.

With a smirk, Holly moved up her body. She could see that Tracey was flushed and trying to catch her breath. Tracey's eyes were closed and hair outlined her face on the pillow. She looked small and frail. Her eyes opened and a smile appeared on her face, "I think I'm going to be in trouble with you." Holly kissed her on the lips.

Tracey smiled back weakly. "Just give me a minute." Her eyes shut again. Holly kissed her on the shoulder and on her neck.

"I missed you." Tracey felt her shudder.

"Are you cold?" Tracey asked as she looked for the comforter. Holly pulled her back to face her.

"I'm falling for you." Holly spilled the words before Tracey knew what to do. Tears formed in her big brown eyes as she said it.

"I'm having the same feelings. I hate when I can't see you. I think about you all the time. I can't control myself when I'm around you. It's 4:30 in the morning and I want to touch you and be with you." Tracey confessed as she wiped Holly's tears away. "Don't cry."

"I'm crying because I'm happy." Holly laughed nervously. "You make me happy."

"Well, that's definitely okay." Tracey grabbed at the waistband of the discarded clothing and threw them to the floor. "What's with the sweats?" Tracey teased as she ran a finger along the hollow of Holly's shoulder.

"They're soft." Holly said as she cuddled against Tracey's side. "Just not as soft as someone I know."

"Who would that be?" Tracey teased a smile reaching her face as her eyes remained close to sleep.

"You." Holly silenced Tracey with her lips as she wrapped the teacher in her arms.

~

With an eyelid cracked open, Holly wasn't sure where she was at for a moment. The warm body pressed against her back reassured her that she was still with Tracey and in her bed. She groaned as the softness of Tracey's breasts pressed up against her skin. An arm was haphazardly clasping

her waist. There was possessiveness in the firm grasp of the hand on her stomach. They spent the early morning hours learning each other's body. Soft lips and wandering hands mapped the landscape. Learning every hill and valley, the hard planes and soft curves, they explored until exhaustion took over. With Tracey, she climaxed over and over. She lost count of the number of times she had an orgasm. Each time was more intense than the last. Holly's body reacted to Tracey's touch like no previous lover. Tracey held on to her, pressing her hands, fingers and nails tight against Holly's back as she came, crying out Holly's name. A numb stinging sensation skirted across her back, she knew there were scratches and possibly blood. She curled her hand around the one resting on her stomach. The clock on the table closed in on the early hours of the afternoon. She felt a feather light kiss between her shoulder blades.

"Are you awake?" Holly asked when more kisses followed.

"No." She heard a whisper of a response against her skin followed by a quiet laugh. The hand on her stomach began to caress in small circles.

"No?" Holly questioned as she turned to face Tracey. Her hair was mashed against her head in places, sticking straight up in others. Bruised lips greeted Holly as soon as she turned. Holly moved to cover Tracey's body with her own, her leg slipping comfortably between Tracey's thighs. "You seem awake to me." Holly nuzzled her face against Tracey's neck.

"Still sleeping. I'm having the best dream ever." Tracey pressed her center against Holly's thigh. She could feel the wetness coating Holly upper leg.

"Oh, you are definitely awake." Holly closed her eyes as she increased the pressure against Tracey's center. At a quick gasp from Tracey, she pulled back.

Tracey looked into the brown eyes hovering over her. The night she spent with Holly was like a home coming. Her previous experiences paled in comparison. She wanted to do things she never thought of before. She wanted Holly to take her now. She was ready and waiting for her touch. Reaching a hand to Holly's face, she trailed the pad of her thumb across her cheek to the bruised lower lip, her eyes mesmerized by the feel of Holly lips under her touch. When Holly took the digit into her mouth, Tracey locked eyes with Holly. They didn't speak as they began to move against one another. Their touches mirrored as soft caresses led to changing of positions. Holly spread Tracey's legs wider, sliding her leg over Tracey's. When their centers touched, they let out gasps. Holly led the way. Her gyrating motion increased as slick centers danced together. Pants filled the air and sweat pebbled along their skin. Their bodies blended into one as skin slid against skin. Holly bit her lip and closed her eyes.

"No." Tracey broke the silence. "Look at me. I want to see your eyes." Her voice hitched as she felt the first tremor course through her. Holly forced her eyes open to hold Tracey's. She knew she was close. The feel of Tracey against her was like an aphrodisiac. She wanted her more and more.

"You're so beautiful. You make me feel so much." Holly declared her thoughts. She was holding off her pending orgasm.

"Let go baby. Come with me." Tracey reached out and touched Holly's face. "Come with me." Tracey released a throaty moan as her body let the orgasm fill her. She bucked up against Holly as Holly followed right behind, calling out Tracey's name. They held each other tight and murmured incoherent whispers as they fell back to sleep.

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~ With All of My Heart ~

by Catherine Burke

Author's Note: Here we are again....I thought I'd try this again.

Category: Orig. Uber Alt.

Rating: R / NC-17

Summary: Doctor Holly Graham was going through the motions. Taught to rely on no one but herself, she toiled through the medical school and settled into a position at one of Baltimore's top trauma centers. Tracy Campbell had looks, a career, a loving family and loyal friends. Yet, her love life was lacking. Pursued by many a suitor, she never found what she was looking for until a snowy night on a Maryland highway.

Comments/Disclaimer(s): This is an original story. The story and characters belong to me. They are not to be used or reproduced without my express written permission. I have posted an similar story on another site under the kato5568@aol.com email....This is me. These characters are mine and not swiped from someone else. It's good to know people are looking out for us!

This story depicts a love/sexual relationship between two consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it.

Special Thanks: To J Brownell for ideas suggestions and getting me to actually post this. Kerrie who was able to beta and get this story back to me a very short time. Living half way around the world does have its advantages. Time differences worked well for us. I'd like to give a shout to Powerbab, who actually writes about Cleveland where we live. We'll get together at the coffee shop soon.

I'm posting this in chapter blocks. Life gets in the way at times. Hope you enjoy.
You can reach me at burkcatherine@aol.com

Chapter 9

After a lazy morning in bed, they showered, grabbed a light lunch and checked in to the very posh hotel overlooking Baltimore harbor. Holly suggested getting ready in the hotel suite. When Tracey stepped into the hotel lobby, she was awestruck by the polished marble floors, the works of modern art displayed through the hotel and awe-inspiring twelve foot waterfall which was the focal point of the hotel. It was as if the entire building was shaped around the water feature. Standing next to the reflecting pool, Tracey watched the water cascading over the edge. She glanced at Holly who was speaking with the concierge. The man laughed at Holly's comment and continued to smile with his eyes as he stole a glance Tracey's way. Holly turned to look at her as well. When her eyes met the doctor's, she felt a shiver run through her body. She couldn't wait to be with Holly again. Not only did the hotel render her speechless, the look Holly was giving her was causing explosions in her southern regions. She couldn't wait to get to their room. Holly wanted this evening to be special and hadn't spared any expense.

Tracey was just as impressed with their room. On the fifth floor, the suite overlooked the harbor. A small sitting area just inside the door housed a wet bar and big screen HDTV. In a separate room, the master suite held a King size bed with red, brown and gold colored pillows and bedding. The bathroom held a Jacuzzi tub and glass encased shower with multiple jet heads at strategic locations. Off the bedroom, the large sliding glass doors led to a small balcony. Although it was February, Tracey ventured outside in the bitter cold to stand at the railing. Holly stood in the room and watched her as she leaned slightly over the railing.

"Don't lean too far. I really wouldn't know how to explain it." Holly commented as Tracey sent her an award winning smile. Tracey came back into the room, shutting out the cold. She wrapped her arms around Holly's waist and backed her to the giant bed.

"This is spectacular." Tracey covered Holly's mouth with her own. "You're spectacular." She cupped Holly's center through her slacks. She felt Holly jump at the contact. "Please tell me we have time." Tracey traced her fingers along the inseam of Holly's slacks. She added pressure when she felt her harden clit.

"Yes." Holly's strained breathy voice filled her ear. Tracey unbuttoned the button at Holly's waist and slowly lowered the zipper. The sound seemed to echo off the walls of the large room. She went slowly, moving her hand along the moist cotton panties covering Holly's center. Holly's hips instantly lifted from the bed as she tried to make Tracey touch her.

"Please." Tracey skittered her tongue along Holly's neck and throat. She pushed aside the cotton material and entered Holly with two fingers. The wetness that greeted her made her groan. She had been with other women, but none like Holly. She wanted to come just from touching her. Her fingers massaged the swollen tissue, the pad of her thumb played with the bundle of nerves. She slowly drew her fingers in and out of Holly's center. Her pace increased as Holly's moans grew. Tracey bit down on the top of Holly's breast as she gyrated against Holly's body. Holly pulled open her shirt and bra for Tracey to gain access to her breasts.

"Fast..." Holly called out as Tracey greedily sucked at her breast. Taking it into her mouth, she played with the erect nipple, teasing it with her tongue and teeth. Holly held Tracey's head at her breast. The sucking pleasure of Tracey's mouth, fingers and thumb was strumming her dangerously to the edge of climax. "Harder!" Holly loosened her grip on Tracey's hair as Tracey reared up, abandoning the wet nipple. Gaining leverage, Tracey leaned on her free hand and pumped hard against Holly's center, she could feel the constriction of muscles around her fingers. She knew Holly was close to coming. She could hear the sound of skin slapping against her hand and forearm. She pumped deeper and harder, her lower body pressing against Holly's.

"There... there.." Holly's voice tapered off as she disappeared from her body for the moment. She felt the hot rush of moisture from her center, a female ejaculation. She had heard of them but never had one.

"Fuck!" Tracey screamed as she came. Her body collapsed on top of Holly's. It took a few minutes to recover. Tracey rolled on to her back, her hand still resting in the opening of Holly's slacks. "You okay?" She panted as she wondered what the hell had just happened.

"Oh yeah..." Holly cooed as she tried to catch her breath. She watched Tracey's wrist bounce up and down with the rise of her diaphragm. "That's a first." Holly felt the rush of heat to her cheeks.

"Was that?"

"I think so. It's the first time I've..."

"I'm the greatest!" Tracey lifted a hand and gave a fist pump in the air.

"Yes, you are." Holly rolled on to her companion and began to undo her pants. "Let me show you how much I appreciate you." Holly pulled her slacks and underwear off in one motion. She crawled between Tracey's legs, licking her lips. "You smell good." She lowered her head to the vee between her legs and let the tip of her tongue touch the swollen flesh. "I'm going to taste you." Holly positioned Tracey's legs over her shoulders and blew a hot breath on the pulsating flesh. "Do you want that?"

"Godyes!" Tracey flung herself back on the bed at the first swipe of Holly's tongue against her center. "Oh Jesus." She heard Holly's chuckle then she was lost in the sensation of Holly's mouth on her center. Twisting her fingers in the blonde curls, she closed her eyes, slipping in to the euphoric world Holly sent her.

~

Tracey studied her reflection in the hotel mirror. Her fingers traced her features. She looked the same, but something inside had changed. Deep inside. She had let Holly get to her heart. She piled her hair high on her head in coils and curls, letting the chestnut colored mass cascade to the back of her neck. She turned to study her profile. Her hair looked good. She refused to shower with Holly, knowing where that would lead. She showered while Holly got ready. When Tracey

stepped into the steam filled vanity area, Holly was finished. Tracey stuck her head into the sitting area where Holly sat watching a college basketball game.

"I'm letting you know it may take a while." Tracey warned and went back to get ready for their night out. She wrapped a towel around her chest and examined her torso for any marks Holly may have left. She knew she left a sucker bite on Holly's shoulder. Her dress was a halter top that fell open to the middle of her back. She had a matching wrap to cover her shoulders and hoped that would cover any marks. Her lips were puffy in a thoroughly kissed fashion. She knew she would be sore but she didn't care. She wouldn't change the last twenty four hours for anything.

The burgundy colored silk dress she wore showed just enough cleavage. Tracey picked it out specifically for this evening. She wanted to let Holly know she was ready to move to the next level. She hadn't planned on sleeping with Holly before tonight. She just couldn't help it. She desired Holly too much to pass up the opportunity. Two strips of material ran from her neck and covered her breasts, the space between was open, with an amber pendant resting against her skin. The material gathered at the waist then fell to mid-thigh, silk stockings and matching three inch heels finished off her outfit. She wanted Holly to desire her. Tonight, she wanted to dress up and look sexy for the doctor. She couldn't wait to be seen on Holly's arm. Later she would savor the moment when she danced in Holly's arms. If the night followed the pattern of the day, she would end her evening under Holly's body, being ravished by her. She let out a small laugh, two hours ago she climaxed twice and now she could only think about Holly fucking her fast and hard. It was going to be a long night. She tried to reach behind her to secure the back zipper, but wasn't able to. Her pouting reflection stared back at her. She wanted to make an elegant entrance when she presented herself to Holly. Now she needed assistance with the zipper.

Sitting quietly on the couch in the other room, Holly stared at the television which was on but no sound came out. Lost in her thoughts, she wondered how long it was going to take for Tracey to be ready. She had been warned but she didn't expect this. She was dressed and ready in twenty minutes. She took a little bit more time to work on her hair, throw on a basic coat of mascara and eyeliner. She didn't like lipstick since it made her mouth feel weird. Her outfit was a combination of old and new. She and Dr. Greg Walosky, her co-worker and friend went shopping for a new outfit, instead of the same old one she wore all the time. Greg found a metallic golden colored blouse which he described as fabulous and paired it with a new suit which Holly loved. The chocolate brown suit tapered her sides and slimmed her shoulders. The outfit looked great and made her comfortable. Never one to think of accents, she was grateful Greg picked out the jewelry she wore, a small gold band on her pinky finger, a gold rope chain and small hoop earrings. She looked at the clock on the television. If Tracey didn't get a move on, they would be late.

Tracey's high heels sank in the plush carpet of the suite as she walked into the sitting area. Holly was on the couch waiting, her left leg bounced with impatience. "Can you give me a hand?" Tracey asked as she watched Holly jump at the sound of her voice. She started to laugh and covered her mouth to hold in the enjoyment of scaring Holly. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to.." She stopped as Holly's face changed from fear to a quite different look. "What?"

"You're beautiful." Holly stepped closer. She lifted her hand to touch Tracey's face. "I am going to be the envy of every person we see tonight." Holly let her thumb trace her jaw line and placed a soft kiss on her lips. Tracey closed her eyes as Holly's lips touched hers. She had to get her need under control. They had plans tonight. She couldn't help the way her body reacted whenever Holly came close.

"Can you help with the zipper?" Tracey asked as her body automatically leaned into Holly's. Holly didn't respond but she did step behind Tracey. Warm, soft hands grazed her shoulders as a small kiss was dropped on the back of her neck, the hands wandering across the expanse of her back to the top of her dress. She felt the tug of zipper, then Holly placed her hands on her waist.

"Done." Was the soft whisper in her ear that sent the hair on her arms to full attention. "For now." Holly grazed her ear lobe with her lips. She stepped away quickly, afraid of where her thoughts were going.

"I suppose it would be upsetting to Simon if we stood him up?" Tracey said as if she could read the thoughts swimming through Holly's brain.

"I know. Allison would never forgive us."

"Ready?" Tracey asked as she threw her wrap over her shoulders and glided past Holly. She ran her fingers along Holly's forearm. "You look hot." Tracey commented as she looked over her shoulder, making sure Holly knew she was checking her out.

"It's going to be a long night." Holly muttered under her breath. She put her hand on the small of Tracey's back as they went to the elevator and into the lobby. The concierge who Holly spoke to earlier greeted them as they stepped into the lobby.

"Your car is waiting." His hand extended to the sleek black limousine idling at the front doors. The driver stepped out and opened the door for them. "Have a wonderful evening Dr. Graham, Miss Campbell."

"Thank you Daniel." Holly winked at him and followed Tracey into the back of the sedan. She slid next to Tracey who immediately placed a hand on her thigh.

"This is awesome." Tracey as she checked out the interior of the limousine. "You didn't have to do this."

"I didn't. Daniel arranged it. His son came into the ER. According to Daniel, I was the doctor who saved his life. I don't remember the exact case. There are a lot of people in and out. I told him he didn't have to."

"Is that what you were talking to him about earlier?" Tracey snuggled closer. Holly nodded and laced her fingers with Tracey's. "It's a nice surprise. This entire day has been the greatest day ever." Tracey gushed aloud. Holly laughed and kissed her lightly on the lips.

"Yes, it is." Holly held tight as the car pulled up in front of Tuxedo's. The line of customers ran outside the door. The driver pulled in front and the valets immediately stepped to the back door. The driver waved them off and opened the door for the women.

The waiting patron's peeked over each other's shoulders, trying to get a look at who was exiting the car. "Ready?" Holly saw Tracey's nod and stepped out of the car. She held her hand out for Tracey who was quickly at her side and staying close. One of the valets opened the door for them and in a few short minutes, they were in the warmth of the restaurant.

"Miss Campbell and Dr. Graham." The hostess greeted them with a smile as another employee asked for their coats. "Your table is ready. Chef Simon has asked to spend a few minutes with you if you don't mind." The elderly woman with fiery red hair led the way through the restaurant. Candles throughout the restaurant created a warm intimacy. There were a few customers who stopped eating to watch the striking couple walk by. "Simon will be out in a moment. Would you like a drink or the wine list?"

"The wine list." Holly said as she held Tracey's chair out for her. The red head nodded and set the wine list next to Holly's place. "Thank you."

"I'll be back in a few moments." The hostess turned from their table and headed into the kitchen. Unlike most of the tables, theirs had three chairs versus the standard four or two.

"Okay, I feel like Ashton Kushner is going to jump out any moment and say we've been punked." Tracey shifted in her chair, aware of the eyes looking her way.

"I'm enjoying this. I don't get out often and it's usually because Greg needs a date." Holly placed the linen napkin on her lap. She picked up the wine list. "Do you want some wine?"

"Yes." Tracey felt as if her nerves were in overdrive. She had never been treated like a VIP, ever. She was a high school Biology teacher. She didn't even want to look at how much the bottles of wine cost. She should have placed limits on the amount of money Holly spent this weekend. Between dinner and the hotel, Holly must have spent Tracey's monthly salary. "Don't get anything too pricey." Tracey's voice cracked.

Holly quirked an eyebrow at her companion and wondered what was going on. "You like cheap wine?" She saw the strange look that pass across Tracey face. "What's wrong?"

"It's just a lot of money. You shouldn't spend..." Tracey was cut off. "Yes, I should and I am." Holly covered Tracey's hand with hers.

"Do you know how long it's been since I've wanted to do something special for anyone?" Holly knew she had done more for Tracey than anyone else in her life. Even with Pam, she never had to wine and dine her. She never wanted to. "Can we settle one thing now?" Tracey looked up at her. "I want to do this for you, for us. If you let it go this one time, I promise never to do it again unless we want to. Is that agreeable?" Holly gave her a smile and pressed lightly against her fingers.

"Agreed." "So, do you still want cheap wine?" The snort from across the table was her answer.

"Good, because I think the chef would be offended." Holly gestured to the doors of the kitchen as a tall bald man with wide shoulders and waist approached their table.

Tracey turned to see Simon Wade walking towards them. She got to her feet to greet him. They had been paired up with Simon for Andy and Allison's wedding. They hit it off tremendously but hadn't seen each other since. Tracey knew once the couple had children, she would be seeing more of the chef. "Tracey Campbell!" He bellowed across the restaurant. He immediately engulfed her in his thick arms. "You are always a knock out. Sit, please." He whispered in her ear. Tracey sat down. The additional chair squeaked under his weight as he settled. "Who is this lovely woman at your table this evening? Hopefully the same one my sister was gushing about."

"It is. Simon, this is Holly Graham. Excuse me, Doctor Holly Graham."

"Please, just Holly."

"Something tells me you've earned the title of Doctor. Just like the title of Executive Chef, but I'd rather be called Simon."

"Simon, it is. Thank you for the treatment. The staff here has been wonderful." Holly saw the small look shared between them.

"Allison said I'd like her." Simon said. "I can't stay long but I wanted to visit with you. It's been too long."

"Any suggestions from the chef?" Tracey glanced at the menu then to Holly whose eyes lit up.

"How about I surprise you with something?" Simon got to his feet. "Anything you don't care for?"

"Are you kidding?" Holly laughed.

"We'll take care of anything you send out. I'm starving." She glanced at Tracey whose scarlet complexion matched the table cloth.

"Suggestions on the wine, Simon?" Tracey changed the subject quickly.

"I'll send something out." He gave her a kiss on the cheek and gave a wave to Holly.

They sat in silence for a few moments. The rumblings around the restaurant let the couple know they were again the focus of attention. "I think there are a few jealous folks in here tonight." Tracey smiled like the cat that ate the canary. "This was a great choice."

The bottle of wine arrived, a red burgundy pinot noir with a rich bouquet and complex blend of flavors. The silky taste danced across their palates. "Still want cheap?"

"Hell no." Tracey laughed. "Remind me never to be cheap again. Especially with wine."

Course after course of food arrived. Tracey was relieved that the portions were more of tasting samples. Simon sent out scallops wrapped in Kaffir lime leaves, a *Banh cuon* so tender and flaky it melted in their mouths, followed by the main course of a seared duck with a fig sauce. Dessert was a lemon-cherry parfait with chunks of sweet cherries mingled with the tanginess of lemon zest. Holly held her hands in the air when the wait staff approached with a silver covered tray. "Please, no more." She called out. Tracey shook her head as she scraped her spoon across her dish, trying to get the last of her dessert.

"If I knew no one would be looking, I think I would lick this dish." Tracey said as she popped the last bit into her mouth.

"From Simon." The waiter smiled as he stepped away. The staff conveyed the women's pleasure to the kitchen staff. In fact the entire evening in the dining room had been an adventure. As busy as it was, the dining room came to a stand still when the food was presented to the beautiful women who were guests of the chef. He walked away, knowing the other guests would be as surprised as the women.

"Go ahead." Holly pushed the platter towards Tracey. The gray eyes widened with mischief.

"I can't eat another bite. We're going to have to find some way to work off all this food." She placed a hand under her chin. "Can you think of a way to do that?"

"Stop. You've been very good and if you start now, these people may get a show they weren't planning on." Holly hid her smile with her napkin. "See what it is?" Tracey lifted the lid to reveal two red roses crossed together with a small note centered between them. Tracey lifted one to her nose to inhale the fragrance. She remembered the rose she found on her towel the night before. She hadn't told Holly about the incident. They didn't really speak that much about anything last night or this morning.

"You okay?" Holly asked. "You looked a little sad."

"Not tonight, I'll tell you tomorrow." Tracey handed her the other rose. "Thank you for a beautiful evening."

"Thank God Simon cooked." Holly smiled, knowing if she attempted to cook a meal Tracey would be better off going for fast food. "It's been a most enjoyable evening. Are you ready for some dancing?"

"I'd rather.."

"Miss Campbell?" They were interrupted by a tall man standing next to their table. Tracey did a double take at the man and realized it was Geoff Stanley. His daughter, Michelle was in the accident, and the one parent who threatened to sue the school. His stern blue eyes focused in on Tracey's cleavage.

"It appears as if you're the guest of honor here this evening." He continued.

"Mr. Stanley, nice to see you." Tracey tried to remain polite. She wasn't comfortable around parents while she was on a date.

"I hope you ladies are enjoying your evening. It's a shame to see two beautiful women unescorted on Valentine's Day."

"We're..."

"We're meeting our dates later. They were held up at work." Tracey quickly had a cover story for their lack of male companionship.

"If you're in need..." Geoff placed a hand on their table and began to lean down towards Tracey's ear.

"Mr. Stanley." Holly's voice grabbed the attention of the dark haired man. "Your family is looking for you." In the doorway a very agitated looking woman and a teenager on crutches glared their way.

~

Colored spinning lights flashed across the dance floor as Tracey led Holly towards the open wooden floor. The sound of the bass rattled the large suspended speakers. Bodies swayed to the rhythm of the music the DJ played. Tracey waited for a slow romantic song. She loved all types of music. Of late, every song she heard on her car stereo seemed to be about love. Maybe it had something to do with the woman grasping her hand. Of course being February fourteenth could have something to do with it.

There were a few awkward moments with the Stanley's at the restaurant. Tracey knew many parents would frown upon a lesbian teaching in the school system. In some states, teachers had been fired. Holly immediately sensed her discomfort and pulled away her hand away from Tracey's. "I'm sorry about the restaurant." Tracey apologized for the twentieth time. Holly squeezed her hand. "It's just..."

Holly leaned down and silenced her with her lips. The kiss slowly heated up. The awkward moment at the restaurant had both women questioning what the other was thinking. "I know your job." Holly filled in the blank. "I don't see how who you sleep with affects your students' grades."

"Some people freak out about it." Tracey let her hands rest on the waist band of Holly's slacks. The shimmering blouse under her jacket was opened to the center of her sternum. Tracey thought she looked good enough to eat.

"I thought schools were all about diversity and equality. I guess not." Holly said as she let her gaze travel over the crowd. "Shit." The word escaped as she caught the gaze of Pam Farmer from across the room. Her ex-girlfriend was dressed in tight leather pants and a white lace top.

"What?" Tracey asked as the expletive was released close to her ear.

"My ex." Holly stated flatly as she watched Pam walking their way.

"Happy Valentines Day!" Pam hollered as she approached and stood next to the couple. She leaned in to kiss Holly. Holly quickly backed away to avoid the EMT's lips. You've got to be kidding, she thought. The romantic night she was planning with Tracey was quickly spiraling out of control. Her ex-girlfriend dressed in skin tight black leather pants and the skimpy white lace blouse was drunk and trying to kiss her.

"Don't be a shit. Who's your friend?" Pam turned her pouting face to Tracey. "Hello." The sultry seductive voice Holly had become numb to filled her ears.

"Go away." Holly ground her teeth in annoyance. She felt Tracey tighten her grip on her hand.

"Easy Hol. I just wanted to meet your friend." Pam slightly slurred. "How about we go home and make it a threesome?" Pam's wobbly fingers reached towards Tracey's face.

"No." Holly shouted as she stopped Pam's hand from reaching its destination. "You're drunk and making an ass out of yourself." She saw the pissed look surface on Pam's face before she felt Pam's finger poking her in the chest. "Back the fuck down Pam." Holly growled.

"I was just verifying some info I got."

"What are you talking about?"

"Rumor was you're dating some hot chick." Pam glazed eyes studied Tracey for a moment.

"What do you care if I am dating someone? You sure as shit have no reason to question what I do." Holly barked.

"Guess they were wrong. Call me." Pam let her fingers linger for a moment on Holly's chest as attempted to dip them into Holly's cleavage.

"What the hell are you doing?" Holly pushed Pam away from her. "Leave me alone."

"Come on Holly, what's wrong? You used to like me?" Pam said as she put her hands on Holly's hips, trying to retain contact with the doctor. "Besides, we had some good times in the sack. Remember the night I let you..."

"Excuse us." Tracey grabbed Holly's hand and led them to the dance floor. "That is your ex?" Holly nodded, her eyes still blazing with anger. "You're lucky you found me." Tracey teased trying to defuse the situation.

"I'm very lucky." Holly agreed as she brushed her lips against Tracey's, nipping lightly at the bottom one. "Tonight is not turning out how I wanted it to."

"What matters is the end result."

"Oh yeah." Holly whispered in Tracey's ear, she could feel the hair on the brunette's skin pebble. "You like that?" The whisper was softer and closer as lips nipped at her lobe.

"Yes." The breathy whisper of a response was barely heard over the music. "Where do you want tonight to end?" Tracey pulled away to look into Holly's eyes.

"In your arms." Holly savagely bent her head and took Tracey's mouth with hers. The kiss was one of possessiveness. No one doubted Holly's intention to make Tracey's hers.

"Coach Campbell?" A young voice called to the teacher. Tracey slowly lifted her head to see one of her players and another student standing three feet from them. "Fuck." This time the expletive came from the teacher. Standing three feet from the couple stood a small blonde teenager with her arm in a sling. Zoey Pope was underage and in a gay nightclub. Tracey closed her eyes and pinched her nose. How could such a great date turn disastrous so quickly? First, Geoff Stanley hit on her at the restaurant. Tracey freaked out and ran back into the closet so quickly, she forgot Holly was sitting across from her at the table. There were stories about teachers who lost their jobs because of their sexual orientation. She didn't want to lose her job because of who she slept with. Now her student and point guard was standing in front of her.

"Good evening." Holly spoke up when Tracey stood silently staring at the young teenager. Holly recognized her as one of the players on the high school team. "It seems you've got us at an advantage."

"I didn't mean to bother you." Zoey began to walk away.

"Zoey." Tracey called. The teen stopped and turned around, her face averted, staring at the top of her shoes. "Wh.." She stopped when Holly put a hand on her arm. "It's okay, I'm just surprised."

"I'm sorry. Please don't tell my mom." The teen wiped at her eyes. Tracey went to the teenager and wrapped her arms around the teenage. "I'm sorry."

"No... no, it's okay." Tracey lifted the teen's chin. "It's okay. This is Holly, a friend of mine." Blue eyes swam in unshed tears as she glanced at the blonde. "More than a friend." Tracey corrected herself as she looked at Holly.

"Are you supposed to be here?"

"Malcolm's brother is the DJ and as long as we are eighteen and don't drink, he gets us in." Zoey looked to the slim black teenager watching them.

"Hello Ms. Campbell." He waved to his former Biology teacher.

"Malcolm." Tracey acknowledged him. Not only did she have one student in the club, she had two. She looked at Holly. The doctor shrugged her shoulders, there wasn't anything they could

do. "Let's talk." She waved the teenagers over to an empty table in the back of the club. Holly stood next to the booth, ready to flee if the teacher wanted to escape.

The teenagers looked as if they were about to receive punishment. Big sad brown eyes glanced at Holly a few times as Malcolm fidgeted in his seat. He turned to the teacher when she began to speak.

"Well, it seems that we have a situation." Tracey folded her hands on the table in front of her. "I'm not out at school. If word gets around that I'm a lesbian, it may cost me my job."

"No." The teens said in unison.

"Listen to me. Maybe not a Bayview but there have been teachers who have lost their jobs because of their sexual orientation. It's a harsh reality."

"Ms. Campbell, we won't say anything." Malcolm started. "We understand what you have to do. There aren't many gay students at Bayview, or at least ones who admit it. You're one of the best teachers, there's no way they would fire you." Zoey finished. "Not everyone accepts homosexuals interacting with students, children. I need to count on you. I'm not asking you to lie, but I don't want to advertise my sexuality." Tracey's shoulders strained. She was emotionally drained. She felt Holly's hand caress her bare shoulder. She leaned into the warmth of the woman beside her.

"Maybe we should let this go. It's been a long night." Holly felt Tracey's head nod in agreement. "Do you have a ride home?"

"We're staying at my brother's apartment across the street."

"Be careful, please." Tracey slid out of the booth and into Holly's waiting arms. She felt like crying. She had been very careful over the years to avoid seeing her students in gay establishments or at pride events.

"Are you okay?" Holly whispered in her ear.

"Can we go?" She asked as she shook her head. Tracey wanted to go.

"We can do anything you want." Holly put an arm around her waist and led her to the car waiting outside.

~

Strange would be the word to describe the twists and turns of the night. Tracey was standing at the mirror wondering how her evening changed in such a short time. The weird come on by Geoff Stanley at the restaurant. Running into her students at the club was something she never thought of. Holly seemed to understand why Tracey denied their relationship. She began to pull down her hair and let the curls fall to her shoulders.

"Hey." Holly stood at the bathroom door. She shed her jacket and her hands framed the doorway. "Can I help?" Tracey's hands froze mid-air. She never had anyone ask to help with her hair before. She turned to look at Holly and nodded. Holly moved behind her and began to knead the muscles in Tracey's neck.

"I'm really sorry." Tracey mumbled as she chin dropped to her chest.

"Stop." Holly said as she pulled the locks free from the pins. With each pin, she set them on the counter and let her fingers massage the tender flesh. "Nothing that happened tonight will send me running to the hills." She dropped a kiss on her neck. "Besides, I like you." She said as she kissed her skin again. "Unless you wanted to take Mr. Stanley up on the offer he was going to.."

"Absolutely not." Tracey turned to face Holly. "Maybe that's something we need to talk about."

"Sleeping with men?"

"No, silly." Tracey turned back so Holly could continue to with her hair. She felt very feminine as Holly's fingers worked the stiffness out of her hair. "Are we monogamous?"

"I don't want to see anyone else. Do you?" Holly stopped her task and placed her hands on Tracey's shoulders. Their eyes locked in the mirror.

"No." Tracey felt and saw the blonde relax. "I don't cheat Holly. Hell, I rarely go out." She turned and ran her hands through the soft tossed blonde hair then pulled Holly's lips to hers. "Let's go to bed."

"Do I bother with clothes?"

"Ha..." Tracey said as she reached for the zipper on the back of her dress. "You may need to help me though."

"Anything to get you naked."

"Anything?"

"Yes!" Holly said as she unzipped the back of Tracey's dress. She let her hands wander along her back and to her hips. "Anything you want. Just ask."

"Go get in bed." Tracey pressed her rear into Holly's center. "I'll be right there." She felt Holly's arms wrap around her pulling her closer. Her lips nipped on her shoulders and moved to her neck. Tracey did a half turn and pulled Holly's lips to hers. "Go now, I'll be right there." Holly kissed her again and practically sprinted to the bedroom. She heard clothes being flung across the room.

Tracey removed her dress and stripped the rest of her clothes off. She took the complimentary robe from the hook on the wall and slipped it on. She brushed out her hair and washed her face.

She touched the corners of her eyes wondering when the crows' feet would appear. She had a few years until she hit thirty. She could feel the pending new decade creeping up on her like the falling grains of an hour glass. She brushed her teeth and stepped back from the mirror. She opened the robe to look at her body. Noise from Holly in the other room drew her attention. She wondered what the blonde saw when she looked at her body. Just the thought of Holly looking at her caused her nipples to tighten and her center to pulse. Yes, she wanted to be naked with Holly and make love through the night. Was it love? Or was it a pure sexual need. There was definitely an attraction. She flipped off the light and walked into the bedroom. Immediately, she noticed the bottle of champagne chilling near the bed. There were two bowls on a tray next to it. One held chocolate covered strawberries and the other had heavy white whips of cream in it.

"Daniel?"

"No, this is all me. Do you mind?" Holly asked as she sat up against the headboard. The sheet draped across her breasts. Tracey saw the large bruise she had given her earlier.

"No." Tracey stood at the foot of the bed. "I want something from you but, not at this moment." Tracey fiddled with the tie at her waist. She watched Holly's eyes as they watched her every movement like a hawk. Tracey undid the tie and let it fall to the ground. She wanted to toy with Holly and she enjoyed every moment. She held the robe together with a hand. She moved towards the tray and placed a finger in the whipped cream then into her mouth to taste. "That's really good." Tracey heard the groan Holly made. "Do you want a taste?" Tracey asked as she put a dollop of whip cream on the curve of Holly's breast and slowly licked it off. She felt Holly shutter at her touch. When her tongue touched the pebbled flesh, she felt Holly's hand at the back of her neck. Tracey pulled away before Holly could get a firm hold on her.

"Are you trying to kill me?" Holly groaned as Tracey moved to the end of the bed. Holly let the sheet drop as she moved towards the bottom of the bed. Her naked breasts bounced slightly as she moved to Tracey.

"Do you want me naked?" Tracey teased.

"Yes." Holly hissed out. Her frustration beginning to show as she unconsciously reached for Tracey.

"Why?" Tracey continued to tease. She had never been this vocal in this situation. Normally, she would be content to slip into bed. She liked this playful side that came out with Holly. The shocked glassy eyed look that came over Holly was priceless.

"Because I want to touch you. Taste you. Feel you." Holly moved closer, her hands reaching for the edges of the robe. She ran her fingers along the silky material and Tracey's skin. "Do you want that?"

In the mist of her teasing, Holly had turned the tides on Tracey. The teacher's eyes were closed, the nearness and slight touch were almost too much to handle. When Holly's hand slipped under the material and cupped her breast, Tracey felt her knees buckle. "Tracey, do you want me?"

"Yes." The whisper was more of a groan.

"I want you." Holly parted her robe like Moses parting the Dead Sea, letting it slip to the floor. She let her eyes and hands roam across Tracey's flesh.

Their mouths connected as Tracey threw her arms around Holly and melted against her. Falling to the mattress, she didn't want to tease. She wanted to feel loved and cherished.

Chapter 10

Tracey stabbed at the pork chop on the serving platter that Tommy held in front of her. Another Sunday family dinner was sans Holly. She wanted the doctor to meet her family and become part of the extended network that included her brothers' wives. When Tommy cleared his throat, she looked into the steel colored eyes that mirrored her own. "Sorry." She muttered as Tommy withdrew the platter and passed it on to Frank.

Last weekend was great, right up to the moment she asked Holly about her family. They were lying naked in the large king sized bed at Pier 5. In Holly's arms, she felt closer to her than any other human being. She wanted to know more about the woman who made her blood surge in her veins. She ran her fingers along the plane of Holly's ribs, noting how thin the doctor was as she could feel the contour of each bone. She had her head resting on Holly's shoulder. They were awake, enjoying the quiet morning, basking in the glow of the last forty eight hours.

"Tell me about your family." Tracey said as she kissed Holly's neck. As if the North wind had swept into the room, the temperature dropped as Holly immediately stiffened. Tracey closed her eyes, she knew she made a mistake. This was the subject she had stumbled on the night at Johnny's. She thought after some time, Holly would open up and give her some insight about her life. Instead, the cold shoulder was literally under her cheek.

"No." Holly's answer was quiet, but firm. Tracey continued her ministrations, hoping to clear the air of the tension now hanging over them. She could feel Holly withdrawing. Her limbs began to move, first checking the clock on the nightstand. Tracey waited for the dreaded work excuse that usually followed an awkward moment.

"Don't." Tracey spoke before Holly. She leaned up on an elbow. "If you say you have to go into the hospital, we might as well call it quits right now."

"What?" Holly's brown eyes widened in shock.

"You have to give me a chance Holly. Every time, I ask you something too personal or that makes you uncomfortable, you close up." Tracey brushed her lips over Holly's. "Don't shut me out. Please, I want to know you." Tracey placed her hand flat against Holly's sternum. "About you, all of it. I know there are somethings that are not easy or pretty."

"You don't know the half of it." Holly tried to roll away.

"You're right." Tracey let her escape from their closeness. "The issue is that I want to know about it. I won't judge you or your family."

Holly threw her legs over the side of the bed. Running her hand through the bedridden locks, she stared out the window across the harbor, a nervous gesture Tracey was quickly picking up on. Like the dark gray clouds rolling over the harbor, she wondered if they would be able to weather the storm of Holly's family. "Don't be so sure about that Tracey." The doctor's voice was even as she spoke to the window. Tracey pulled a blanket around her to ward off the chill she felt since bringing up the topic.

"Talk to me Holly." Tracey leaned against Holly's back wishing she could take back the words that caused this sudden change. "I love you." Tracey kissed her neck as she felt her heart break. Whatever hell Holly's parents put her through still had a firm hold on her.

"I don't know what that means." Holly confessed. She had people say it to her through the years. Mel, Greg and Rollins had told her they loved her. Her parents told her the same thing. Love to her was a free pass to hurt. Love meant betrayal. Love was nothing but pain.

"It means that I care for you. I will be there for you, support you, believe in you. When times get rough, I want to be the one you count on."

"And what if I can't?"

"We can work on it. I... I just want to share things with you. My thoughts, my future and maybe one day, my life. I know this is all new and fast, but Holly, I want you in my life." Tracey wrapped her arms around Holly's waist. When Holly pressed her hands against Tracey's arms, she had a spark of hope that one day Holly could return her feelings.

"This is new to me." Holly leaned back into Tracey's warmth. "With Pam, there were no words. It was a selfish relationship. Eventually, we didn't care what the other was doing." Holly laughed a little. "I think I was relieved when I caught her in bed with the nurse. It was an easy way out of the relationship."

"Do you want out of this?" Tracey felt the sting of tears as her voice cracked slightly.

"No...no..." Holly turned bringing their lips together and pressing Tracey against the mattress. "I want you." Holly slid under the blanket, sliding her thigh between Tracey's legs. "All the time. That should be a crime." Tracey put her hands on the back of her neck. "Time Tracey, give me time."

Time, the word had a plethora of meanings. Yet there never was enough. It never was the right time. There was a bad time or a good time. Time could never be mended, a stitch in time. Holly asked for time and Tracey was giving her it. As hard as it was, Tracey continued to show up at her parents alone. She looked at her brothers' families and they were all willing to meet her family. In fact, the only girlfriends her brothers brought home were the women sitting around the table. Had she wanted anyone else to meet her family? Not in a long time. She had friends her

family had met. Piper practically spent the summers over the Campbell house playing basketball in the driveway. Tommy still teased Chris about the crush he had on Vonnie.

"What's wrong Trace?" Frank asked as he passed the bowl of mashed potatoes. His eyes never met his daughter's. It was a trait the Campbell parents had, eyes in the back of their head.

"Nothing." Tracey moved her fork through her peas, separating them into small contingents. Like a General lining up his troops, she lined up her vegetables on her fork.

"When is your season over?" Ellen asked sensing her daughter's mood had nothing to do with anyone at the table.

"We have districts next week."

"Good, I can take the kids to watch the game." David, her oldest brother said as he grabbed a roll from the basket in front of her.

"I wouldn't advise it. We are only playing in the districts because our record."

"Tracey, your team is really good. Don't let some bus accident four weeks ago get in the way of your achievements." Frank piped up.

"It was seven weeks ago." She continued, "Almost two months." That's when she met Holly. She slept with Holly two weeks ago. She was at the cross roads of time again. She was beginning to hate the word.

"Hey, are you still seeing the doctor?" Tommy asked.

"What is this? The Spanish Inquisition?" Tracey set her fork down and stared at the faces of her family.

"Pumpkin, we are just concerned. You hardly say anything and you're playing with your food like the twins." Frank reached a hand across the table and placed it on her arm. "If something is bothering you, we'd rather you tell us than ask a hundred questions. You've closed up."

"Don't get us wrong sis, we know when to leave you alone. The last couple weeks, you just seem sad." Tommy nudged her side.

"My team is probably going to get crushed in the district game." Tracey blew out a breath. "It's hard to lead them into the game knowing that the opponent has a better skill set and experience." She knew the girls were going to be disappointed by the second half of their season. Her seniors, Zoey Pope and Michelle Stanley sat on the sideline cheering the underclassmen on. Yet there was no way the team she put on the court could compete against the Largo Bearcats. "It's a tough way to end the season."

"And the doctor?" Tommy probed.

"Yes, I am still seeing Holly. I'd like for her to meet everyone but she has to work a lot." Frank coughed and it sounded as if he stifled a grunt. Tracey tried to catch his eye but he avoided looking at her.

"Well, I am sure she is a busy woman." Ellen folded her napkin and shifted in her chair next to Frank. This was the statement her mother had made for the past four weeks. There was a mix of verbal and non verbal agreements around the table. Tracey looked at the faces, they avoided looking at her. She knew where her heart was. Holly meant a lot to her and it was obvious from the reaction of her family members they were concerned with her relationship with Holly. She knew that if Holly were a man each of her brothers would find a way to confront the doctor by now. David cleared his throat and looked towards his son, Luke.

"We would like to go to the game. Do you have a problem with that?"

"No...I'd love for you and Luke to be there, just don't expect a win."

"Or a visit from the doctor soon." Chris added. The entire table fell silent. Tracey's mouth dropped open slightly.

"You know honey." Chris's wife Trish began. "I remember a time when you wanted nothing to do with my family." The slight raven haired woman spoon fed the two toddlers in the high chairs next to her.

"That's because..." Chris stopped mid sentence. "Sometimes, I forget what I great family I have. We have an advantage. We were raised in a family that loved us. We didn't have the hardships other families go through." He looked at his wife, then to his sister. "Tracey, sometimes, you need to show someone what it's like to have a loving family. There are people out there that only associate pain with the word family. If she cares about you, she will come around."

"I hope so Chris. I really do." Tracey answered with her head bowed. She didn't care what her family thought. Holly had a tough life and she wasn't going to open it to criticism.

"Give her time Tracey. If she's smart, she'll know what a good catch you are." Trish smiled as she shoveled food into the twin's mouths.

The dreaded word *time* held in the air for a moment. Tracey didn't want to agree. She wanted Holly at the dinner table as her significant other, an equal to her sister-in-laws.

"Thank you." Tracey let Trish know she appreciated the shared wisdom. There was still a doubt in her mind whether or not Holly cared for her. She had spoken words of love, yet Holly didn't know what to make of them. Chris was right. He knew Trish's family life was screwed up when he met her. It took a long time for Trish to go out with him. It was a longer road for her to agree to marry him.

"Okay, what's next?" Holly bounced on her heels, looking at the white board suspended behind the admin desk.

"Look at that!" Rollins exclaimed. The nurse stood at the admission desk staring at Holly. Next to her, Mel and John wore bright smiles. Holly grinned as she walked behind the counter and placed the file she was working on in the bin.

"What's wrong?" Holly asked as she checked the board for any cases she missed.

"I think that is a genuine smile on her face. What ever could have caused that?" Rollins continued.

"Oh I think it's about five eight with dark hair and"

"A really great body." John finished. The dark haired man's face turned red.

"Back off Johnny." Holly lifted a warning finger towards the medic as she held back her smile. "Does it show?"

"You're radiating honey." Mel said as she stepped behind the desk to give her friend a hug. "The crappy part about it is I never get to see you." For the first time, she understood why she never saw her friends when they started new relationships. Mel gave her a hug. "Come on, let's grab some lunch."

"Nurse Rac...Rollins page me if you need me." Holly watched the glare cross the nurse's face as she walked quickly away.

"Oh, you're in for it when you get back." Mel looked over her shoulder as she fell into step with Holly. "Want to venture to the cafeteria?"

"Living dangerously now." Holly teased as she hit the stairwell.

"You should talk taking the steps so Rollins won't catch you." Mel groaned as she followed behind the doctor.

"I'll get it later for that Ratchet comment." Holly laughed as she pulled her frame up the hand rail along the stairs. "She started it. She teased me first." Holly explained as she made her way to the cafeteria. Mel stood in line with Holly, sliding their trays along the aluminum rails. Holly grabbed a salad and half a club sandwich. Mel picked out a chicken salad plate and a soda. Holly paid for both of their meals.

"Seriously, you look really happy." Mel said as she took a seat across from the tall blonde doctor. "If Tracey does this for you, then I am more than happy for you."

"I never thought." Holly paused, hoping she wasn't cursing herself. "I'd be this happy."

"It shows. You were never like this with Pam or what's that chick's name? The other doctor."

"Gosh...umm...Gabby." Holly remembered the classmate she dated for a short period of time. "She was a nice girl."

"She was. You blew that one."

"No, I was waiting for Tracey. I know that now."

"You're really smitten." Mel held up her fork and pointed it at Holly. She saw the redness creep up Holly's neck to her cheeks.

"So what about you? Anyone new on the dating front?"

"Got some things in the works. If anything comes of it I'll let you know." Mel said. Just then Holly's pager went off.

"ER. I've got to go." Holly went to Mel's side and gave her a hug. "Let's try to do breakfast Sunday."

"It's Easter." Mel corrected her.

"Whatever.." Holly said as she walked away. She flew down the stairs to the bottom floor of the hospital. She knew two feet from the end the hand rail hand had an indentation where the maintenance crew dropped a beam. This was her domain, this was her home. She opened the stairwell door to the ER floor space. Rollins stood at the desk, her stiff back to the stairwell door. Next to her was a tall young woman leaning on a cane. Holly filled the space next to the head nurse. Without a glance, Rollins said,

"You've got a visitor."

Holly surveyed the landscape of the ER looking for a familiar face. Maybe Tracey was going to surprise her. Instead her focus came back to the main desk. Standing at the heart of the ER was Michelle Stanley, hands on hips waiting impatiently for someone. Holly realized the teen was waiting for her. "Miss Stanley, how can I help you?" Holly asked as she stepped behind the desk.

"I need to see you." Michelle held her breath for a moment, the teen fidgeted and glanced around the hospital. She reached out a hand to touch Holly's sleeve.

"Okay, how can I help you?" Holly asked wondering why Tracey's student was standing in the ER asking for her. She picked up a file from the rack and flipped open the metal cover.

"I need you..." The teen dropped her voice to a whisper. "I need to be examined." The teen's face turned a bright red. Holly wondered if red was the color of the day.

"What is the medical issue you are having?" Holly raised her eyes to Rollins

who was gesturing towards the bay doors. Sirens filled the air just outside the building.

"Umm, I think I am in trouble." She stared at Holly who waited for additional information. "It's more of a female issue. Is there anyway you can see me?" The teen again looked around the ER.

"Michelle, I'm not that kind of doctor. I don't see private patients. I can recommend some doctors. but I wouldn't be able to help you." Holly quietly explained as she watched the lights of the bus flash against the cinder block walls of the Emergency bay. A few seconds later, the ambulance was visible through the swinging doors and windows. "I'm sorry." Holly said as she placed the stethoscope around her neck. She left Michelle standing at the desk as she raced to meet the entering gurney being pushed in by two technicians.

"Not as sorry as you're going to be." Michelle muttered under her breath as she turned to face Nurse Rollins.

The ample breasted woman stared at the teenager. "What did you say?" Rollins confronted the snout nosed teen who walked into the ER as if it was her own kingdom.

"Mind your own business nigger." Michelle said for Rollins ears only. Sandra had seen and heard it all. This girl was all about herself. Rollins looked the teen over and "Out before I call security!" Rollins ordered. The teen tipped her head back and laughed at the nurse.

"Don't worry, I'll be back." Michelle shoved the files on top of the desk to the floor, causing Musah to jump to his feet. "See what you made me do?" Michelle cried and immediately began to shed tears. Rollins looked towards the admissions clerk to see if he witnessed the actual events.

"Call security." Rollins repeated as she gestured to the camera that captured the entire incident. Michelle's tears quickly disappeared as she turned and left through the bay doors.

"Viper." Rollins said, still feeling the sting from Michelle's comment. She looked around the ER for Holly. She needed to tell the blonde how the girl acted when the doctor was absent. Rollins didn't have the time. She watched as Holly began to shout orders out in the room. They weren't given to anyone in particular, but this was how the ER worked. The doctors gave the orders and the nurses complied. If there was a less experienced doctor, the nurses would be vocal. With Dr. Graham, the staff followed orders as they were voiced. No one questioned Holly. She treated the nurses like a doctor. Their opinion counted. If a nurse had a concern with a patient's care, they were wise to voice it to Dr. Graham. They were equal in the eyes of Dr. Graham.

Three hours later, Rollins stood at the Admissions desk as a man with a salt and peppered colored buzz cut approached the desk. His quick glances around the ER conveyed the message of his search for a specific person. Rollins looked for the obvious bulges under the arm pit area or the covering of the waist band by a shirt or jacket. It was Wednesday, the slowest day according to stats of Emergency Rooms by some group who had the time to count the number of cases that smashed through the double doors.

"Good evening, welcome to Jessup Hospital. How can I help you?" Rollins stated her greeting, as if the man in front of her were a police officer or an inspector from the state.

"I'm looking for Doctor Holly Graham." The man stated as Holly ventured from behind curtain six where the young boy and mother still waiting on the CAT scan for his fainting episode during school.

"Do you have an appointment or can I relay a message to Dr. Graham?" Rollins had been in the ER for a long time. She had seen many patients family members show up in the department asking for the doctor who cared for the departed during the last moments of their lives.

"It's more of a personal matter." Frank Campbell smiled at the nurse behind the desk. "If you see Dr. Graham please tell her that Frank Campbell stopped by to have a moment of her time." He nodded politely and began to retreat to the parking garage.

"Mr. Campbell!" Holly shouted her heart beating a staccato rhythm. Her main concern was Tracey's well being. She knew the team had a game tonight and there was ice on the highways. "Tracey.. Tracey, is she okay?" Holly was breathless from the sprint she ran to catch up with the former military commander. His shirt crisply ironed and his slacks creased down the length. Even if he was out of the service, he dressed as if he was still in uniform.

"Okay?" His quiet voice was clipped. Holly stood in front of him, feeling as if she were undressed. The maroon scrubs she wore were wrinkled and stained. Her white lab coat had a coffee stain on the lapel. She hadn't planned on having visitors but today seemed to be the day for people to come out of the woodwork. The night was still young and held promise of more fluids permeating her clothes. She could quickly dash into the locker room and grab a fresh set of clothes. "I would say that depends on your definition of okay." His voice deepened like Scott Glenn's, the actor. Into the cadence which you wanted to trust but knew it may not be the best idea. "You see, my daughter seems to care for you a great deal yet, you don't give a shit about her feelings."

"Sir, I ..." Holly looked around to see if they were having a private or public conversation. "I care for your daughter."

"So then tell me Dr. Graham why do I see tears in her eyes? Why does she have to make excuses for your absence or your lack of interest in her family?"

"Can we go get a cup of coffee?" Holly suddenly felt like the teenager in her first college lecture, people staring at the young nerdy kid with out of date clothing and glasses thick as coke bottles. She went from one emotion to another. The thought of Tracey being hurt sent a surge of panic through her veins. When Frank confronted her about Tracey, she wasn't sure what to say or do. She had never had her girlfriend's family seek her out and confront her as to why she didn't want to meet them. This was the Campbells, Holly knew she was in for a whole different ballgame. One of their first conversations was about how important Tracey's family was to her.

"I think that is the wisest thing you have said so far." Frank nodded as he turned to the stairwell leading to the cafeteria. "Come on Doctor."

Holly's feet felt frozen to the floor. She had never felt the butterflies in her stomach as she did at this moment. She had held people's hearts in her hand and never felt such a fear. She followed a step behind the former naval officer. She knew Tracey's father retired after a spotless career in the military. His name was Frank. Her mother was Ellen and she had brothers, Tommy and there were a couple more. She just couldn't remember their names. She stole a quick glance at Rollins who was as gape mouthed as she felt. When the nurse's hand gestured in a shooining motion, Holly knew she had to follow after the man. Her heart was pounding as she reached the second landing. She caught her breath. Frank Campbell breezed into the cafeteria, heading to the coffee urn. The hot liquid steamed in a small cloud above his hands.

"How do you take your coffee Dr. Graham?"

"Black. Please call me Holly."

"Are you sure? This is your place of work and I wouldn't want to diminish your rank in front of your troops."

"These are my co-workers. I wouldn't act differently in front of them." Holly said as she accepted the cup of coffee.

"Are you sure?" Frank raised an eyebrow. "Sometimes when you allow your troops to know your weakness, you fail as a leader."

"Mr. Campbell, I assure you that I know my job. My staff respects me and trusts my judgment. As I am sure your staff trusted your judgment." Holly held her coffee and gestured towards the empty table by the window.

"Don't think I'm going to be easy on you Dr. Graham." Frank said as he sat in the chair across from Holly.

"Holly." She tried to get the stubborn man to call her by name.

"Dr. Graham." Frank continued.

"Why are you..." Holly didn't want to get in an argument with Tracey's father the first time she spoke to him. "Making this difficult? Please call me Holly."

"What type of father do you think I would be if I let you slide right in here and win me over with your title? With your money?"

"I never said anything about money."

"Yet, you get defensive about money." Frank countered. "If I know my kid, and I think I know her better than you, she doesn't care about the material stuff." Frank turned his coffee cup between his cupped hands. "What she does care about is her family, her students, and her friends. I will make the assumption that you are more than friends."

Holly felt the sip of coffee burn the back of her throat. She tried not to give any tell tale signs of her nervousness. Frank had come to the hospital to speak to her. Tracey didn't know anything about her father's actions. Otherwise, she probably would have warned Holly during the phone conversation they had earlier. There was sadness in the teacher's voice, but Holly dismissed it as disappointment for the season as the district game was tonight. If the team lost, their season would be over.

"My question for you Dr. Graham is whether or not you care for Tracey?" Frank leaned back in his chair, his arms open in a non-threatening manner. "Because you're hurting her without even knowing it."

"I care for her sir." Holly mirrored his position and studied him. "My intentions are not to hurt her."

"Well you are." Frank gave her no room for excuses. "As I see it. She's hurt when she looks around and sees her brothers with their families and she is alone. She's dated a few people, but I've never seen her look like she's missing something in her life."

"I didn't know." Holly's defenses were raised every time Tracey wanted to talk about family. She closed off when Tracey touched areas she wasn't comfortable with. She had asked for time. Maybe Tracey should have asked Holly to understand just how important her family was.

"What are your intentions towards my daughter?" Frank asked. From the startled look he received from Holly, he continued on. "Tracey seems like she wants to spend time with you. I hope you aren't messing with her."

"I enjoy being in her company." The smile that lit up Holly's face was contagious. "She's amazing. I'm in awe of what she does sometimes. Her patience with the students. Did you know she helped out at Carl's house after the accident?"

"Yes, I helped her clear the snow out of his driveway."

"I want to spend more time with her and see where the relationship goes."

"I have a request of you. If this thing between you and my daughter continues, don't come between Tracey and her family. We are a tough bunch of swabs and we do not take kindly to anyone treading on our decks."

"I know you are a navy family but what does that mean?" Holly was totally confused by his last statement. Her head cocked to the side as she watched his mouth form into a tight line.

"You hurt her, and we'll hurt you." Frank placed his hands on the table top and stood to his full height. "This conversation is between us." Frank turned on his heel and briskly walked out of the cafeteria. Holly didn't realize she had stopped breathing until he disappeared. There was no doubt Tracey's family loved her. They were looking out for her, protecting her. Holly let out a small whistle, now she knew not to piss off Tracey's father or her family. She let her shoulders fall and ran her hands through her hair. Sitting in the middle of the hospital cafeteria, Frank Campbell had warned her not to hurt his daughter. Maybe she should end it now. The pain that surged through her body just at the thought was excruciating. She let Tracey in her heart. She knew she cared deeply for the teacher. Tracey confessed her love on Valentine's Day weekend. She didn't know how to respond. Tracey deserved so much more than what Holly could give her.

"You feeling sorry for yourself?" Rollins voice brought her out of the haze she was dwelling in. "That man's a good soul. Lookin' out for his kin. Just like I'm looking out for you." Rollins sat in the seat Frank had vacated.

"I don't have a reference for anything like this." Holly was a bit dumbfounded. She never imagined meeting Tracey's father under these circumstances. She knew she would eventually have to meet them, but not like this.

"The man loves his daughter. He wants to keep her safe and happy." Rollins smiled at the doctor. "Not all families are like what we see here. Or like what you've been through Holly. Some genuinely love one another unconditionally."

"Unconditionally?"

"Yes, I like to think Leon and I have that. Four kids and twenty-eight years of marriage you would hope we have unconditional love." Rollins reached a hand across the table and covered Holly's. "If you have a chance at that Holly, don't let it slip away. Let her in. Talk to her. Tell her about your fears. Tell her about your family."

"She asked me and I closed up Sandra. I felt sick. I don't want her to think less of me. Once she finds out, she might."

"She won't. I've seen the way she looks at you. She will love you more because of it."

"But how will I know?"

"You have to learn to trust her. You have to try first. Don't let her go." Sandra squeezed her fingers. Holly squeezed her hand back.

"I'll try." Holly looked up at the over head lights. "I have to."

"Easter is Sunday. Maybe it's time to meet the family."

"I think you're right." Holly swallowed the lump in her throat. She was going to have to tell Tracey about her parents. She felt the tears rising just as they had done twenty years ago when

she had nothing left. She didn't want to be alone anymore. She wanted Tracey to be in her life. In order to do that, she was going to have to be in Tracey's also.

"I'm going back down. I expect you to be there in a few minutes. Take your time if you have to. Maybe make a call." Rollins winked at her and left her to her musing her own.

"Thank you Sandra." Holly pulled out her cell phone and dialed Tracey's number. She looked at the clock. If Frank came to the hospital after the game, she knew Tracey would be at the gym still.

"Hi! I didn't think I'd talk to you again tonight. Guess what?"

"Hello...what?"

"We won!"

"That's great. I can't believe it. Congratulations!"

"We play again on Saturday." Tracey's voice dropped a little bit.

"Saturday? Aren't we having people over to watch the NCAA games?"

"I can call everyone and cancel."

"No, I will handle it. You'll be there after the game right?"

"Holly, are you sure? I know it's not..."

"It's fine. I'm glad you won. You can tell me about the game when I see you..." Holly placed her hand against her cheek. They spent nights at each other's houses but they weren't supposed to see each other until Saturday.

"Are you okay?" Tracey asked. "Did something happen?"

"No..no I just wanted to hear your voice." Holly smiled into the phone. Hearing Tracey's voice was like a warm blanket around Holly's soul. "I'll see you Saturday."

"No, Holly, I'll be at your house when you get home. Bye." Tracey hung up the phone and Holly sat in the middle of the cafeteria grinning like a fool.

"Don't blow this." Holly said aloud as she got to her feet.

~

Chapter 11

The doorbell rang twice. Holly moved from the kitchen to the front entrance hall. She stopped at the sideboard to check her hair in the mirror. Knowing what a huge basketball fan Tracey was, Holly suggested they have friends over to watch the Women's NCAA basketball tournament. There were multiple games on, but the Maryland game would be the preferred one to watch. Holly wore a red turtleneck, a gray University of Maryland sweatshirt, pair of jeans and a pair of black Doc Martin boots. The bell rang again and voices from the front porch questioned if they were at the right house. Pulling the curtain back from the sidelights Holly saw the stern face of Office Piper and Maxine Kendall. Tracey's friends were the first to show up and Tracey wasn't there to greet them.

"Come on Doc, I'm cold." Vonnie called into the house when she saw the curtain move.

"Sorry ladies." Holly said as she opened the door. "Let me take your coats."

Piper pulled off her leather bomber jacket and handed it to Holly. Taking in the interior of Holly's house, Piper turned around taking in the décor. "This is really nice. Did you buy it this way?"

"I wish. I did a lot of the work myself. Room by room, I redid it one at a time. The place was a mess when I bought it." Holly ran her hand along the banister remembering all the sweat, aches and splinters she went through.

"Is this one of the houses the city was selling for a dollar?" Maxie asked as she set the twelve pack of beer on the floor as she shed her jacket. The city of Baltimore had adopted a program similar to Washington DC. Dilapidated homes were sold to the public for as little as a dollar. The buyer agreed to fix up the dwelling and live in the residence for at least four years. Holly's home was once a flop house for drug addicts, hookers, and vagabonds. It took her a year before she could reside in the house but the investment was worth it.

"Same program but it was more than a dollar. The deal is you have to live in the house for at least four years. I've been here six." Holly took Maxie's offered jacket and went to the hall closet to hang them. "Come on in, make yourselves at home. Tracey had a game so she'll be here as soon as she can. There's food in the kitchen and the big screen..."

"Wow!" Piper's voice filled the air. "This is a nice kitchen."

"Like that. It was a great deal." Holly walked into the kitchen where Maxie was running her hand along the granite counter top. Piper was staring at the gas top range.

The women were both smiling. "What?" Holly asked.

"Tracey has got to love this kitchen." Vonnie said knowing her friend's love of cooking. "Has she cooked for you yet?"

"She's promised me but she hasn't yet. I'm keeping her to it." Holly laughed as she grabbed a piece of celery from the veggie tray. Maxie looked a little uncomfortable. She knew the bank VP

still had feelings for Tracey. As an act of good faith, Holly was going to make an effort to be polite to her.

"So who have you invited to this shindig?" Piper asked as she popped a piece of cheese in her mouth.

"Mel, she's an EMT for the county. I think you may have met her at the hospital." Holly watched with interest as the cop nodded and stood in the kitchen with her hands on her hips. "Greg and Mark may stop by. I work with Greg and Mark is his partner. They are going to benefit dinner."

"Not much of a crowd on your side." Maxie commented as she wandered into the living room. The comment hurt. Holly didn't let it show, but she knew she had limited amounts of friends and no family.

"Don't mind Max." Piper commented as she turned to see Mel on the back porch. "She hates everyone. Looks like you have a new arrival." Piper opened the door and grabbed one of the bags falling out of Mel's hands. "Got it?"

Mel did a quick double take. The cop from the hospital was in Holly's kitchen. "Number 3."

"What?" Piper looked at her questioning.

"It's Tourettes Syndrome." Holly covered as Mel's face turned completely red. "She's only out on a weekend pass." Holly grabbed the other bag out of Mel's hand. Mel stomped her feet on the mat.

"Mel, this is Yvonne Piper. Piper, Mel Watkins." Holly nodded towards the auburn haired woman just as the front door bell rang. She knew Tracey would come in through the backdoor and never ring the bell.

Tonight, she wanted to show Tracey that she was open to being social, meeting her friends, entertaining them while she was at her game. Tomorrow was Easter. To add to her new found optimism, she was going to attend the Easter gathering at the Campbell house. The other item on her agenda was to open up to Tracey regarding her parents and what she had gone through as a teenager. If they were going to have any kind of future, she needed to tell Tracey about her family and to meet the Campbells.

Holly checked the window next to the door. There were two women standing shivering at the door. "Hello." Holly said as she opened the door. "Come in." Greetings were exchanged.

"Lori Williams." The smaller short hair girl with the beer under her arm introduced herself as she offered a hand in greeting. Holly recognized the name of the girl Tracey went to college with. "Wearing the bad hat is Brandi. She thinks that it helps her win at cards." The ugliest winter hat with oranges, purples and pinks sat on top of the heavy set taller woman, Holly noted as she shook Lori's hand.

"My grandmother knitted it." The woman protested. "Thank you for having us over." She took hold of Holly's hand as Lori dropped it. "We didn't know Tracey was dating someone let alone living with you."

"We're...." Holly almost said not living together, but in fact Tracey's belongings had begun to migrate to her house and closet. The idea had been in the back of her mind for weeks, but she was afraid it was too soon to take such a step. "Tracey had a game, so she is not here yet. There are a few people in the living room." Holly took their coats. "It's great to finally meet Tracey's friends."

In the great room, Holly introduced Mel to Tracey's friends. Immediately, Maxie slid close to the EMT and began to make conversation. Holly stood to the side, watching as every cell in her body wanted to scream beware to Mel, but didn't. She'd let Mel make her own choice.

"So you're friends with the doctor? How do you know each other?" Maxie took a sip from her beer. As soon as she saw the hazel eyed woman standing near the table emptying bags she wanted to take a shot at hooking up.

"We work together at the hospital. I actually work for the county. My runs are usually in and out of her ER."

"She owns the ER."

"Not technically but she runs it. She's the best doctor they have." Mel wondered what was going on between Holly and Maxie. She didn't see them interact a whole lot, but the tension was definitely there. Instead, Holly seemed to keep a distance from Maxie. Holly interacted with the other guests without issue. She was a great hostess, replacing empty drinks, gathering plates, making sure everyone was set. The television was tuned to the NCAA Women's tournament games. The highlight of the evening was going to be the Maryland Terrapins verse the Duke Blue Devils. The rivalry was on going through out the years and in the ACC. Atlantic Coast Conference.

Holly walked into the kitchen to find Piper leaning against the counter drinking a beer. Cheers from the living room gave testament to a close game.

"You know Tracey is the best person I know." Piper said as she looked at Holly. "I hope you realize that." Holly knew the cop was trying to gage where Holly stood with her friend.

"I do. I'm very lucky to find her." Holly answered trying not to look at Vonnie who seemed to be studying her every move. Just as Holly was going question her, Piper's eyes darted to the door and softened as Mel walked in.

"You're a cop that walked by us a couple weeks ago." Mel said to Piper. "I work as EMT stationed on the Southeast side. I usually run the traumas to University."

"Wow Pipe, do you know someone everywhere?" Maxie said as she followed Mel into the kitchen. It seemed like Maxie had her sights set on Mel. "Have you heard from Tracey?" Maxie asked.

"Earlier. Anyone need a beer or beverage?" Maxie threw her hand in the air. Holly found the same brand of beer Maxie had in her hand and handed her a new bottle. Piper coughed and pulled a pack of cigarettes from her pocket. She held up the pack and pointed to the back porch. "There is a can to right." Holly let her know as she nodded and headed out the back door. Mel eyes watched the tall figure walk outside. Maxie stood waiting for Mel's next move. Holly saw Mel's eyes roll in annoyance. She was over Maxie's advances. She gestured to the small half bathroom off the kitchen. Holly hid her amusement, knowing Mel was avoiding Maxie. Maxie didn't know what to do for a moment, then turned around and went back into the living room.

Holly looked at the clock on the microwave. Tracey should be arriving soon. She added more veggies to the platter as Mel exited the bathroom.

"Please tell me it's safe."

"The coast is clear. Is she coming on strong?"

"Like a cat in heat. Man, I don't want to cause a problem but that woman needs to back off." Mel said loud enough for Piper to hear as she came back inside. Mel's face flushed beet red. Holly thought it was cute.

"Ladies." Piper said as she passed them on her way to the living room. Mel held her tongue until the blonde disappeared. Mel let the breathe she was holding out and slapped Holly on the arm. "Holly, you didn't tell me she'd be here!"

"She's Tracey's friend. I wasn't sure if she'd be here." Holly saw Mel's frustration. "Is there something I should be aware of?" Holly hid her smile, knowing the EMT found the arrogant cop attractive.

"No...yes.." Mel turned around the looked towards the living room. "Is she dating anyone?"

Surprised by Mel's question, Holly thought about conversations she and Tracey had about Piper. There was no mention of a girlfriend. Piper did go to Denver to visit a friend before Christmas. "I don't think so but I can..." Holly stopped as she felt cold hands slip around her waist. She felt the familiar weight push up against her from behind. She smelled Tracey's perfume. Tracey put her chin on Holly's shoulder.

"What's cooking doc?" Tracey pressed her weight against Holly's backside.

"Hey...I didn't hear you come in."

"I snuck in the front door." Holly turned to face Tracey and gave her what was supposed to be a quick kiss on the lips. Instead, Tracey placed a hand on the back of her neck and pulled her deeper into a kiss. They broke apart breathless. They stared at each other for a few seconds.

"Don't mind me." Mel said impressed by the affection the women had for each other.

"Sorry..." Tracey recognized the EMT from the photos in Holly's office and house. "You're Mel, right?" The EMT nodded. "I've seen your photo before. In fact, the night of the accident, I thought you guys were a couple."

"That's funny!" Mel laughed and slapped Holly again.

"Stop it!" Holly rubbed her arm. Mel's love taps were quickly becoming bruises. "Well, what was result?" Holly asked.

"We lost in overtime. It was a good season but it's over. Thank God!" Tracey kissed Holly on the lips again. Tracey smiled at Mel as the blush crept up her neck. "I have a hard time keeping my hands off her."

Holly put an arm around Tracey's waist and fed her a piece of cheese. "Mel has been asking about Piper." Tracey nodded as she looked towards the living room.

"Well Mel, she is very nice. Are there too many people here? I think I invited the entire softball team and some of the teachers and Carrie Ryder the coach from the team that just beat us tonight."

"Mark and Greg may stop by. I only invited Mel." Holly ate a carrot with ranch dip.

"We may have to spill outside or you need to get a bigger house." Tracey joked went to the fridge and pulled out a beer. "Any one need a drink? I'm going to mingle." She gave Holly's butt a pat as she went by.

"Holly, she's really.."

"Hot!" Holly said as she sucked the dip off her finger. "Back off there Mel." Holly joked. "She's mine."

"I can hear you." Tracey stuck her head back in the kitchen. "And you are correct."

"I would never guess that she is gay." Mel said leaning to look out to the other room. "I mean, it's not like you or I look gay. She is just really femme."

"What about you?" Mel leaned over the counter and looked at her friend. "Are you happy?"

"I am. It's so much more than I ever thought I would have with someone. Pam and I always had issues."

"True. It's good to see you happy. Come on, let's be social. Poor Tracey friends with a bunch of jock lesbians, I love it."

Holly followed Mel into the living room. Tracey was making conversation with Mel. Holly could see out of the corner of her eye that Tracey was watching her. She liked knowing that fact. She smiled and gave Tracey a casual look. They had not been together all week because of schedules. Brandi had on her goofy hat at the dining room table as a game of cards had broken out. She seemed to be enjoying herself as she raked the pile of money towards her. Outside, Piper was standing on the front porch smoking. Holly was certain that Mel would be disappointed with that factor. Holly sat down on the couch and Tracey sat down next to her. Tracey put her hand on Holly's knee.

"You do realize where you are sitting?" Tracey whispered in her ear.

"On my couch." Holly whispered back. She could feel Tracey's breast pressed up against her arm. "Oh you are bad." Holly said as she remembered the last time Tracey had been over the house. They made love on the exact spot they were sitting. Holly felt herself getting moist as she thought about it.

"I'm going up to change clothes. Get into something more comfortable." Tracey let her hand run the length of Holly's thigh.

"You're really bad. We have guests." Holly whispered. Tracey gave her a look and headed up stairs. Holly smiled and waited a few minutes then followed her upstairs to the bedroom. Tracey stood in the walk in closet, her shirt discarded on the floor. She folded the slacks she had had on over a hanger. She turned to face Holly who had just closed the door behind her. The sight of Tracey standing in the middle of her closet dressed in her bra and underwear sent Holly's blood pumping. She moved towards the teacher. Tracey placed her hands on Holly's waist.

Holly pushed her up against the wall as she brought a hard passionate kiss to her lips. She felt Tracey's urgency as their kiss increased. Tracey's hand quickly undid the button of her jeans. Her hand slid down the front of Holly's pants and her fingers probed the wet throbbing hood. Holly knew she would orgasm quickly as Tracey's touch sent her over the edge. She muffled a scream in Tracey's shoulder as Tracey's fingers slipped into her. Holly moved her hips against Tracey's hand and grew more excited. She needed to touch Tracey. She spun Tracey around so that her front was up against Tracey's back. Tracey's hands were pressed on the closet wall, her body between Holly and the wall. Holly ran her hand down Tracey's body along the curve of her breast, to the flat plain of her belly to the waistband of her underwear. She let her fingers tease Tracey, running her digits across the material covering Tracey's engorged muscles. She felt Tracey shudder as her fingers touched her clit. With her other hand she fondled and tweaked Tracey's breasts as they rocked together. Holly kissed her neck, as her hand slipped into the front of Tracey's panties. Tracey moaned loudly as Holly's fingers dipped and explored the contours of her center.

"You feel so good." Holly moaned into Tracey's ear as she nipped the lobe. She heard Tracey panting as Holly's hand worked against her center, her breath shallower and her moans louder.

Holly knew she was close to orgasm. Tracey's body went ramrod straight as she reached her peak. Once her body came under control, Tracey spun around and kissed Holly softly on the lips.

"You have some effect on my brain." Tracey wrapped her arms around Holly's waist.

"You make me want to do things like...." Holly kissed her neck not finishing her sentence. Holly was still aroused.

"Like what?" Tracey pulled her closer to her just as there was a knock on the door.

"Hey, I don't mean to interrupt." Maxie called through the door. "But you got guests coming in."

Holly stepped away from Tracey and put a finger to her lips. Maxie knew she was interrupting and Holly prayed she wouldn't lose her cool. She stared at Tracey for a second as she backed out of the closet and to the bedroom door. The flushed look on her face let Holly know she wasn't the only one disappointed. She winked at Tracey. "Can we finish this later?"

"Without a doubt." Tracey smiled as she hid from view in the closet. Holly opened her bedroom door to see Maxie standing in the hallway, her hands posed on her hips trying to look past Holly into the bedroom.

"You're not interrupting, Maxie." She kissed Maxie on the forehead as she closed the door and brushed past her. "That will give her something to think about," Holly said as she headed downstairs.

In a matter of twenty minutes, the house went from half a dozen people to two dozen. Holly had seen some of these people before, but she wasn't sure where. Greg and Mark stopped in. Mark, an accountant for the school system, seemed to be quite at ease with the number of educators in the room. Greg and Mel stood in the front room talking. Greg had always wanted Holly to go out with Mel.

Holly tried to play hostess but when she would go to make introductions, she was usually scoffed off because everyone knew each other. Later, she was once again leaning on the kitchen counter next to Piper. Through the course of the evening, Holly noticed Piper keeping an eye on her. "You playing cop tonight or should I be worried about a crush?" Holly asked her as she handed her a beer.

"Cop," Piper smiled as she took a sip of beer. "Sorry, she's my friend." Piper said as Tracey could be heard laughing in the other room.

"Good. It means you care about her. You're watching out for her." Holly smiled as Tracey laugh echoed through the house. "I want her to move in. It's fast. I know that. I just want to be with her."

"I'm all for it." Piper smiled. "You guys are really good together."

"Are you messing with me? Playing good cop?"

Piper put her beer down and turned to Holly. "No, I think that if you and Tracey don't stay together, there is really no hope for any of us. I've known Tracey for a long time and she is one of my best friends. I've seen her date before. I've seen her hurt. I have never her seen her beaming. Doc, you make her beam." Tracey walked towards them with a big smile. "She makes you beam." Piper whispered in Holly's ear as Tracey wrapped her arm around Holly's waist.

"What are you guys doing over here looking all serious and stuff?"

"Not sure about the serious part, but there is a bunch of stuff." Holly said as she pulled Tracey closer.

"When are all these people leaving so I can take advantage of you?" Tracey winked at Piper and touched Holly's nose with her finger.

"You better stop or our friends will get a sight right here in the kitchen." Holly countered causing Piper to spit out her beer and laugh.

"That would turn some heads." Piper chimed in.

"Pipe, Holly said that her EMT friend, Mel was checking you out earlier." Tracey gave her a nod. "Not bad looking, I'd say yes." Tracey continued to say as she squeezed Holly's butt.

"You better be joking missy." Piper said to her. "You've landed a doctor." Piper walked off into the next room.

"Do you want to come over my parents house tomorrow? I was invited for dinner and they asked if you were coming?" Holly felt the apprehension in her body language.

"That would be great. I think I should meet them." Holly knew after Frank's visit, she needed to make an effort to meet her family. Tracey loved them and they were a big part of her life. Holly did not have family support and was happy Tracey did. "I'll feel nervous and nauseous, but I'm sure I'll survive."

"There are a lot of people here." Tracey turned and observed the guests. "You have been in the kitchen most of the night."

"I'm comfortable in the kitchen." Holly pulled Tracey closer. "I think we should think about getting a bigger house." Holly watched the color wash from Tracey's face. She immediately regretted saying it. "Someday... we should think about that." Holly said as she walked into the living room to speak with Greg, wondering if she had made a big mistake.

The last of the guests, Maxie and Jessie left around 2:30 am. Holly was tired. She felt as if she was standing on eggshells with Tracey after the house comment. She had planned on asking

Tracey to move in tonight once they were in bed. She wiped off the counter and pulled another full garbage bag out the backdoor. Tracey came in from the living room with more empty bottles.

"I keep finding empties." Tracey said as she put the bottle in the recycle container.

"More people showed than I thought would." Holly opened the back door and set the garbage bag outside. "Are you leaving?" She asked as she saw Tracey's coat in her hand.

"I don't know. I'm not sure." Tracey said as she sat in one of the kitchen chairs.

"What is going on? Was it the house comment? I don't know why I said it. You made the comment earlier about needed a bigger house. I just..." Holly sat at the table. "I said what I said."

"You got weird after that." Tracey said. "I'm not sure if you want me here. Or you think I want us to buy a bigger house. I don't want your money."

"I don't have money. I have debt, lots and lots of debt." Holly reached across the table and took Tracey hands in hers. Their fingers intertwined. "I got weird or quiet because you looked freaked out by the house thing." Holly closed her eyes. "I was joking, but I was serious too."

"Do you want me to stay?"

"I would love for you to stay. I want you to stay." Holly could feel the tears forming. She fought to hold them back.

"What's wrong?" Tracey could tell that Holly had reached another level of being upset.

"For so long, I was unhappy and lonely. It got to a point where all I ever did was work. I got some comfort from my job. You came into my life and I thought this is great. Tonight, I was planning on asking you to move in. I spoke to Piper earlier about it." Holly wiped away a falling tear. "I don't want you to think that the house thing tonight had anything to do with it." She wiped her eyes again. "I've wanted to ask, but I thought it was too soon. I just don't want to fuck this up." Holly pulled away and sat at one of the kitchen chairs. Putting her chin down, she rubbed her eyes with her hands. "You came into my life and I'm just waiting for something to happen and fuck it up." Holly wiped away a falling tear. "I don't care about a bigger house. I just don't want to mess things up with you." She wiped her eyes again. "I'm scared."

Tracey walked over and kneeled in front of Holly. She took Holly's face between her hands.

"What are you scared of?" Tracey pierced her with her gray eyes. "Talk to me Holly." She rubbed the pads of her thumbs over Holly's jaw.

"That you'll leave." Holly said not proud of this moment in her life.

"I'm not going anywhere. I was lonely and tired of being with the wrong person. We are both worried about "time" and what other people think. I would have been skeptical if the moving truck pulled up the first week. I have friends and a family. I didn't have someone special. You are

my someone special. When I'm at the apartment, I want to be here." Tracey pierced her with her gray eyes. "I want to be home. I want to be here." She looked around the house. "This is home to me." Tracey leaned forward and kissed Holly. Loving and gentle was the best way Holly could describe the kiss. The fears she had disappeared.

"I feel like a fool." Holly said as she leaned her forehead on Tracey's. "I'm sure this is not the first time or the last time." She saw Tracey's concern. "I have some issues. I need to deal with."

"Who doesn't?" Tracey stood and reached out for Holly's hand. "Come on, let's go to bed."

"Let me lock the house and I'll be right up." Tracey nodded and headed upstairs.

Holly checked the locks on the front and back doors. She turned off the light in the spare room and left the night light on in the kitchen. She stopped at the bathroom and washed her face. She blew out the candle on the counter. She was going upstairs and into Tracey's arms. A small smile appeared on Holly's face. She never felt like she quite fit in. Finally, she felt happy and as if she belonged. She belonged with Tracey. Things were going her way. Tomorrow, she didn't know how she was going to interact with the Campbells but she knew she would make an effort for Tracey.

In the bedroom, Holly noticed the light that Tracey left on low for her. She sat on the bed and looked at her lover. She leaned over and kissed her.

"Hey." Tracey said as she had dozed off. "Are you okay?" She sat up and leaned against the pillows. Holly pulled back the covers and snuggled close. Tracey turned off the light and pulled Holly's head to rest on her chest. Tracey's fingers stroked Holly's hair.

"When you talk about your family, there is so much enjoyment and love in your voice. I don't understand that. When you asked me about my family, I don't know how to answer." Holly said as she listened to Tracey's heartbeat.

"I know. Do you want to tell me?" Their voices were barely whispers. "I never want to bring it up, because I'm not sure how you'll react."

"I don't really have a family. I have my mother, but I haven't talked to her in years. I've been on my own since I turned sixteen." Holly leaned up on an elbow to look at Tracey's face. "My sixteenth birthday was spent in a coffee shop hiding." Holly settled back against Tracey's chest. "It's funny the things you remember. You probably had a big birthday party for your sweet sixteen."

"I did, but I don't remember anything from it." Tracey commented as she touched Holly's cheek. "Were you hiding because you were going through an awkward stage?"

"I wasn't the best looking teenager. Lots of acne, big thick ugly glasses and I was tall and skinny."

"Normal teenage angst, there are lots of girls that go through that." Tracey tried to understand where Holly was going with the conversation. "I'd like you no matter what you looked like." Tracey leaned over and kissed her lightly. Holly gave a small laugh and returned to her spot against Tracey's chest.

"It wasn't a stage. It was a life style for me." Holly ran her tongue along her front teeth as if she still wore the braces that corrected her teeth. "That's not why I was hiding." She felt the sting of tears in the corners of her eyes. "I never thought we were the ideal family. My parents slept in separate bedrooms and hardly interacted with each other. There were no family vacations or outings. It always was me and Dad." Tracey's hand continued to soothe away the pain she heard in Holly's voice. "I was always smart. I just didn't understand how freaky smart I was. I went to a special school for the gifted. When I was fourteen, I would take the bus to the public high school where my dad taught and get a ride home from him." Holly felt Tracey's fingers reach for hers. They laced their fingers together.

"What happened? I know you said your father is dead." Tracey heard Holly's breathing hitch as she started to speak, then stopped.

"I'm not certain. The truth never really came out." Holly confided. "There were times, where he would have to tutor a student or two after school. Time after time, I waited for him. He had different students but there was this one girl, Louise Richmond." The name felt like a lead weight in the room. "She was always in his office. I didn't pay much attention to her. She was nice to me in front of him, but as soon as he left, she'd call me names like dyke and freak. One day, my dad was out of the office and she began to make fun of me and talk bad about my mom, telling me it was my fault that my parents didn't get a divorced. She knew things that I had never dared to speak about." Holly's voice grew quiet. "And she was mean. She was beautiful on the outside but mean and ugly on the inside. I didn't know people could be like that until I meet her."

"I know exactly what you mean. Did she hurt you?" Tracey asked. Holly shook her head.

"Not me, my dad." Holly stroked her thumb across Tracey's hand. "A student accused my dad of an inappropriate relationship. When that happened, my entire life changed."

"Jesus.." Tracey said as she pulled Holly closer.

"They never released the juvenile's name, but I was pretty sure it was Louise. The sad part is, I think they were in a relationship. My thirty-five year old father was having an affair with his underage student. He was charged with gross sexual imposition of a minor. He was arrested by the sheriff and booked. My dad lost his job and the house."

"Oh my god. Where was your mother?"

"Gone. As soon as the charges were filed, she got a quick divorce and left town. I heard she took a transfer with the bank she worked at and moved to Chicago." Holly remembered walking towards her house as media vans and news crews surrounded the neighborhood. They were like vultures, trying to interview the neighbors and former students. "I didn't know where to go, so I

hid in the coffee shop. I was left with nothing and no where to go. An attorney by the name of Jordan Norwood came into my life. She was pretty hot now that I think about it, and probably a lesbian."

"Did you have a crush on her?"

"Again, she was nice to me. I probably would have done anything she asked me to. When my dad killed himself before the trial could start..." Holly's voice was flat as she recalled the day Jordan Norwood told her about her father. "I became a ward of the state, because my mother was gone. Now that I think about it, Jordan was my first crush. She was a very bright and beautiful woman. She made sure that I was taken care of. I'm not sure how she came into the picture, I just remember her walking into the coffee shop and offering to help me."

"An attorney shows up out of the blue?"

"I think her partner worked at social services and somehow, the cause of a teenage girl became an important issue for her."

"She's the one who started the emancipation process?"

"Yes. She also got me enrolled and set up at college. I even think she had some say in me getting accepted into medical school. I haven't thought about her in a long time. We lost touch after awhile. It hurt too much to see her."

"Sounds to me like she had an important role in your life, she helped you during a time when you didn't know which way was up."

"She did." Holly felt the pressure in her chest begin to ease. The heaviness she always felt was fading away. "I should try to find her and thank her."

Holly let her finger tip run over Tracey's nipple. She watched as the bud hardened under her touch. "You're beautiful."

"You're looking at my boobs." Tracey chastised her and gave a slight tug to the blonde hair.

"Exactly." Holly said as she leaned over and kissed the hardened nipple through the material of Tracey's night shirt. "I love your body."

"Holly." Tracey wiggled a little bit under Holly's teasing lips and fingers.

"I know." She said as she leaned back her head resting on Tracey's shoulder. "Because he killed himself before the trial, I never knew if he was guilty. Always wondered what really happened."

This house was the closest she had to a home since she was fifteen. She didn't seem to notice her parents were never around, it was how it had always been. Her father Don stayed after school for meetings or to help his students. Her mother Rita worked as an investment manager at a bank. As

the only child, Holly grew up basically on her own. When she was tested for school, she was placed in a gifted program. Her maturity and intellect had her by passing years of schooling. On occasion, she would stop at the public high school where her father taught. Most of the time, he was still with a student or two. She came to realize that every time, she stopped at his class room, the same girl was there. A few years older than Holly, the pretty teen was always wearing plunging necklines and revealing skirts or shorts. Holly wondered to this day what the truth of relationship between her father and Louise was. By the time she was fifteen, she knew her parents never slept in the same room. Sometimes not even the same house. Rita would be gone for days and rarely checked on or cared about what Holly was doing.

When the local newspaper ran an article on her father's accusation there was no hiding it. Don Graham was arrested on charges of having a torrid affair with his seventeen year old student. Although the paper never mentioned the minor's name, Holly knew it was Louise. Within a matter of days, he was fired from his job and the charges against him grew to include statutory rape and gross sexual imposition of a minor. The district attorney was going after the teacher. Unable to handle the situation or unwilling to believe her husband, Rita Graham filed for divorce. She wanted nothing to do with Holly.

Holly's life did turn upside down. No longer the ignored daughter, she was the unwanted daughter. Her mother packed her things and never looked back. Holly was faced with dealing with her father arrest, the media attention and the fact he was involved with a girl two years older than she was.

For the first time in her life, she didn't know what to do. The court appointed defense attorney for her father must have voiced his concerns for the teenager to his social services colleagues. When attorney Jordan Norwood came into Holly's life, it was at a time she longer trusted adults and couldn't relate to teenagers. Jordan advised Holly of her rights and what options she had available. She chose the route of emancipation. Jordan had the proceeding fast tracked, not wanting to subject Holly to the foster care system. As a legal adult, she was able to enroll in university and continue with her studies. Jordan Norwood did save Holly. It was Jordan who told of her father's suicide ten days before his trial was to begin. Holly didn't bat an eye. She thanked the woman for the update and went to class.

Her years at Kent State were a miserable blur. She received a scholarship from one of the endowment funds. Her college fund was seized during her father's trial. She had nothing. She lived with a professor's family, serving as a live in nanny for the two small children they had. Oddly enough, Holly found she liked the kids and the couple she was working for. The family she worked for usually spent the holidays in Europe, which meant Holly was homeless during these times. She managed to crash at a classmate's place, but she was usually alone. Occasionally, she would be dating someone who would ask her over to celebrate. She never quite fit in. She didn't know how to interact with others. Of course the question about her family always came up.

Tomorrow at Tracey's family's, there were going to be questions, lots of them. Holly had prolonged the meeting with the Campbell family for months and from the way Tracey approached the subject of meeting the family, the natives were getting restless.

"What happened with the girl?"

"I don't know. After, the house was sold and I've never gone back there." Holly pondered her past. "I always wonder if he was innocent. Then I think, why would he kill himself if he was innocent?"

"I guess it's something you'll never know."

"I guess not. I'm sorry for laying all this on you."

"What about you're mom? Did she even care what happened to you?"

"She wanted nothing to do with me. I went to college. When I got into medical school I came here and bought this house. Funny thing is, she came into the ER a few years ago looking for me."

"Did you talk to her?"

"No, I had nothing to say."

"Holly, please try to talk to me. Inside there is so much hurt." Tracey placed her hand over Holly's heart. "I don't want you to hurt anymore." There was so much damage done by her parents that Tracey didn't know where to start.

"I don't know. It's really hard for me." She turned to face Tracey. "This is the reason I stayed away from your family. I've been scared to meet them. Come on, Tracey, how many times have they invited me over, six or seven? What happens, I pick up a shift." Holly nuzzled Tracey's breast with her nose. "You were smart about telling me last minute."

"Busted. I know you have been avoiding it. They really want to meet you." Tracey knew her parents were about to revolt if they didn't meet Holly soon. She wouldn't put it past Frank to grab a shotgun and demand to meet Holly. "What did you do for Christmas this year?" Tracey thought how lonely Holly must be.

"Went to Greg and Mark's and I worked." Holly saw the concern in Tracey's eyes. "It's okay. I've been on my own for almost fifteen years. I'm used to being on my own."

"What about Pam? Did you have a relationship with her family?"

"I barely had a relationship with Pam." Holly kissed Tracey lightly on the lips. "What Pam and I were complacent. She thought that I was a challenge so she tried to get me to go out with her. She is all about a challenge. When the challenge is gone, she finds a new one. That is why she put on the show Valentine's Day. A challenge to get me back, or try to date you," Holly started to laugh. "I thought I had issues."

"Come here." Tracey kissed Holly softly on the lips. She touched her gently on the face and ran her hand down her back. "We are going to be together for a long time. I promise you. If you do not want to meet my folks then it's okay."

"I do want to meet them. It's hard with memories and questions are asked and I have really no answers."

"Holly, they will love you. You don't have to answer any questions. I'm sure they won't pry. They are military born and breed. Do ask, Don't tell."

"You deserve so much more than I can give you."

"I'll take anything you can give me." Tracey pulled her closer and kissed her with all the love she felt. "I just want to be with you."

~

Chapter 12

Holly sat in her Honda CRV, her hands braced against the wheel of the six-year-old SUV. She sat at the stop sign two blocks away from Tracey's parents' house. She promised Tracey she'd be there at four o'clock. Slowly the clock on the dash approached three fifty five as Holly took a deep breath and checked for traffic. She continued towards the Campbell home. Around the corner came in view the home of a career military man, who with the help of his wife raised three boys and one amazing daughter. Holly shrugged at that thought. She had never been on friendly terms with anyone's family, including her own.

A therapist would have a field day with Holly. Especially now she was dating a teacher, her father's former career. Holly could no longer avoid meeting Tracey's family. If she wanted to continue to have a relationship with the teacher, she would have to subject herself to meeting the family. Tracey was close with her brothers. What were the names of Tracey's brothers? She knew the youngest was Tom. There was a Chris. The oldest was David. Her mother's name was Ellen. There was no way she'd forget Frank, Holly thought as she pulled in front of the Campbell residence. The house was modest and in an older development in Montgomery county. Tracey mentioned they had moved to the DC area so the kids could finish high school in one area and her father could finish his service to the Navy.

Holly pulled in front of the house. There were four cars in the driveway with a large RV that was parked on its own slab next to the garage. In the driveway, three boys and four girls played basketball. Holly cringed as the ball came off the backboard and hit the hood on a BMW.

"Hi." A little girl about six said as Holly walked up the drive with two of homemade apple pies.

"Hello." She answered back as she noticed she was the center of attention of the group. "Is your Aunt Tracey in the house?"

"Yep." One of the older boys answered. "Are you the doctor?" Holly laughed out loud.

"Yes, but call me Holly."

"Cool. I'm Luke." He pushed back his Raven's winter cap and took the plate from her hands.

"Wow you're tall. You're not as tall as my dad but you're going to tower over grandma." Luke gave a smile that revealed a flash of his aunt. "Come on in. We're waiting for you. Nothing big but you know proper manners and stuff."

"How old are you?" Holly asked.

"Fourteen next month, you interested?" Holly stopped in her tracks. "I'm joking. The family's waiting." Holly looked at the younger version of Tracey. "Grandma has been talking about you since January. She's very excited to meet you." Luke walked with through the garage and into the mudroom.

"Aunt Trace!" He yelled as he hit the door. "The doctor's here." He popped off his hat as his brownish blonde hair stood straight up from the static electricity. There was a shuffle of shoes as he kicked off his sneakers next to the dryer. A smaller woman with grayish hair came into the mudroom.

"Luke, where are your manner's?" Holly knew that it was Tracey's mother. They had the same color eyes and the shape of her face mirrored Tracey's.

"Hello. I'm Ellen Campbell. Welcome. I've heard a lot about you."

"Thank you for the invitation. I apologize for not coming over sooner. Sometimes work gets in the way."

"That's right Tracey says you work a lot. You're not working now are you?"

"No." Holly said with a smile. Inside, she was working on keeping her nerves in order. Ellen was a small woman with grayish brown hair. She was close to five four in height. "I brought some pies."

"You didn't have to do that." Ellen took her coat. "It was very nice of you."

"I think Luke took the plate in."

"That Luke he's my oldest grandson, David's son." Ellen looked in the hallway mirror. "Do I look like a grandmother to you?" She pushed her hair back.

"No, I would've never guessed." Holly felt on edge. Ellen did look old enough to be a grandmother. Holly had seen grandmothers as young as twenty-seven.

"Ms. Graham, I hope you're a good doctor because you're not a very good liar." Ellen teased as she waved her hand and laughed. "I have five grandchildren, Luke and Mora are David's. Chris has three, Chad, and the twins, Lisa and Lauren. Tom has the one, Patrick. Most of them are outside playing. There are some neighbor kids in that mix creating havoc outside. I'm hoping that Tracey has children. Do you like children?"

"Kids are great." Holly knew that Ellen could see right through her lie. The older woman gave her a nod. Holly felt her stomach turn into knots and her head began to spin. Kids, kids, grand children... last night they were in a fight about living together. No one had said anything about children. Did Tracey want children? Did she want children? Where was this day going to take her? Tracey appeared in the room in front of her.

"Hey, I didn't know you were here. " She said getting to her feet and greeted Holly with a hug. "Did you meet my mom?"

"Yes, and some of the kids. Luke is a charmer." Holly felt odd just hugging Tracey. Normally they would kiss but in front of family the rules were a bit different. She felt Tracey let her hand linger on the small of her back.

"Yes, he is. He learned it all from his aunt." Holly felt her face flush at Tracey's statement. "Come on, I want you to meet my brothers." Tracey led the way from the kitchen to the family room of the house. There was a hallway full of photographs. Holly stopped to admire them.

"This you?" She pointed to a photo of a younger Tracey with a football helmet on and playing in a group of boys.

"Yes," Tracey pointed to the picture. "This is Tommy and that is Chris with my cousins Bobby and Phil."

"There are so many." Holly stood back and took in the wall of family photos. The Campbell children had various similarities but she was able to tell them apart. Tommy and Chris had hair the same shade as Tracey's. David was the only one with black hair like their father.

"You know that I have never thought of it that way. There are many memories on this wall. I walk by it all the time without even a second thought."

"You have to have a first thought to have a second thought." The deep voice came from behind Tracey. Holly looked in the face of a very masculine version of Tracey.

"Tommy, this is Holly." Tracey said. Holly knew Tracey was only a year older than her brother, Tom.

"Hello." Holly said.

"Hello. So this is the mystery woman you keep dishing me for." Tom put his hand on his chin. The nod of approval came slowly. "Well, I can see why." Tracey punched him in the arm. "Nice to meet you. I heard Luke say you brought pies?"

"I did. I've heard a lot about you."

"I've heard more about you I bet." Tracey punched him again. "Dad and David are watching the game. Do you like hockey?"

"Not really." Holly answered truthfully.

"Thank God." Tom smiled. "I'm getting something to drink. Do you want anything?"

"No, thank you." Holly thought that if she started drinking at this point, there would be no stopping her. Tom went towards the kitchen.

"Are you okay?" Tracey asked her. Holly shook her head. "Come in here." Tracey motioned her to follow her into the bedroom. Holly let her composure slip once Tracey shut the door. Her hands covered her face and ran over her hair. She paced the floor.

"Deep breaths...breathe.... tell me what is going on?"

"I lied to your mother and said that she didn't look like a grandmother. Tracey I see women who are in their twenties who are grandmothers. She started with the grand kid thing and if you are going to have kids. Christ, I don't even know where we are going let alone kids." Holly sat down on the bed. She glanced around the room. "Is this your room?"

"Yes...Dr. Freak out." Tracey knelt in front of her. "You need to relax. There is nothing about this day that you can't handle. We should do it right now so that you relax." Tracey began to unbuckle her belt and pull her shirt from her waist band.

"Are you kidding? I can't. Not here." Holly squirmed away from Tracey until she caught the teasing in smoky gray eyes. Tracey was laughing at her. "I must really care about you. Right now I'm having a break down and you are joking about having sex in your parents house."

"Relax. I'm trying to make you comfortable."

"Home is where I would be comfortable." Holly said as she leaned down and kissed Tracey's lips. The soft kiss caused a desire to rise in Holly. "I better not do that again."

"We can later when we are home." Tracey took her hands and stood up. "Are you ready to meet the rest of the swabs?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Nope."

"Then the answer is yes!" Holly said with a fake salute. Tracey kissed her, taking her face between her hands and kissing her deeply. Holly's desire began to stir more. Tracey brought her closer and kissed her deeper. They broke apart and stared at each other.

"This is my family. They mean the world to me. You are very special to me and they know that. If you do not feel comfortable, we can leave. Are you okay with this?"

"Yes." Holly took her hand and kissed it. "Thank you." Tracey gathered her up in her arms. She held her for a couple of minutes.

"Ready, take a deep breath." Holly felt like one of her patients. She took a deep breath. "Exhale." Tracey coached her. "Let's go before they think we are doing something that we want to do." Tracey winked at her as she led her towards the door. As soon as they walked into the hallway there was very short very pregnant woman with a little girl holding her hand.

"Someone didn't nap very long." Tracey looked at the little girl. "Mora, I though you were supposed to be sleeping." Tracey tussled the little girl's her hair as she put her thumb in her mouth hiding behind her mother's leg.

"Tracey, I'm dying. Your mother." The woman stopped and looked at Holly. "Hi. I'm Kelly, David's wife." Kelly stared at her for a minute. "I know you. You're friends with Dr. Walosky. I work in the Research unit."

"Yes..Yes. I know you. I haven't seen you in awhile." Holly said as she looked at the woman's stomach.

"I've been a little busy." She put her hand on her stomach. "I went to part time and now if they really need me I will go in." Tracey picked up the little girl and swung her on her hip. They headed into the family room. "David, this is Holly, Tracey's friend."

The tall raven-haired man got to his feet. He stood well over six feet. His features were chiseled and defined and his skin color was darker olive than Tracey's color.

"Hello, nice to meet you." David stuck his hand out. "Good to finally put a face with a name."

"Hon, Holly is friends with Dr. Walosky."

"Really, didn't he just get that big research award?"

"Holly gave his introduction at the benefit. " Tracey piped up.

"That's right. I remember you saying something about it but I didn't make the connection." Kelly moved towards the small sunroom off the TV room.

"Dad, this is Holly." Tracey made the introductions. As the short older version of David came into the room carrying a couple of beers, Holly felt her stomach twist and knot. His high and tight hair cut looked freshly trimmed. He eyed Holly over, then extended his hand.

"Frank, call me Frank. Here take this you probably need it." He handed Holly a beer. "Ellen is a little rough on the new ones. Right Kelly?"

"Let me tell you about it." The pregnant woman sighed. Holly felt a wave of relief rush over her. Frank winked at her. "It's very nice to meet you. I heard you took this one rock climbing. That had to be a challenge."

"It was fun." Holly realized these people were normal and trying to make her feel comfortable. "Right Tracey?" She relaxed a bit as she realized she liked Tracey's family. She sat near Frank as they started talking about eco challenges and competition extreme sports. Frank had been a Navy seal and was very proud of the tattoo he had on his bicep.

"David's got some alligator on his shoulder." Frank complained and David laughed.

"Watch out Holly. He is going to bust out the stories any second." Tommy yelled as he roughed Chad's hair. "So it will be something about walking to school in the snow both ways up hill."

"Is he showing his tattoos off?" A voice asked as another shaggy brown haired brother popped his head in the room. "Does Holly have any?"

Speechless for a moment, Holly realized Tracey's siblings were teasing her. The latest addition had to be Chris. "No comment." Holly scooted into the corner of the couch. "What's with the tattoos?" Holly asked.

"Dad likes to say each tattoo should have a war story. Do you have any?" When Holly didn't answer right away, Chris continued. "I'll ask Tracey." Chris started to exit the room. "Just kidding." He came back in the room. "That's next visit." He teased the doctor.

The television in the family room still tuned to the hockey game, Holly became the center of attention as she was introduced to the rest of the Campbell clan. Frank managed to corral her into the space next to him on the couch, while Tracey and her sister-in-laws Kelly and Trish headed to the kitchen to help with dinner preparation.

"Do you think she'll be okay with dad?" Tracey glanced back at Holly sitting casually next to her dad.

"If Frank did to her what he did to me, she'll be fine." Trish said ignoring the strange look Tracey gave her.

"I'm going to bow out on kitchen duty." Kelly explained as she placed her hands on her lower back. "I'm having a rough time today." The eight month pregnant woman was moving slowly and having a hard time catching her breath.

"Kell, why don't you lay down for awhile? We can handle it. Besides, my mom is just going to tell us are in the way like normal."

"Take quick nap. We'll wake you for dinner." Trish commented holding open the bedroom door for her. They walked back to the kitchen, leaving Kelly to sleep in Tracey's bedroom.

"What did Frank do to you?" Tracey whispered to Trish trying not to let Ellen hear her question.

"He came to my parents house to talk to me." Trish confessed. "You know how it was when Chris and I started dating."

"Yeah..." Tracey thought back. Her sister-in-law came from an abusive family with drinking and drug issues. When Trish met the Campbells, she didn't know what to make of a family that sat down and ate dinner with conversations instead of heated arguments and beatings.

"Your dad came over and took me for coffee. He sat me down and told me that I had no choice as to who my family was." Trish wiped a tear away. "That I did have a choice as to who I let control my life. He asked me if I still wanted my dad to have that control over me. I didn't, but I wasn't sure how I'd survive without money or a roof over my head. I had a job but nothing that could support me while I went to school." Trish looked over her shoulder to where her children played in the yard. "Your dad paid for my apartment while I was in school." Tracey's mouth must have dropped open slightly. "Oh, I said no way at first. I've been propositioned by dirty old men who want an exchange of goods." She blushed. "He laughed. He told me to think about it and let him know by the end of the month."

"Did you tell Chris?"

"He made one stipulation, I wasn't to let Chris know. I took him up on the offer. Once I graduated and started to work, I tried to play him back, but he wouldn't take it. He said to put it in a college fund for our kids. Tracey, we weren't even married yet."

"You know my dad. He doesn't say a lot but when he does, it usually has a purpose." Tracey thought back to the past week with Holly. Even though they didn't see each other, she did spend the night at Holly's, but was gone before she got home from work. Through the night, she held on to Holly's pillow as if it were the doctor. "Do you think he paid a visit to Holly?"

"After the last family dinner, I think he did. She seemed a little intimidated by him when they met."

"Why wouldn't she tell me?"

"If Frank did visit her, she won't. Believe me, I know what it's like to have your dad tell you to keep the visit to yourself. She'll never mention it."

"Tracey can you make the salad? Trish, can you set the table?" Ellen asked as she breezed between the women. "Please tell me you got Kelly to lie down. She's been under my feet all

day." Ellen blew her bangs out of her eyes and wiped her damp hands on the apron. "I love you kids, but sometimes you're just in the way."

"Oh we know mom." Tracey winked at Trish. "Kelly is taking a nap."

"Where is your friend?"

"Holly is being subjected to the Campbell men, so she'll appreciate the Campbell women." Tracey smiled, knowing Holly could hold her own with her family. "I'm going to be getting some tonight." Tracey whispered in Trish's ear. When her sister-in-law's face turned ruby red, she said. "What?"

"You've never talked like that about someone." Trish laughed. "I was beginning to wonder if even knew..." Trish stopped when Ellen came close.

"We all were wondering if you knew what it was like to have great sex." Ellen voiced what Trish was going to say. "Oh honey, we've all been hoping you'd find someone you really liked." Ellen pinched her cheek. "And it's about time. I would have a hard time if that was Maxine Kendall sitting in family room with your father."

"Mom!" Tracey was embarrassed, by the conversation going on around her.

"Face it Trace, you enjoy sleeping with that woman."

"I love it." Tracey smiled as she pulled a head lettuce from the frig. "I really love it." This was the first conversation she ever had with her family about her sex life. "I just can't seem to get enough of her."

"Now you understand the rabbit theory."

"Understand and practice...thank god we can't get pregnant." Tracey tipped her head back and laughed.

"Now I'm jealous. It took three kids for us to figure it out." Trish countered. Ellen chuckled.

"Took us four." She explained as she placed a hand on Tracey's shoulders. "I'm happy for you honey. It's good to see you like this." Ellen hummed and continued to set the food containers on the counter top.

"Anyone need help?" Holly stood in the doorway, her hand on the door jam. "Your family has an obsession with tattoos."

"They didn't." Trish said with a laugh. "Did Frank make his hula girl dance for you?"

"I didn't get to see the hula girl. I'm going to have to ask for a special showing." Holly saw the surprised look in Ellen's eye. "I'm teasing."

"She's teasing you Holly. Frank doesn't have any girl tattooed on his body and if he does, he's going home with one of the kids." Ellen huffed at Trish. "Probably Chris if I had to pick one." Ellen opened the oven and pulled the rack out. Set on top was the largest ham Holly had ever seen. "Tracey, can you get this?" Ellen asked her daughter to lift the pan to the stove top.

"Holly if you could, please let everyone know dinner is ready. Tell Luke and he'll round up the kids. Don't worry about Kelly. She is napping." Ellen smiled when the tall woman nodded and headed towards the noisy family room. "She's nice Tracey. I like her." Tracey kissed her mom's forehead and smiled.

"Thank you."

~

Holly's head was spinning from the activity around the large dining room table. Ellen explained that the table wasn't usually this large, only for family gatherings. She had to order two additional sections so there was enough room around the table for everyone. Missing was Kelly, who was still sleeping in the bedroom. Holly had never seen such a feast in a person's home. There was ham, turkey, mashed potatoes, salads of every kind and the bowls never emptied. If one appeared to be empty, a new one would take its place. The kids sat in high chairs close to a parent. Holly watched in amazement as Trish fed the twins with the expertise of a juggler. A cup would tip, she'd catch it. One of the girls would mush their food out of their mouths, she'd spoon it up. A roll would be flung in the air, she snagged it like an outfielder.

"Practice." She said when she caught Holly staring at her. By the time pies were cut and passed around, Holly was stuffed to the gills and debating about using the stepper when she got home. She needed to unbutton her pants to feel comfortable. She felt Tracey's hand on her knee and couldn't suppress the smile that appeared on her face. She enjoyed meeting her family. She couldn't remember the last time she felt like she was welcomed into a family. Just as she lifted her fork to her mouth, she heard the cry.

"David!" It was a muffled cry from the hallway that caused panic through the house. A flash of dark hair jumped from the table and ran down the hallway. Holly felt the hair on her arms stand up.

"There's something wrong." Ellen said with her voice rising in fear.

"Mom!" David's voice called out. Tracey got to her feet as did the rest of the adults around the table. She felt her heart pound. Kelly rarely complained with her previous pregnancies. Tracey wasn't sure if it was because her sister-in-laws age, but this time around the pregnancy was taking a toll on Kelly. She stole a glance at Holly who looked very calm.

"There's a lot of blood." The words floated down the hallway to Tracey's ears. She felt a hand on her arm and found Holly standing next to her.

"Grab the phone." Holly said calmly and brushed past her towards the bedroom. Tracey nodded and grabbed the cordless from the kitchen wall. Holly made her way into the bedroom. Tracey

stood at the door watching as the doctor squatted next to the bed. She placed a hand on Kelly's abdomen. There were quiet words exchanged. Holly nodded and lifted her eyes to Tracey's face.

"Alright everyone out!" Frank's voice boomed. He looked at Holly. "Except for you doctor." The room cleared out except for David.

"Can someone get my bag out of my car?" Holly held out her keys and Frank swiped them from her hands. "Thanks. Ellen can you get some boiling water and some linens?" Holly's focus went to David and Kelly. "You've done this before, right?" The couple nodded. "Same drill, just with a little twist." Holly gave the couple a small smile. "When I get my bag, I'm going to see what's going on with this one. As a precaution, I'm going to have Tracey call for an ambulance." She nodded towards Tracey who forgot she was holding the phone.

"It hurts." Kelly winced when another contraction hit her. Her hand was wrapped in David's as she bore down with the pain.

"I know this is going to be hard, but don't push..." Holly said as her medical bag was placed at her feet. Frank stood next to her huffing and puffing as if he was in labor. Holly slipped on a pair of gloves and began to examine Kelly. "Tracey." Holly called to her again. "Call and let them know we have a thirty four year old female in labor. The baby decided to come a little early and is..." She paused looking for the right word. "Backwards."

Tracey backed out of the room with the phone in hand. She pressed in the three digits. She felt someone next to her. Her father was white as a ghost. There was a trail of perspiration along his temple. His smile was faint.

"911, what's your emergency?"

"Hello..." Tracey didn't recognize her own voice. "I need an ambulance sent to 11238 Rosewood Lane. There is a thirty four year old female in labor. We have a doctor at the location but she said the baby is backwards."

"Okay....I've got an ambulance on its way. I need you to stay on the line with me. Can you tell me if she is having contractions? How far apart are they?"

"Dad, see if Kelly's having contractions and the time between them." Tracey held the phone against her chin and gave orders. Frank disappeared in the room and was back in a less than thirty seconds.

"They're every ten minutes and she is dilated at 5 cm." Frank called out. The operator must of have heard him because she repeated the stats in Tracey's ear. "She can't get a read on the baby but the mother's blood pressure is elevated."

"Did you get that?" Tracey asked the 911 operator.

"Yes.." The operator said as sirens were heard in the background. Luke went running down the driveway waving to the bus into the driveway. The teenager was worried about his mom.

"The ambulance is here." Tracey let the operator know. Frank opened the door and let the two person crew into the house. Tracey recognized the bald headed EMT from the bus accident. He held on to the stretcher, wheeling it past Tracey. Following him was his partner, Pam, Holly's ex-girlfriend. She gave Tracey a slight smile and trying to work her charm. It was a half a second before she realized who she was staring at. The expression on the EMT's face, along with the faltering footing led Tracey to believe Pam was a bit surprised by her presence. Tracey would love to see her face when she realized Holly is in with Kelly.

"Dr. Graham...." The male EMT called out when he saw Holly at the bedside. "Making house calls?"

"Richard, good to see you as always." Holly's eyes looked past his face and over his shoulder to the second member of the team. "Ms. Farmer." She commented when Pam walked into the room. "We have a frank breech. Kelly is a nurse in Dr. Greg's office. This is her third child. BP is elevated 135 over 90. Contractions are approximately stabilized at ten minutes. Dilated to 6cm. What week are you in?"

"Thirty weeks..." David called out before his wife could. "Is everything alright?"

"I can't get a monitor on the baby here but at the hospital they can do that." Holly pulled her stethoscope over her shoulder. "Did you know you were breech?"

"He's been really active the last couple of days. If I'd have known, I would've stopped it." Kelly commented. The beads of sweat were resting on her forehead. David wiped them away with a cloth. She smiled at him.

"Who's your OBGYN?" Holly asked. She stepped back and let the crew do their job. By the rigidness in Pam's posture, Holly knew the EMT was pissed. Her movements were clipped and she uttered one word responses to Rich.

"Dr. Levin, he's out of..."

"Townson. I know him." Holly looked at the monitor and to her watch. "I'm going to give Adam a call and let him know what's going on. Rich and Pam are going get you ready for transport. Do you have any questions?"

"Are you coming with us?" David asked as Kelly shook her head.

"I think the family will be right behind you and if you need me, I will be at the hospital. Your sister may have an issue with me working though."

"This is a family thing. Not a work issue." Kelly called out. "If she doesn't understand, then she'll have to deal with me."

"I understand!" Tracey came up behind Holly and placed her hand on her lower back. There was no way she was going to let Holly out of her sight with Pam nearby.

"I will go, but I'm not working." Holly said quietly as she pulled Tracey closer.

"Welcome to the family." Tracey said as she leaned in to kiss Holly on the lips.

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~ With All of My Heart ~

by Catherine Burke

Author's Note: Here we are again....I thought I'd try this again.

Category: Orig. Uber Alt.

Rating: R / NC-17

Summary: Doctor Holly Graham was going through the motions. Taught to rely on no one but herself, she toiled through the medical school and settled into a position at one of Baltimore's top trauma centers. Tracy Campbell had looks, a career, a loving family and loyal friends. Yet, her love life was lacking. Pursued by many a suitor, she never found what she was looking for until a snowy night on a Maryland highway.

Comments/Disclaimer(s): This is an original story. The story and characters belong to me. They are not to be used or reproduced without my express written permission. I have posted an similar story on another site under the kato5568@aol.com email....This is me. These characters are mine and not swiped from someone else. It's good to know people are looking out for us!

This story depicts a love/sexual relationship between two consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it.

Special Thanks: To J Brownell for ideas suggestions and getting me to actually post this. Kerrie who was able to beta and get this story back to me a very short time. Living half way around the world does have its advantages. Time differences worked well for us. I'd like to give a shout to Powerbab, who actually writes about Cleveland where we live. We'll get together at the coffee

shop soon.

I'm posting this in chapter blocks. Life gets in the way at times. Hope you enjoy.

You can reach me at burkcatherine@aol.com

Chapter 13

"What in heavens name are you doing here?" Rollins' fists were planted squarely on her hips as her voice echoed off the walls of the Emergency Room. She knew Holly was supposed to be at Tracey's parents' today. The last place she expected to see the doctor was in ER. "Turn around and march back out the door you came through!" Rollins unballled a hand to point towards the exit. "When that woman dumps your ass, I can't say I won't blame her."

Holly's eyebrows lifted at Rollins last statement. She gave the nurse a lazy half grin. "Sandra, why do you think I would pick you over Tracey?" Holly held in her laugh as she watched the play of emotions over the veteran nurse's face.

Rollins clicked her tongue on the roof of her mouth. "Did you even attempt to meet her family?"

"There was an emergency." Holly tried to explain.

"Emergency, my ass." Rollins chastised her. "You don't even know the meaning of the word. If I was that girl's mother, I'd..."

"Is there a problem, Holly?" Ellen Campbell approached the agitated nurse who was giving Holly the fourth degree. The nurse's mouth opened and closed like a fish deciding to swipe a worm off a hook. "Did you see where they brought Kelly?"

"Nothing I can't handle, Mrs. Campbell."

"Ellen."

"Ellen." Holly repeated and looked at Rollins, who looked as if someone had stolen her puppy. "Sandra, can you see where a Kelly Campbell is? Rich and Farmer brought her in by bus. She was in labor, breech."

"Huh?" It took a moment for Rollins to realize the small woman next to Holly was Tracey's mother. Nodding her head like a bobble head doll, Rollins went behind the desk and began to punch keys on the computer. "Sorry, Dr. Graham, I was..."

"Looking out for me?" Holly gave her a smile and placed a hand on her forearm. "I'd do the same if the situation was reverse. This is Tracey's mother, Ellen Campbell."

"Mrs. Campbell." The nurse gave her a nod and raised her eyes from the computer screen to the pint sized woman with Holly.

Hurried footsteps approached the desk. "Did you find anything out?" Tracey called. She had dropped Holly and her mother off at the doors and gone off find a parking space.

"Not yet, Sandra is looking up the status." Holly put an arm around Tracey's waist and pulled her close. "I'm sure she's okay."

"Nurse Rollins, good to see you again." Tracey smiled at the typing woman. "Holly's not causing you trouble?"

"Nothing I can't handle." A rare smile appeared on Rollins' face.

"I've been good." Holly said as Tracey poked her in the side. "I didn't do anything."

"This time." Tracey teased.

"They took her to three, the maternity ward."

"Who's on duty?"

"Jackson." Holly nodded at Rollins answer. She knew Linda Jackson, the OBGYN who often covered weekends at the hospital. "I'm here until eight, if you need anything."

"We should be good. I'll see you tomorrow." Holly said as she followed Ellen and Tracey to the bank of elevators. The evening had taken a turn Holly could have never predicted. She was grateful to be at the house and taking care of Kelly. Even if her role in the situation was minor, she knew that Kelly needed to get to the hospital.

"When was Kelly's last appointment?" She asked the Campbell woman as she rode in the elevator. Her OBGYN should have caught the baby's position and given direction to the mother.

"Kelly missed her last one and wasn't able to get a make up appointment." Ellen answered. Holly hissed between her teeth. "Was that bad?"

"No, but the doctor would have seen the baby's position. Having a breech baby isn't that uncommon." Holly explained. The bell rang and the doors opened to the maternity ward. Standing at the elevator was Pam Farmer.

"Hi." Pam said uncomfortably as she shifted her weight from foot to foot. "I think she is in surgery now." The EMT immediately recognized the family members. "The father is in the waiting room." She pointed to the set of double doors.

"Thank you." Tracey said as she led Ellen past.

"Holly, you got a second?"

Holly looked to Tracey, who gave her a nod then turned to Pam. "Just a couple." She gestured for Pam to follow her to the windows overlooking the parking garage. Holly leaned her back against the wall and crossed her arms over her stomach. "What do you need?"

"Jesus..." Pam rubbed her temple. "Listen Holly, I just...I wanted to apologize."

"For exactly what? Hitting on me and my girlfriend while you were drunk? Cheating on me? Not just once or twice, I'm still finding conquests around the hospital. Or for fucking the nurse in my house and bed?"

"Shit." Pam's face drained of color. She turned to walk away then turned back to Holly. "I'm sorry I treated you like crap." Pam paced in front of Holly, who hadn't changed position despite the awkwardness. "You look happy. I wanted to let you know I think it's great you found someone who makes you happy." Pam began to walk away.

"Pam!" Holly called out after her. When the EMT turned, Holly pushed off the wall and walked towards her. "Thanks. She's a great person."

"You're just lucky you asked her out first."

"She asked me out." Holly remembered the cute note the teacher left for her.

"She's a smart woman." Pam waved, pushed open the stairwell door and disappeared.

"Yes, she is." Holly mumbled aloud and went in search of Tracey and her family. Walking towards the waiting room, Holly took in the anxious form of David Campbell sitting on the faux leather couch, his elbows resting on his knees and chin resting on his hands. His leg bounced wildly as he waited for news on his wife and child. Ellen sat next to him her hand rubbed her son's back, trying to offer him some comfort. Tracey stood at the nurses' station talking with a woman dressed in maroon colored scrubs.

"Is that Dr. Graham?" One of the nurses behind the desk asked her co-worker as she rolled her office chair closer. The woman turned around to take in Holly's form striding towards them.

"Yep. Down Shelia. Rumor is she is seeing someone pretty seriously." The nurse turned her attention back to chart in front of her.

"I can wish. Besides, Farmer was up here looking for her a few minutes ago. That chick is such a player." Shelia batted her eyes towards Holly as she stepped to the desk. Tracey cleared her throat and stared at the nurse for a moment until she felt Holly's arm slip around her waist.

"What did you find out?" Holly asked as Tracey turned and kissed her on the lips. The act caused the nurse reviewing the chart to chuckle. Shelia on the other hand turned completely red.

"Shelia was just looking for that information for us." Tracey said she pulled back and stared into Holly's eyes. She winked at the doctor and squeezed her side before she turned to the nurses.

"Shelia, Miss Rose." Holly greeted the nurses. "Anything you can share on the status?"

"Dr. Graham." Rose Winger straightened her frame and set the chart aside. "You know we can't give out information." Holly had saved the ward's butt many a time over the years when a baby arrived a tad early or when a tee time got in the way of a delivery. "Seeing as you are not working tonight, I can tell you Dr. Jackson is in surgery and should be out within an hour, give or take."

"Thanks Rose." Holly winked at the older nurse and grabbed Tracey's hand. They walked to the chairs to update the others.

"Shelia thinks you're cute." Tracey said as she held tight to Holly's hand. "What did Pam want?"

"I'm not interested in Shelia or Pam."

"I know, but what did she want? She looked a little miffed at the house."

"She wanted to apologize and said I looked happy."

"What did you say?"

"I told her your mother was a really good cook so I was happy because I had a full..." The smack to her stomach stopped the teasing. "Stomach." Holly leaned down and pressed her lips to Tracey's. "I'm teasing."

"You better check with Shelia because at the rate you're going, you're not going to get any..."

"Any what?" Ellen interrupted Tracey's threat. Holly watched as Tracey fumbled for something to say.

"Sleep." Holly covered quickly. "I talked to Rose and from what she is saying. Kelly is in surgery with Dr. Jackson." She took in David's gaunt look. "It appears to be a routine c-section." When David went to interrupt her, she continued. "I say routine. Nothing I was told will lead me to believe otherwise. Kelly is in very good hands and we should be getting an update soon."

"You got that from what the nurse said."

"It's a hospital thing. If it makes you feel better, I've worked with Dr. Jackson before and she is very good at her job."

"Holly, thank you for everything you've done for us." David stood and gave the doctor a mammoth hug. "Thank you so much." After a moment, Holly collected her thoughts and gave him a hug back. He was fearful of losing his wife and child.

"David, they'll be fine." Holly patted his back and felt him nod.

"I just don't know what I would do if something happened to her." David stepped back and wiped his eyes. Holly glanced at Tracey and held her eyes for a moment. She wondered if they could have that strong of a bond. Tracey said she loved her. It seemed like the Campbells showed their love for one another freely and often. Holly had yet to tell Tracey what she meant to her. She wasn't sure how she would categorize her feelings for Tracey. She knew if Tracey was hurt or injured, she would be upset and concerned. She never wanted to deal with a situation like David was going through.

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The ride to Holly's house was quiet. Tracey's head rested against the seat and her hand was on Holly's thigh wrapped in the doctor's warm hand. The surgery lasted just over an hour. Dr. Linda Jackson came to speak with the family in the waiting room. Kelly was still under anesthesia and in recovery. The baby was a five pound, four ounce little boy. Tracey closed her eyes as the tears began to form. David was completely relieved his wife and child were safe. Kelly was going to have a long recovery but the feisty blonde would bounce back. Kelly's uterus had torn and caused the bleeding. The cesarean delivery of the baby caused less stress on her insides and probably prevented the tear from becoming a bigger problem. David wanted to wait for Kelly's approval on the name before he announced it.

"Long day?" Tracey muttered as she tightened her grip on Holly's hand. She felt exhausted. She wasn't sure if it was from the late night yesterday, all the cooking today, or the excitement over the baby. She was looking forward to a week away from work with spring break starting tomorrow. When Holly didn't answer, Tracey opened an eye and looked at her. They had plans to spend a long weekend at Maxie's summer home on the shore. "Long day..." Tracey repeated and squeezed the doctor's hand.

"Very long. It's going to be a long week for me, while someone I know gets to do nothing all week and get paid for it."

"Please, I deserve the week off. The kids are getting cabin fever and not learning a thing." Tracey stifled a yawn and rolled her shoulders. "I can spoil my new nephew everyday."

"He's so little." Holly was able to see the baby through the nursery window along with everyone else. Rose asked if she wanted to come into the nursery, but Holly declined. She knew Ellen would want to hold her grandson before she did. She stood outside and ohhhed and ahhhed with the rest of the family. "I forget how small they are."

"I'm sure Kelly has a different perspective of small." Tracey smiled as her head rocked on the seat back. She left her car at her parents since she was on break and didn't need to be at work in the morning. When she approached Maxie about using her house for a long weekend, the banker was all for it until she realized Tracey didn't want her there. An argument ensued and Maxie agreed on one condition that they didn't use the master bedroom. Tracey was fine because she wasn't planning on using Maxie's room and she knew Holly would not want to sleep there.

"Your mom's question about having kids." Holly blew out a breath. "Man, I didn't see that coming. I was ready for why do you want to date my daughter? Not do you plan on having children?"

"She loves her grandchildren. I'd be the perfect daughter if I have a few." Tracey had heard her mother's request many times. The disappointment in her voice when Tracey said she'd never be getting married. There wouldn't be a mother-daughter wedding planning event. Ellen had three daughters-in-law and she pitched in all she could without interfering. Tracey glanced over and saw Holly's hands gripping the wheel. Her face was an ash white color. "Are you okay?"

"Fine." The reply was quick and clipped.

"I'm not saying I want kids." Tracey pulled her hand from Holly's and folded her arms across her stomach. Holly tilted her head and glanced at Tracey nervously. "I'm not."

"But your parents do."

"It's my life, my body, my decision, not my parents. I'm not even thirty. If I want to have a child, I will." Tracey rubbed her temples. She needed to get some sleep. Holly was going to start pulling away because of this conversation, if she didn't do something quick. "Listen Holly." Tracey wiped her hands on her thighs to remove the sweatiness. Her stomach was doing somersaults. "I do not want to have a baby at this time. What I do want is to see where we go. How we get along and if there's a chance for something....." Tracey looked for the right word. "Long term?" Fit her criteria, it wasn't filled with the pressure of marriage, commitment, or forever. Did she want forever with Holly? She did. She loved her.

"Long term? Like a lease?" She heard the playfulness in Holly's answer. "Am I a car? Do you want to turn me in after three years or twenty thousand miles?"

"Stop..." Tracey laughed, knowing the blonde was trying to put her at ease. "I think it will depend on if I get a toaster oven."

"Hold out for the Garman." Holly stopped the car at a red light and leaned over and kissed Tracey. "I like kids." She pulled away with a smirk on her face.

"Sure..sure..." Tracey fidgeted in her seat. "Then why did you look like you were about to pass out when I started talking about them?"

"I actually started talking about them. I'm okay as long as you have them." Holly shuddered. "The thought of my body going through pregnancy is just not going to happen."

"You're a jerk." Tracey hit her arm in the same spot Mel had punched last night, causing Holly to flinch and her eyes to tear. "Oh...I'm sorry." Tracey rolled up Holly's sleeve to reveal a large black and blue circle.

"Kelly grabbed it earlier." Holly rubbed her eyes.

"I'm so sorry." Tracey leaned in and kissed the bruise.

"How sorry?" Holly said as she pulled into her garage and shut off the car engine so that only a soft ticking of the engine could be heard. Holly pointed to her lips and Tracey acquiesced by kissing her. The kisses they exchanged were soft, like rose petals against one's skin. Holly pulled away cupping Tracey's cheek and caressing it with the pad of her thumb. "I'd like to try "long-term" with you. Sometimes, I get caught up in here." She pointed to her brain. "So bear with me, if you can, because I like being in your life."

"I like you in my life." Tracey leaned into the warmth of Holly's palm. They stared at each other until the garage open light clicked off. In the midst of laughing, they climbed out of the car and went into the house hand in hand.

~

For the first time in many years, she dreamed of her father. He stood next to her at the admissions desk in the ER area. His dirty blonde colored hair was long and fell into his brown eyes. He looked at Holly and gave her a half grin.

"Can you forgive me?" Don Graham asked his daughter. She leaned against the counter and wondered why it was so quiet in the hospital. There was no staff. There were no EMTs crashing the double doors calling out vitals. Holly ran her hand through her hair. Instead of the short spiky mass, her hair was long and stringy falling to the center of her back. She felt the thick coke bottle thick glasses weighing heavily on her nose. She knew if she'd looked at her reflection in a mirror, her face would be covered in ugly pimples. Her shoulders slumped.

"I'm not this person anymore." Holly cried feeling ashamed.

"You're still my daughter." Don stepped closer and placed his hand on her forearm. Holly shuddered as the coldness of his touch reminded her of the cadaver from medical school. She and her classmates dubbed the dead man Saul. She couldn't sleep the first night after they had worked on the cadaver. The nights following, she fell asleep exhausted. "Do you forgive me?"

"You left! I had no one!" Holly brushed his touch away. His eyes mirrored hers, big brown, and innocent. Was he innocent?

"I need you to forgive me." His voice stayed soft like a small child trying to get out of doing chores.

"Dad, why? Why now? I'm doing good. You don't need anything from me." Holly sank to the floor, her knees clutched close to her chest, her breathing rapid as if she were about to hyperventilate.

"I'm proud of you. So smart and beautiful." He crouched down and placed a hand on her knee.

"I'm not beautiful." Holly lifted her head and felt the absences of her long locks, the glasses were replaced with contacts and the acne cleared up. She was thirty-four again, not an awkward teenager.

"You've always been beautiful to me. I'm glad you've found someone to love." Don stood up and brushed the knees of his gray slacks. "You'll need me soon." With that he disappeared into thin air.

Holly jerked awake. Her lungs screamed for air as she couldn't seem to calm down. The realization of an asthma attack had her searching for the long forgotten inhaler she used often as a teenager. Her frantic movements must have stirred Tracey. A warm hand pressed against the small of her back as she opened the night stand drawers. Tracey tried to calm her down.

"Easy." Tracey cooed as she rubbed her hand up and down Holly's back. "Relax. You need to try to relax."

Holly nodded and blinked at the brightness of the light Tracey flipped on. She heard Tracey open the night stand on the other side of the bed. She tried to slow her breathing and get her body to relax.

"Here baby." Tracey said as she handed Holly the inhaler. Holly took the small respirator and placed it in her mouth, releasing the medication. Tracey's hand continued her ministrations along her back. "Slow it down. I know it's hard, but it will work quicker if you relax."

Holly felt oxygen filling her lungs, the muscles in her chest began to relax. The soothing motion of Tracey's hand calmed her racing heart. "Wow." The whisper escaped her lips.

"I didn't know you had asthma." Tracey leaned her cheek against the center of Holly's back, letting her hands roam under Holly's t-shirt. She could hear air entering Holly's chest cavity. "Better?"

"Yes." Holly hung her head. She hadn't had an attack in a number of years. She used to have them all the time when she was growing up. She barely could participate in her physical education class because of her condition. "It's been awhile since I've had one."

"How long?" Tracey eased the shirt up over Holly's head throwing it to the floor along with her own.

"Three or four years." Holly remembered when a new cleaning crew worked in the ER. The chemicals they used caused her to go into a full blown attack. Her breathing under control, she leaned into the warmth of Tracey's body. It felt good to be held and cared for. Tracey wrapped her arms and legs around her body and placed her chin on Holly's shoulder. "Thanks for taking care of me."

"Any time doctor." Tracey teased as she covered Holly's stomach with a hand. "Besides, I like taking care of you." Tracey kissed her ear lobe then took the flesh between her teeth and nipped

playfully at it. Her hand began to roam freely across Holly's torso. She cupped a breast and let her thumb caress the nipple, which peaked from her touch.

"What are you doing?"

"Taking care of you silly." Tracey peppered her neck with kisses and let her tongue taste the saltiness of Holly's skin. Her hands freely danced across Holly's body. "Is this okay?"

"Yes." Holly rolled her head to the side giving Tracey a larger expanse of skin to kiss. Tracey leaned into Holly's form and pressed her face down on the mattress. Tracey planted kisses along her neck, across the width of her shoulders and down her spine, stopping at each vertebrae to it homage. She put her fingers under the waist band of Holly's bikini bottoms and worked them off the doctor. She shed her underwear and straddled the small of Holly's back pressing her torso against Holly's bare back.

"I love the feel of your skin against mine." Tracey let her hair fall, caressing Holly's skin with feather light touches, her voice husky with a mix of sleep and want. "What woke you up?" Tracey nuzzled her blowing a warm breath into Holly's ear.

"I had a nightmare." Holly was lost in the sensation of Tracey's fingers, hands, and hair touching her back. Tracey straddled her hips, just above her waist. Holly could feel the heat of Tracey's center on her skin.

"What woke you up?" Holly repeated and chuckled as she felt Tracey begin to rock against her.

"A dream..." The soft sexy voice whispered in her ear. She felt the hard points of Tracey's breasts against her shoulder blades. "A really good dream... you were in it."

"Was I? And what was I doing?" Holly knew she was wet. The smooth rhythm of Tracey moving against her was turning her on.

"This.." Tracey ran her tongue along Holly's neck, her breasts pressed into her back and she began to speed up her movement. "Lift up for me baby." Holly felt Tracey's hand at her hip urging her off the bed. She lifted her hips and felt Tracey's fingers working their magic. She fell into the motion Tracey set, letting the teacher push her center against her rear. On all fours, Holly groaned, she needed more. She wanted more. Tracey had a hand on her hip and her other cupped and pinched her breast. Holly felt her center constrict as Tracey's fingers tightened on her breast. It was as if her nipple were connected to her clit. Tracey's mouth was on her shoulder, kissing, nipping, whispering words that Holly couldn't decipher.

"Please..." She finally called out wanting Tracey to touch her, to fill her. Tracey slipped two fingers into Holly and let the doctor ride against her. "Yes!" Holly called out as she pushed against Tracey's fingers, almost crying out when Tracey withdrew and re-entered her. Holly dropped her weight to her elbows as Tracey's hips slammed into her from behind. A strangled cry mixed with Tracey's pants and grunts filled the bedroom. Holly felt the tremors course

through her body and let the intensity of the moment flow through her until she finally blacked out.

"I love you." She woke at Tracey's words as the teacher lay on top of her back panting. Catching their breath, they lay there for a few moments. The intensity between them was a like an electrical charge during a lightning storm. Holly felt the tears on her skin and wondered why Tracey was crying. She rolled to her side and pulled Tracey to her chest. She placed soft kisses on her cheeks, along her jaw and on her lips.

"That was wonderful. Why are you crying?"

"I'm just having a moment..." Tracey ducked her head under Holly's chin. Holly wrapped her arms around her and held tight. She kissed the top of Tracey's head and waited.

"Please don't cry. I don't like it when you're sad." Holly stroked her hair and let her fingers run up and down Tracey's arm.

"I'm not sad. I'm just....it's just so overwhelming sometimes. I've never felt this way before."

"You sound like that is a bad thing." Holly joked and she felt a slight jab to her side. "I like your feistiness." She kissed her forehead. "I like your body." She kissed her nose. "You, Miss Campbell, are very good for me."

"And you, Dr. Graham, may be the end of me." Tracey lifted her head to look into Holly's eyes. They stared at each other for a moment, then moved towards one another letting their lips meet. Holly pulled back and hesitated.

"What?" Tracey said as she touched Holly's face. She didn't want Holly to withdrawal. "Talk to me Holly."

"It was a nightmare that caused the attack." Holly settled down, resting her head on Tracey's shoulder. "I dreamed about my dad." Holly felt the hand soothing her hair stop for a moment and then continue its path. "In the dream, he asked me to forgive him."

"What do you think of it?" Tracey didn't want to press.

"My brain knows all the psychological reasons for the dream." Holly held her hand in front of them. "Anger, resentment, grief..."

"Holly, you have a right to have those feelings. Have you gone home, or at least tried to follow up with the lawyer?"

"No. There is nothing there for me." Holly turned her head and kissed the underside of Tracey's jaw.

"You have a lot of unresolved issues with your parents, maybe going to Ohio to investigate may give you some answers."

"There's nothing there for me." Holly shifted her weight on top of Tracey's. "I only want what's here." When she leaned in and began to kiss Tracey's ear, neck and shoulders, Tracey was too preoccupied to argue. She moaned when Holly pressed into her center.

"Please....." The word of need cut off as Tracey's lips were covered by Holly's mouth.

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Chapter 14

Thoughts whirled around Tracey's head as she pushed the cart up and down the grocery store aisles. One of the carts front wheels had its own itinerary and fought against the other three. Bad luck on her side, she picked out the broken cart. Thankfully, she didn't have much to pick up. The short list she had was for the weekend at Maxie's place on the Eastern shore. The house sat on an inner finger of the Chesapeake Bay and had been in Maxie's family for generations. Each year, Maxie invited the softball team to spend the holiday weekends at the house. The Queen Anne style house could be lived in year round, but Maxie thought differently. Too remote, she once told Tracey. On the other hand, Tracey loved the area, quaint rural farmland along the waterfront, near a small Middle American town where the Wal-Marts and Depots had yet to invade. If Tracey could, she would pick up and move to the area. Her job and family kept her on the west side of the bridge. She couldn't wait to see Holly's reaction and get her impression of the area.

Holly. Tracey thought about the woman she hadn't seen her since the birth of her nephew. In early hours of the morning, Holly crawled from bed and left for work without waking or saying goodbye to Tracey. She woke sprawled across Holly's bed, her face shoved in the doctor's pillow. She reached for the warm body that should be next to her. Instead, she felt only the cool sheets. She didn't stir when Holly left. A tornado could of hit and she probably wouldn't have noticed. Her sulking mood lighted as each hour passed. Soon they would be on their way for a nice romantic get away weekend. In less then four hours, they would be together for three days.

Reaching for a package of steaks, a smile touched her lips. The last few weeks felt like riding on a roller coaster. Her team played the last game of the season. Holly finally opened up to her about her family. The questions around her father's death still had Tracey wondering if the man did have an affair with his student. No wonder Holly had issues. After hearing about the doctor's family, Tracey understood Holly's reservations about meeting her family. The initial meeting had gone better than Tracey expected. The messages in her voicemail confirmed her family welcomed Holly with open arms. Without a doubt, having a doctor at the house in the middle of a medical crisis was greatly appreciated by everyone. David and Kelly named the baby Collin Graham Campbell. Tracey told Holly her nephew's name during a phone conversation late one evening. She beamed with pride. Her family liked Holly.

"They didn't have to do that. I didn't do anything special." Holly tried to blow off her importance in the baby's delivery.

"My brother was very grateful. Your presence reassured him. I think that was a good enough reason to name the baby after you."

"It's my job Tracey. It's what I do."

"It's who you are." Tracey countered. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

"Yes." The last letter hissed out, her psyche imprinted with being a doctor. She knew better than to argue with Tracey. "Tell them I'm honored and I can't wait to see them again."

A blast of sirens filled the background and Tracey knew Holly would have to cut the conversation short. "We're still on for the shore?"

"I wouldn't miss it. I've got....I know! Trace, I've got to go." Holly's voice was muffled for a moment. "I'll see you in about thirty-seven hours." The phone went dead and Tracey knew whatever happened on the other end needed Holly's immediate attention.

Thirty-three down and four more to go, she thought as she glanced out the large glass front of the Shoppers store. It was a decent spring afternoon, the sun breaking through a few clouds. Spring roared in like a lion and hopefully would stroll out like a lamb. This weekend on the water, she really wanted to grill out on the large redwood deck. The view overlooking the water took her breath away. Praying the weather would hold out so she and Holly could take the boat out for a ride. Maxie trusted Tracey enough to let her pilot the 22' Bayliner Trophy Cuddy, she owned and stored on the shore. If the weather didn't cooperate, they could take a walk through the wooded trails or spend time in front of the fireplace. Tracey didn't care, as long as she got to be with Holly. She wanted to be with her all the time. She couldn't wait for summer. This would be the first summer she had someone she wanted to spend time with. She didn't care about softball or hanging with her friends. Enjoying Holly's company was her top priority.

"Hey Miss Campbell." Tracey lifted her head when she heard her name. Standing a few feet away from her was Michelle Stanley. Tracey thought it odd since Michelle appeared to be by herself and she didn't live in her neighborhood. The teenager had a basket carrier in her hand. Tracey quickly scanned the contents, sun lotion, lip balm, hair ties, deodorant, and a few other small items.

"Michelle, good afternoon." Tracey stepped behind her cart and looked at the contents. Her shopping produced a lot of food for one person. She glanced over the contents and wondered if Michelle would notice. A stabbing fear filtered into her thoughts. What if Zoey or Malcolm had broken their promise? "Nice to see you. I'd thought you'd be out enjoying your spring break, not shopping at the market."

"Oh, I'm on my way to the airport. Florida for break. Heading to the Keys." Michelle took a step closer and placed her hand on Tracey's buggy.

The Keys, Tracey thought. She had never been to the Keys. She couldn't imagine what parent would allow their seventeen-year-old to romp around one of the hottest party spots in the country. "That's nice."

"My mom is there now. I'm meeting her." Michelle replied. "What big plans do you have for break?"

"Me?" Tracey gestured towards herself. "I'm...I'm heading to a friend's for the weekend. Nothing big."

"The doctor's house?"

"What?" Tracey felt the hair on the back of her neck stand up. An uneasy feeling began to creep up on Tracey's subconscious.

"You're friends with Dr. Graham, is it her house?" Michelle's hand ran the length of the buggy, but she stared at Tracey. Her green eyes were dark almost black in color.

"I'm sorry."

"I thought you were friends?"

"Dr. Graham is an associate. I wouldn't call her a friend." The inside of her brain, Tracey ran through the list of adjectives she would call Holly.....sexy, hot, caring, funny, loving. *Was Holly loving?* She didn't want to rehash Holly's feelings for her. She needed to get out of this conversation with Michelle. "Have fun in Florida." Tracey tried to end the conversation.

"You did have dinner with her on Valentine's Day." Michelle continued to probe, her hand wrapped tightly on the cart. Tracey felt a lump in the center of her throat. Her tongue was thick as she had not reply for the teenage. She stood staring at her without a word to say. She couldn't deny being out to dinner with Holly that night. She recalled the creepy feeling she got from Geoff Stanley. Like father, like daughter, the Stanleys gave her the same eerie feeling as she experienced in the locker room when she found the rose. It was as if Michelle was trying to bait her. The teen continued. "You could do better. She's not that much to look at, maybe it's her bank account." Michelle let her hand drop and stomped off towards the register. Tracey stared at her rigid back. Whatever had just transpired, it pissed Michelle off.

There was a bit of commotion at the front of the store, but Tracey paid no mind to the noises coming from the area of the cashiers. When she turned towards the front of the store, she saw the mess of cans, papers and produce. A young bagger appeared to be pissed off as he bent over to clean up the mess. He placed item after item back on the pallet.

"Eddie?" Tracey saw another of her students. The quiet senior had worked at the store for the last few years. "What a mess."

"Ms. Campbell, hi." His voice carried the irritation his face didn't reveal. "Yeah, watch out for the glass." Eddie continued to sweep the spilled dry goods into the dust pan.

"What happened?" Tracey bent to help him pick some cans up placing them on the stack he had started. She had just passed by this spot five minutes ago.

"Michelle Stanley." He huffed out. "I never knew a person could be so mean."

Tracey looked at his face and saw the look of hate in his eyes. She must have been staring because Eddie tilted his head to the side then made eye contact with her again. "I know she's on your team and all. That crap she pulled on Zoey after New Year's and this." He gestured at the mess on the floor. "I just don't care for her Miss Campbell."

Tracey nodded numbly. The student rarely spoke badly about any of his peers. This new insight into Michelle's behavior shed some light on a few things, mainly the fall out between the taller teen and Zoey Pope. "It's okay Eddie. I'm sure Michelle is having a bad day."

"Decade is more like it." He mumbled under his breathe. "You know she broke up with Zoey because she wanted someone more mature." He laughed. "Mature. Michelle doesn't know the meaning of the word." He glanced over at the teacher wondering if she knew about the relationship between her players. "I'm just talking out my frustration Miss Campbell. Don't mind me. Thanks for your help. I can get the rest." His eyes darted towards the manager heading their way.

"No problem. Have a good break Mr. Koch." Tracey stood and wiped her hands on the thighs of her jeans. Could she have missed her two seniors dating? Tracey thought about the closeness the girls shared. She knew Zoey and Malcolm were gay since the night at the dance club. If Zoey and Michelle had broken up mid season, it would explain the angst the teens were going through, especially Zoey. If Michelle was a lesbian, why would she show up at the ER asking Holly for assistance with female issues? Maybe it was a phase. Tracey broke out into an ear splitting grin. Ellen had said the same thing to her when she was seventeen. She assured her mother every year afterward, it was not a phase.

~

The alley next to the ER entrance served as the favorite hang out of the staff. Far enough away from the dumpster, yet close enough to the entrance, the staff could be available in a matter of seconds. Holly sat on the ledge of the docking bay, her feet dangling loosely swinging back and forth as the plastic fork in her hand dug through a salad from the cafeteria.

"It's going to be a beautiful weekend!" Mel stretched her hands above her head and bent side to side cracking her back, the discarded wrappings from her BLT sandwich stuck under her thigh so the wind wouldn't blow it away.

"How do you know?" The weather had turned warmer and the signs of winter were slowly fading away.

"Because I have the weekend off and no matter what the weather, it's beautiful!" Mel mimicked Holly's position on the ledge. Her legs shorter than the doctors hit a few inches higher on the cement wall. "It could pour buckets and I would still think it's beautiful."

"Man, you're in a good mood." Holly popped a cherry tomato in her mouth. "What's up with you?"

"I met someone." Mel smiled and rubbed her hands on the navy blue uniform pants. "We're supposed to spend the weekend together. I can't wait."

"Mystery girl?" Holly quirked an eyebrow at her friend knowing Mel fell quick and hard for any woman who paid her attention. "Does she have a name?"

"Yes." Mel waited a second. "I'm not saying anything about this one though. Every time, I think I've found her, I end up getting dumped within a week."

"You wear your heart on your sleeve Mel." Holly watched as Mel's mouth opened then snapped shut. The argument died before it even started. The auburn haired EMT smiled and nodded in agreement.

"You're right. I'm going to play it cool with this one and see where it goes." Mel affirmed her thoughts with a head bob.

"Good for you." The bland salad in Holly's hands slowly lost her interest. She couldn't wait for this day to be over. The two hour count down had begun.

"Speaking of wearing your heart on your sleeve, how are things with the teacher?"

"I told her about my dad." Holly face was turned down looking at the lettuce in her salad. Suddenly losing her appetite, she set the plastic bowl down, took a swig of her water bottle and wiped her mouth with the sleeve of her lab coat.

The small EMT glanced up and then looked around as if to see who had actually spoken. It took a moment but when Mel gave a small whistle, Holly felt the heat rise in her face.

"Mel." Holly scooted closer to the edge of the ledge and brought her feet up to sit Indian style. She shyly glanced at her friend.

"Jesus, Holly. It took you seven years before you told me about your family. You and Tracey have been together a few months." Mel wasn't sure if she was jealous of Holly sharing personal information with the school teacher so quickly.

"I'm in love with her." Holly admitted. She knew she had been in love with the teacher for some time. She just didn't want to categorize her feelings, hurt by the love she had for her parents. She realized this was the first time she actually said it out loud to herself or another person. Holly's

smiled widened. She felt great as if the admission lifted a huge weight off her shoulders. Her love for Tracey didn't hurt, it more along the lines of euphoria. "I really love her."

"I can tell." Mel laughed taking the fork from her friend's hand. "Have you told her?"

"God no." Holly leaned her elbows on her knees and put her hand on her chin. "I finally admitted it to myself." Holly took a long look across the parking lot. "She told me she loved me, but what if she..." She stopped the negative thoughts from creeping into her mind.

"She changed her mind? Holly, she feels the same way. I can see it." Mel said with the confidence Holly lacked. "Believe me that girl sings your praises."

"What?"

"I've just heard her talk."

"When?" Holly saw her friend's face turned a brighter shade of red.

"At the party." Mel saw the blush in her friend's face. It was great to see Holly happy. In fact, since Holly started seeing Tracey, she could see changes in her. Holly no longer worked weeks at a time. She took time off and turned off her pager. "Michelle is sending out invitations to her wedding. You should be getting yours this week. Are you going to bring Tracey?"

"I'll ask her. June right?"

"Yep."

"Her third, right?" Mel nodded. "What do you get someone who's been married three times?"

"I told my mom I want my first two gifts back." Mel grinned. "I've given her a couple really nice gifts."

"Since she does live with you, don't you have most of her stuff?" Holly knew the siblings loved each other, but drove each other crazy at the same time.

"Yes."

"Wrap something up and give it to her." Holly watched as the wheels in Mel's head began to turn.

"I can do that. She wrecked my can opener last week. I should wrap up the broken one and give it to her." Mel concluded her eyes sparkling.

"Papa Bear to Baby Bear!!" The radio on Mel's hip squawked and the EMT jumped at the call.

"I hate when he calls me that." Mel pulled the radio out of its holder. "Yes, Johnny!" Using her best Jack Nichols impersonation.

"Meet me at the rig. We've got a big fire down at the water front. Tell Stretch that she's going to be busy in an hour or so." John's voice echoed off the cinder block walls.

"No....absolutely no way!" Holly stood up and brushed off her ass. "I've got plans for the rest of the week with a very sexy woman and little or no clothing!" Holly stomped off into the ER.

"You're mean!" Mel called in the radio. She told John about Holly's big plans for the weekend. The teasing EMT on the other end of the radio laughed.

"Where did she go?"

"Probably to kill Musah." Mel called back. The radio began to scream with feedback as Johnny rounded the corner.

"Come on, let's go tell her I was teasing." John jumped on to the ledge. "Was she mad?"

"If it was real fire, I think she'd blow a gasket." Mel got to her feet and followed her partner into the ER.

Holly's hands were flailing about when she came into their sights. The dark skinned man behind the counter rubbed his goatee thoughtfully and nodded. Musha's dark eyes darted to the pair of EMT's approaching the admissions desk. His smile widened as Holly's voice elevated to the next octave. He nodded his head in agreement with his boss. When Holly paused a moment, she realized no one in the ER was moving. They were all staring at her. She turned to see Mel and John standing a few feet behind her. When John's white teeth showed as he tried to hold in his laughter, Holly pointed a finger at the mischievous man and began to give chase. John turned on his heel and ran out of the building. Holly raced after him. Her heart pounded against her chest as she rounded the corner. She ran smack into someone entering the hospital. Knocking the unsuspecting victim to the ground, Holly landed on top of the innocent bystander.

"Oh shit!" Holly fumbled to her feet. She recognized the teenager sprawled on the cement apron as Michelle Stanley, the student who had come to the ER earlier for female issues. Holly stood back, watching the scene unfolding in slow motion. Her target of frustration, John, ran back to where the prone teenager lay at her feet. Holly froze.

John saw the collision and went to help. "It's my fault." John offered a hand to the young woman on the ground. "Blame it on me." John continued.

"What the hell?" Michelle snapped at the handsome EMT. "You didn't hit me!" Michelle rose to her full height and still had to look up to meet Holly's eyes. The coldness in her eyes instantly thawed as realization dawned on the teenage. "Dr. Graham, oh!" Michelle suddenly swayed as John and Holly reached out to catch her.

"Christ..." Holly muttered as she tried to get a better grip on the teen. "Her name is Michelle Stanley. Let's get her into the hospital." The teen's unexpected appearance at the hospital made Holly question what was wrong with her. Did she turn away a patient in need the previous time? John picked up Michelle and carried her into the hospital. Holly trailed behind, holding on to the teen's purse. "Put her in curtain six." Holly pulled back the privacy drapery. Jasmine, one of the ER nurses followed them behind into the area. Holly watched as the nurse took the teen's vitals. She felt the contusion on her chin forming. She could beat John for teasing her. The EMT stood by the curtain.

"Do we have any contact information?" Dr. Nguyen said as he approached the patient.

"I think we have her record from a broken leg." Holly explained as she headed to the admissions desk. "I saw her earlier this year."

"Miss Stanley!" Dr. Nguyen lifted the girl's eyelids and flashed his light for pupil reaction. He took an ammonia capsule and broke it under the teen's nose. Michelle immediately sat up in the bed.

"Get away from me!" Michelle swatted at Dr. Nguyen's hands.

"Please Ms. Stanley. You'll injure yourself further if you don't calm down." Dr. Son Nguyen took a few steps backwards. The doctor's short examination showed no sign of concussion. The lapse in consciousness could have been the teenager fainting. Nguyen looked at the nurse to see if he had done anything wrong.

"Where is Dr. Graham?" She almost cried.

"Dr. Graham is off duty." Dr Nguyen stated. He didn't want listen to the teens whining.

"No, I just saw her. She ran into me!" Michelle was on verge of getting out of the bed.

"Miss Stanley, I am the physician of record." The small Asian man slipped the stereoscope to his ears. "We need to contact your father, since you are a minor."

"I'll be eighteen in June." Michelle pouted and leaned against the raised head of the bed.

"You're not eighteen now." Dr. Nguyen stated. "We need to contact your parents. Since you are a minor, you're staying in that bed until someone can take responsibility for you."

"What about someone else, a teacher, maybe Dr. Graham?" Michelle whined. "Do you have to call my dad?"

"What about your mother?"

"She's in Florida." The teen folded her arms across her chest.

"Then your father it is." He nodded to Jasmine to stay with the patient and exited the curtained area. Holly stood at the admissions desk on the phone.

"I'm not certain why she is at Jessup, Mr. Stanley. I am calling to let you know she was knocked out in the parking lot and we have her in the emergency room." Holly held the phone under her chin and handed Tran the file Musha pulled on Michelle Stanley. "I understand you thought she was on a plane to Florida, but I guarantee you she is sitting in an examination room." Holly rolled her eyes as the man on the other end of the phone ranted about the whereabouts of his daughter. Finally, Mr. Stanley stated he was sending over a member of his staff to pick up his wayward child.

"Do you know this kid?" Nguyen jerked his thumb towards the curtained area asking. He saw Holly's signature on the earlier chart and wondered why she would request Holly as a person to be released to.

"Treated her during a bus accident a few months ago. Broken leg nothing big. She was here a few weeks ago looking for contraceptives." Nguyen's eyebrows shot up. "I told her she needed to find a private doctor, I didn't see private patients."

"Why is she here today?"

"No clue. Her father thought she was on a flight to Florida." At his surprised look, Holly finished explaining. "Spring break." She shrugged.

"Strange." Nguyen commented. "Have you seen her outside the hospital?"

Holly pondered the question. She knew Michelle was a student of Tracey's. She had seen her at a basketball game and at the restaurant. "We've run into each other a few times." Holly watched as his eyes narrowed. "Son, she is a student of a friend of mine. I've seen her at a basketball game and at a restaurant with her parents."

"Okay. You should write up a statement and file an incident report for the records. You know how this stuff bites us in the ass later. Get John to write up a statement also." Tran turned away, muttering something about grown adults and horseplay. The word babysitter mixed in his ramblings.

"Mel, find your boyfriend and let's get this report filed. I'm not wasting anymore time on either of you. If it wasn't for Mr. Funny stuff, I'd be on my way." Holly complained as she pulled up the accident reporting web site. She began to tap away at the keyboard. John pulled a chair next to her and began to answer the questions Holly asked him. She slid back and let John type in his statement.

"I'm sorry about this Holly." John used the two finger method for his keystrokes. "Where is the 'n'?" He asked with his fingers held above the letters. Holly pressed the key he searched for. "Thanks."

"You're killing me John!" Holly sighed as she continued to watch the painful method he used on the keyboard.

"What, got a hot date?"

"Very!!" The frustration of the day finally winding down and the antics of the EMT wore on her patience's. She pushed him to the side and continued to type the report. With a few more questions and blocks to complete, she rolled back, finished with the report. "Musha, can you call security and have them pull the surveillance video from the North entrance and the East garage?" The clerk nodded. She gave John a smack on the arm as she boosted her bag over on to her shoulder. "With that, I am out of here." She waved to her colleagues and headed to Tracey's house.

~

Large brown eyes danced across the surrounding taking in every aspect of the landscape. From the ocean front shops with recycled fishing nets served as decorative backdrops with multiple petrified sea creatures caught in its lines. Old lobster pots sat near door ways served as tables or door stops. Dogwood trees with their white and purple blossoms lined the streets. Along the walk ways, pedestrians took their time window shopping or catching up with a neighbor. With her head practically hanging out the window, Holly looked like a child ready to open gifts. Every nuance of life she absorbed. Kent County set on the shores of the bay. The village of Galena, Maryland along Sassafra River embodied the all American town, baseball and apple pie. The main street ran less than a half mile in front of all the businesses. Houses and churches created neighborhoods on the side streets as the small finger of the Chesapeake Bay ran parallel with the street. At the edge of the business center, a lift bridge raised and lowered as vessels requested release into the freedom of the larger body of water.

"Look!" Holly pointed towards the water as a two mast sailboat slipped along the water through the raised bridge. The bright polished railings and silver accents glistened in the sunshine.

"Do you sail?"

"It's been a long time. The only thing my mother and I had in common. She actually encouraged me to go to sailing camp."

"Did you go?" Tracey watched her girlfriend shake her head and wondered what other memory she was shaking away. A rare mention of Holly mother hung in the air for a moment. "To bad, I am sure you would've of had fun." The jeep slowly continued through town to a small dirt road close to the waterfront. "Maxie has a cabin cruiser. We can take that out if you're interested." Tracey studied the relaxed profile of the passenger. Holly looked like a child on Christmas morning waiting to open presents. She made a note, to bring the good doctor out to the shore more often.

"A power boat." Holly smirked. She could comment about Maxie's need to pilot a large sea craft to make up for some psychological need, but she refrained. Tracey's friend allowed them to use

her home for the long weekend. "It's not the same, but I bet you'd look sexy behind the wheel." An image of Tracey in bikini standing at the wheel caused her center to twitch. They needed to get to the house and soon. Holly bit her lower lip to clear the vision away.

"Driving my jeep doesn't do it for you?" The light teasing brought a slight blush to Holly's cheeks.

"It doesn't matter what you're doing Tracey. Just thinking about you does it for me." The teacher turned red as she shifted in her seat. Holly smiled knowing the playful banter charged the sexual energy in the car. She adjusted her rear in the seat as the feelings she tried to bury minutes ago surfaced. "It's beautiful out here." Holly's attention went to the children sitting bow of the sail boat slipping passed. "I never realized how nice it is on this side of the bridge."

"If I was Maxie, I'd live out here year round." Tracey placed her hand on Holly's bare thigh. Her fingers grazing the edge of her shorts and gave a squeeze.

"Why doesn't she?" Holly saw the flash of concern cross Tracey's features.

"That's Maxie's story to tell." When the bridge lowered for street traffic to continue, she glanced over at Holly and wondered if she spoke so freely about Maxie. On her first visit to Maxie's house, she fell in love with the quaint sea side town that seemed suspended in time. Free from big chain stores, and where generations of the same families owned and operated the butcher, the barber shop and the hardware store. Pedestrians lined the sidewalks enjoying a sunny afternoon in April. Drivers and passengers honked and waved in greeting. Not the normal belt way irritation that came over drivers as they navigated the highways around the city. Out here, her stress blew away like dandelion seeds in the breeze.

"How far is the house?" Holly turned to face Tracey. Her sunglasses flipped on the top of her head and a smile plastered on her face. "You really like it out here." The statement took Tracey by surprise. She didn't realize how easy she was to read.

"I'd move here in a heartbeat," Tracey confessed. "But my family and job are on the other side of the bay."

"Sounds like you've thought about it."

"I have." Tracey made a left turn which took them out of business and historical district. The road surface changed to a loose gravel mixture. Tracey slowed so the dust cloud behind them dissipated in the breeze. "At the corner, you can get a glimpse of the dock and lagoon. It's the gray house with the white shutters." Tracey rounded the path and slowed down for Holly to see the house.

"That one?" Holly's voice cracked as she pointed across the water. Tracey nodded. On the other side of the water, a large two plus story house sat bathed by sunlight. The Queen Anne style design with its steeply pitched roofs along with towers and spindles blended well with its dove

gray color and white accents. The large wrap around porch focused the water so anyone sitting on it had a gorgeous panoramic view. A number of chairs dotted the porch. "It's beautiful."

"Yes." Tracey sped up. "And it's ours for the weekend." Her smile radiated like the sun. The Jeep rolled through the sparse sea grass on to the property. A small carriage house served as garage, but Tracey pulled up next to house where a crushed shell driveway ended. They got out of the car and stepped towards the steep cliff overlooking the weathered wooden dock. Tucked behind the carriage house sat a boat house. Next to it on the lift, Maxie's Bayliner raised out of the water. The boat looked bigger out of the water than in. Tracey learned to drive it the summer she and Maxie dated. There were a few times, Maxie's drinking got out of hand and Tracey had to pilot the craft back to home.

"Wow!" Followed by a short whistle, escaped Holly's lips. "I need to get into the banking industry."

"Believe me I thought the same thing at first. This house has been in her family for generations. She took over ownership when her mom passed a few years ago." Tracey recalled Maxie break down when she found out about her mother's cancer. She passed within six weeks of being diagnosed. Maxie barely had time to accept the illness before she buried her only relative.

"How often is she here?"

"Usually every weekend between April and September. There's a care taker she hired on to help her mom. They still ready the house and boat each year. Mow the grass if it's needed. Things like that."

"I'd live here year round." Holly walked up behind Tracey she wrapped her arms around her waist and lay her hands on her stomach. Tracey felt her shirt rise and the warmth of Holly's hand on her skin. Holly rested her chin on Tracey's shoulder and tightened her hold. "Some day." Tracey turned her face and kissed Holly's jaw.

"It would be nice." She whispered wanting to remember this moment for a long time. Ingrain it into her subconscious so she could recall every emotion coursing through her body. The heat of Holly's body pressed against her. The quiet calm they both experienced as they looked over the rippling water. She pressed her rear into Holly's center and she heard the quick moan. "You okay?" Raising her hand, she traced the features of Holly's face letting her fingers linger over the fullness of her bottom lip. When Holly kissed the digits, Tracey felt the rapid pulsing rushing through her body and leaned harder into the strong body behind her.

"Tracey..." the growl in her ear, caused goose bumps to rise on her arms. As soft lips began to nip at her neck and the barest hint of tongue caught her lobe.

"Come on lover..." Tracey waved her hand beckoning Holly to follow her as she pulled away from the growing need. "I'll give you the grand tour after we unpack the car." Tracey walked to the back of the Jeep lifting the cooler out. Holly took it from her arms.

"I'll take the nickel tour first....the grand can wait!" Holly said as she waited for Tracey to unlock the side door into the kitchen area. Tracey grabbed the bags in the car and headed upstairs.

"How about heading up here as soon as..." Tracey laughed as she heard the refrigerator door open and the contents of the cooler being put away in a hurry. She set her bag on the chest at the foot of the queen sized bed in the guest room at the top of the stairs. She had only slept in the master bedroom. Maxie insisted they share the king sized bed. Nothing ever happened but Tracey knew Maxie wanted something to. She began to take out her clothes and place them in the Victorian chest when Holly appeared at the door. "That was rather quick."

"Don't worry, I plan on taking my time with you." Holly's quick move startled Tracey as she was lifted into Holly's arms and placed in the middle of the bed. The spring squeaked under her weight. Holly stood next to the bed. She stared at Tracey for a moment with a wild look in her eyes then ripped her shirt over her head and shed her shorts and underwear in one swift movement. "It's been a long week." She said as she got on the bed with Tracey.

"Are you looking to get lucky doctor?" Tracey teased as she propped her head up on a bent elbow.

"Absolutely."

She traced her finger along Holly's face and down her neck. The journey continued along her collar bone dipping in the hollow that was not as prevalent as it had been months ago. Holly needed to gain a few pounds and looked healthier. Tracey continued her ministrations letting her fingers graze the skin between Holly's breasts. Each rose colored nipple pushed into tight buds demanding Tracey's touch. She waited bypassing her breasts and moved to the muscles covering her abdomen. The musky scent of Holly's need filled her senses.

"Tracey.." The strain in Holly's voice filled the air. She lifted her hand to pull Tracey hand to her breast. Tracey slapped her away.

"Patience doctor." She purred against her shoulder. Raising her eyes to Holly's face, Tracey kissed the juncture where her neck met her shoulder. "Look at me Holly." Lids fluttered open and closed a few times in an effort to focus. Finally brown eyes steadied on hers. "I love you." Tracey's hand cupped the underside of her breast lifting the weight in her palm and letting the pad of her thumb graze against the nipple. Holly's hip moved off the mattress causing the bed to creak. Tracey kissed her lips and began to move down Holly's torso. She felt Holly's hands on the hem of her shirt then it was lifted over her head. The clasp of her bra was quickly undone joining her shirt on the floor. Her nipples instantly harden as they touched the heat of Holly's body. She felt Holly's hand cupped one and begin to lightly pinch the nipple. The action sent a sensation from her breast to her clitoris. If she wasn't careful, she would cum sooner than she wanted to. With her mouth, she took Holly's breast teasing, nipping and playing with the hard rosy nub. A hand on her waist band made quick work of the button and zipper of her shorts. She lifted her hips in an effort to help Holly remove the barriers between them. They both released a sigh as wet centers touched against thighs. When Tracey lowering her shoulders in between

quivering thighs, Holly spread her legs farther apart and grasped the chestnut hair with her fingers.

"Oh fuck..." Holly breathed out as Tracey's tongue touched the sensitive tissue. Alternating between her tongue and fingers, Tracey positioned her arms under Holly's leg and held her hips. Her hunger to satisfy the woman lying prone on the bed compelled her on. Balancing a fine line between her own pleasure and taking Holly over the proverbial edge, she wanted to savor the sweet nectar flowing freely from Holly's center. The pressure on her head increased as Holly lifted her hips to meet Tracey thrusting rhythm. She could feel the growing tightness as Holly's internal muscles began to clench around her fingers. Increasing the pace, Holly rode against her fingers while Tracey took the engorged clit between her lips. Sucking and milking the orgasm, trying to prolong the wave of ecstasy she rode. A primitive growl released from Holly's throat as her head fell back against the bed. Wave after wave ripples cascaded through Holly's body until she fell limp in exhaustion. Quiet murmurs filled the room as Tracey lapped the last of life juices from Holly's inner thighs. She slowly kissed her way up the doctor's body until she rested on her elbow staring down at the toothy grin covering Holly's face. Tracey let her lips touch Holly's pulling back slightly to see brown eyes hazy with passion.

"That was wonderful." The soft whisper followed a hand cupping her cheek. Tracey smirk brought a smile to Holly's face. "Proud of yourself are you?" The sleepy sound of Holly voice filled her ear.

"Of course, but I don't think a fist pump is warranted at this time." Tracey settled against Holly's recuperating body. "Maybe later." She wrapped Holly in her arms letting her head rest against her shoulder.

"Definitely later." Holly voice drifted as she fell asleep.

~

** Extreme apologies for those of you who have been following this story. I am not a fan of unfinished stories either. As J Brownell told me, don't push! On a happier note, I'm on vacation and heading to wilds of Canada for RR. I should be able to put all the pieces together in a nice neat pile by the time it's over. Take and thanks for sticking with me!

CB

CB

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~ With All of My Heart ~

by Catherine Burke

Author's Note: Here we are again....I thought I'd try this again.

Category: Orig. Uber Alt.

Rating: R / NC-17

Summary: Doctor Holly Graham was going through the motions. Taught to rely on no one but herself, she toiled through the medical school and settled into a position at one of Baltimore's top trauma centers. Tracy Campbell had looks, a career, a loving family and loyal friends. Yet, her love life was lacking. Pursued by many a suitor, she never found what she was looking for until a snowy night on a Maryland highway.

Comments/Disclaimer(s): This is an original story. The story and characters belong to me. They are not to be used or reproduced without my express written permission. I have posted an similar story on another site under the kato5568@aol.com email....This is me. These characters are mine and not swiped from someone else. It's good to know people are looking out for us!

This story depicts a love/sexual relationship between two consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it.

Special Thanks: To J Brownell for ideas suggestions and getting me to actually post this. Kerrie who was able to beta and get this story back to me a very short time. Living half way around the world does have its advantages. Time differences worked well for us. I'd like to give a shout to Powerbab, who actually writes about Cleveland where we live. We'll get together at the coffee shop soon.

I'm posting this in chapter blocks. Life gets in the way at times. Hope you enjoy.
You can reach me at burkcatherine@aol.com

Chapter 15

They ventured from the bedroom when hunger beckoned. Holly took charge of the grill and steaks, informing Tracey although she lacked cooking skills, she could tell when the meat was done. Tracey prepared a spinach salad with a light wine dressing and set a romantic table on the far side of the porch, knowing the evening sky was far too beautiful to waste. They ate, drank and talked until dusk. Just as the sun began to set, Tracey took Holly by the hand, leading her to the end of the dock. They sat on the weathered boards of the dock with their feet dangling off the end just inches from the water.

Holly sat behind Tracey, wrapping her arms securely around the teacher's waist and resting her chin on her shoulder. She placed small kisses on the side of her neck as she felt Tracey's hands cover hers. The western sky danced with streaks of reds and oranges. The water sparkled just as the day ended and night greeted them. The word heaven ran through Holly's head. If there was such a place where people found peace and beauty, she was sitting in the middle of it. She felt content for the first time in a long time. Being in Tracey's presence sent her emotions into a hyper-sensitive mode. It was as if the air buzzed around them. She nuzzled Tracey's hair, smelling the floral scented shampoo she used.

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Waiting until the last ray of sunlight disappeared, Tracey turned and kissed Holly. A warm soothing kiss, nothing hurried, like a promise of what was yet to come. Standing up, Tracey offered Holly a hand to her feet. There was no rush to climb the stairs to the bedroom. Slowly, they undressed each other, watching as the other stripped off their shirts and shorts.

Holly lifted the covers and let Tracey slip between the soft cotton sheets. Waiting until Tracey looked at her; she leaned over and kissed her. She slowly crawled on top of Tracey, careful not to put her full weight on her. They touched, breast to breast, belly to belly. She slid her thigh between Tracey's, gasping as Tracey pressed her lips to her a sensitive spot on her ear. There was no hurry, the night belonged to them.

~

Friday turned into a lazy morning for the couple. Holly woke in Tracey's arms just as the clock on the dresser glowed ten o'clock. Holly smiled at the memory of her name on Tracey's lips. She had taken the teacher to multiple peaks until they fell asleep sated. She snuggled against the warm breast her head rested on. Turning her head slightly, she was able to take the nipple into her mouth, feasting on the firm round mound once again. In a few moments, she felt Tracey move against her. Their naked bodies intertwined. Holly brought her thigh between Tracey's legs, pressing hard against her center. Tracey pushed against her thigh and flipped Holly on to her back. Her wet center painted her desire on Holly's muscular thigh. Holly knew they would climax quickly at this pace. She tried to slow the climax by shifting her position. Instead, Tracey straddled her hips, wanting more. Her legs were bent at the knees and she rode against Holly's center like a seasoned jockey. A muffled groan came from Tracey as Holly slipped two fingers inside her. Tracey lifted and lowered her sex on the fingers, trying to find the pinnacle of passion.

"More... When Holly added a third finger, the bed squeaked as Tracey bucked against her hand, banging the headboard against the wall. Holly watched in awe as Tracey thrust against her, harder and faster.

"That's it baby!" Tracey screamed as she threw her head back, lost in the moment. Her hands cupped her breasts, pinching the nipples and crying out. "Holly!" She collapsed on top of Holly's chest wearing a grin like the cat that ate the canary.

Holly slowly withdrew her fingers despite the groans of protest from the woman on top of her. She heard the bed squeak again and chuckled, wondering if there would be scratches on the hard wood floor beneath.

"Don't laugh at me." Tracey whined as she cuddled closer, kissing Holly's shoulder.

"Good morning to you too." Holly let her fingers run through the wild locks of Tracey's hair. "I wasn't laughing at you. I wish I could have this wake up call everyday." She let her hands run up and down Tracey's back. "I'd rarely hit the snooze button."

"You hit a button alright, but it definitely wasn't snooze." Tracey stretched like a cat waking from a nap. Her arms straight above her head and her back swayed as she unintentionally pressed against Holly's center. She smiled at the figure prone under her rear. "Come on, let's shower and see what trouble we can get into today." She leaned down and placed a love bite on Holly's neck before scrambling out of arm reach.

"Ouch!" Holly rubbed her neck as she scrambled out of bed, following Tracey into the bathroom.

~

Venturing into the small village, they spent a couple of hours browsing antique stores and walking along the water exploring the marina. Holly kept pointing out the sail boats with their sails billowing in the wind as they made their way out to sea. Tracey held her hand as they chatted while sightseeing. As they walked down the main street, Holly noted a lesbian couple outside the hardware store. She nudged Tracey and gestured towards the two women kissing goodbye in the middle of the parking lot.

"They look local." Tracey commented as she watched the blonde with the red smock walk back in the store.

"Did her uniform give it away that she works there?" Holly teased as she squeezed the hand in hers. The light jab to her ribs stopped the teasing from continuing. "I really like it out here. It's like a different world. No one's in a hurry. There aren't any sirens screaming in the air." Just as she finished her sentence, the siren on top of the Fire Station began to wail. The oversized garage doors lifted, revealing an ambulance and fire truck with all their lights blazing. The sharp toot of the truck's horn announced its departure from the depths of the garage. The ambulance followed the rig closely as they headed out of town towards the main highway. When she heard Tracey clear her throat, she tried to suppress her smile.

"Maybe you should ask for a million dollars." Her gray eyes twinkling in the sunshine, Tracey waited for Holly to answer.

Throwing her head back, Holly cupped a hand to the side of her mouth and screamed, "I want a million dollars!" She held her hands out as if the cash would fall like rain from the sky.

"Me too honey!" A driver who was stopped for the emergency vehicles hollered back. Tracey busted out laughing, practically falling to the ground in hysterics. Holly stood with her hands on her hips, waiting for Tracey to gather her composure.

"How about lunch? That seems more realistic." Holly watched the traffic pass by, wondering if they thought Tracey was having an attack of some kind. "Well, if I ever get a million bucks, I'm not sharing with you."

"Awhhh... don't be that way. It was funny." Tracey wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her close. "And you're cute when you blush." Holly leaned over and kissed the top of her head. Although she didn't voice it, she thought the guy's come back was hysterical. She'd never admit it to Tracey.

They ventured to a small bistro with an outside patio that overlooked the waterfront. The waitress set down some menus and gave them a warm smile.

"This is nice." Holly mentioned as she opened the menu.

They ate all the food they ordered, leaving nothing on the plates for the gulls to even think about. They thanked the waitress and walked towards the Jeep parked at the far end of the bridge.

"Do you want to head back since my money isn't showing up yet? Maybe we can go out on the boat for a while."

"Great idea. I can't wait to see what you look like in a bathing suit." Tracey whispered as she held tight to Holly's side. "And I want to continue what you started this morning."

"Don't even get me started with that, Ms. Campbell. You were just as guilty of occupying my time."

"Oh, and I wouldn't mind doing it again." She leaned over and kissed Holly's ear. "And again... and again." She nipped Holly's ear with her teeth.

"Shit..." Holly pushed her away. "Enough, or we're going to make a scene right here." Holly stepped away and began to walk backwards towards the car. "I doubt the locals would appreciate the visiting lesbians if we continue on this subject. Can I drive?"

"Sure." Tracey flipped the keys to her.

They headed back to Maxie's house, taking the back way off the main roads. Holly felt Tracey's hand on her leg and her mind drifted. For the first time in a long time, she felt relaxed. A romantic get away was just what she needed. Although the weekend had barely started, she hoped they would continue the closeness they had now. Holly glanced towards the water and saw a house with a For Sale by Owner sign in the front yard. She slowed the car and glanced back towards the house. "Did you see that house?"

"No." Tracey turned in the seat trying to gaze out the back window. "Pull over or turn around. The last thing we need is to end up in the emergency room."

"That would be interesting." Holly flashed a quick smile and pulled into the next drive way.

The red jeep reversed. The well weathered sign with a faded telephone number slumped across the high grass in the yard. The gravel and crushed seashell driveway curled towards the front of the white two story house with a large detached garage. Three double hung windows showcased the second floor as flagstone flower beds and walkway invited company towards the front door.

"Oh, it's beautiful." Tracey said as she took in the high peaks of the clapboard white and navy trim. The square cuts of gray flagstone ran across the front. On the porch sat well weathered Adirondack chairs which may have been white but faded to a dull gray.

"Wow, this is nice." Holly stopped the Jeep in front of one of the garage doors. "You want to look around?"

"Holly, are we looking for a house?" Tracey asked. The night of the party, they spoke briefly about living together, but never had an all out discussion regarding the subject.

"What harm will it do to look? Besides, it's cool." Holly leaned across the armrest and kissed her. "Come on, it will be adventurous." Holly unfolded her long legs as she exited the car. She leaned and gestured for Tracey to join her.

"Your definition of adventurous is trespassing on someone property? I don't see the adventure in that." Tracey mumbled under her breath as she left the security of the car. "There better not be anyone home." Holly was already on the porch peering through the front windows.

"Look at this place." She said as she shielded her forehead against the glass pane. Hardwood floors coated with a layer of dust on them appeared to be in good shape and ran through most of the main level. A large front room and kitchen were on one side of the home. "Let's go around back."

From the back yard, the opposite side of the lagoon sat. A twenty foot dock floated on the waves. There was a sleek glossy black painted sailboat moored at the end. The teak wood and silver adornments shone in the afternoon sun. The name of the boat, *Lady in Waiting*, was scrawled on the black stern in large white letters. Holly wondered if the property owner was the same person who owned the boat. She turned back to the house and went window to window, trying to get a better glimpse of the interior. Finding a large sliding glass door, she pressed her forehead against

the glass. She felt Tracey's body make contact next to her. The dark haired teacher mirrored her actions and looked into the home. The kitchen was large, with a breakfast bar and eating area.

"The kitchen is huge. Bigger than yours."

"It is. I love the yard, the porch. Oh, did you see?" Holly turned and pointed to the dock and the boat.

"A sail boat... humm. I think I've found a small vice of yours." Tracey turned back to the house.

"Do you like it?"

"The house?" At Holly's nod. "Oh course, it's beautiful."

"I'm going to call." Holly pulled out her phone and began to dial.

"Holly, we can't." Tracey heard the fear in her voice and watched as Holly disconnected the line.

"Why not? I just want to put some feelers out there? Are you scared?"

"It's too much, too soon." Tracey turned away. Scared, yes, she was de finitely scared. Holly said she wanted Tracey to live with her, but neither of them mentioned it again. Maybe Holly wanted to get information about the house and that was it. Tracey ran her hand along the window sill then turned to lean against the side of the house. Holly heard the hesitance in her voice and lifted her chin to look into the silver eyes of her lover.

"I just want to see how much it is. Not buy it. Hell, can you imagine the commute I'd have to Jessup?" She skimmed her lips across Tracey's, bringing a smile to the teacher's face. "God, you feel good." Holly said as she pressed her body into Tracey's.

"We can't." Tracey said as she threw back her head to allow Holly access to her neck and let her hands roam up and down Holly's back, then coming to rest on her hips. Holly pushed her up against the wall of the house and slid her thigh between Tracey's legs. Tracey put her hands around Holly's neck and pulled her closer. Bringing Holly's head down to her, she planted a full blown kiss on Holly's mouth, leaving the doctor breathless. With a finger, she pushed Holly an arm's length away before she uttered. "House! Now!" Tracey yelled as she scrambled off the back porch and raced to her car. Holly, hot on her heels, jumped into the passenger's seat just as Tracey put it in reverse and buzzed out the driveway.

A cloud of dust followed the Jeep down the gravel road as Tracey raced to the house. Holly's hand stroked her inner thigh. The five minute drive to the house seemed to take forever. The Jeep speed into driveway, Tracey slammed on the brakes.

"What the fuck!" Tracey's voice echoed off the interior of the car. In the driveway, Maxie's Land Rover sat parked crookedly near the boat house.

"Is that Maxie's car?" Holly asked as she shifted in her seat, leaning towards the front window to get a better look. "I thought..." Her statement left unfinished as their host stood on the porch with a large tumbler in her hand, waving at them. The contents of the cup spilled over the side and on to the porch.

"I can't believe it." She could hear the anger in Tracey's voice as the teacher's fingers wrapped tightly around the steering wheel. The Jeep continued and abruptly stopped at the side of the house and Tracey jumped out. She charged towards the porch, her back ramrod straight, her shoulders rigid and her hands flying in the air as she confronted Maxie. Holly took in the scene unfolding on the porch. She had witnessed this situation a number of times in the emergency room. No matter what Tracey said, Maxie would do what she wanted. Dealing with intoxicated individual challenged professionals, Tracey's approach to Maxie's state could quickly escalate the situation. Holly hoped the VP wasn't an angry drunk. When Maxie tripped trying to get closer to Tracey, Holly stepped from the car.

"You promised."

"Ahhh..." Maxie brought the palm of her hand up to her forehead like a V-8 commercial, except in her state, she smacked the crap out of herself. "Ouch..." She rubbed the spot she had just hit. "Tracey... hey baby. I'm here."

"Maxie, this is the weekend Holly and I were coming out here alone. We talked about it."

"Who?"

"Holly, my girlfriend."

"You're my girlfriend." The words slurred as Maxie tipped the cup towards her lips.

"God damn it Maxine! I'm not your girlfriend. I'm your friend and at this moment I'm questioning that." Tracey let her hand run through her hair, pushing the mass behind her ears. "This is the weekend you said I could use the house. Holly and I were supposed to have a weekend alone." Tracey reminded her. "Why did you do this?"

"That's this weekend?" She tilted her head and looked at Tracey. When Holly approached the women, Maxie's inebriation induced rant continued. "Who the fuck is that?" Her venomous remark was targeted at Holly.

"Hello Maxie." Holly said as she placed a hand on the small of Tracey's back trying to sooth her mood. Tracey placed a possessive arm around Holly's waist, drawing her close like a shield a warrior would carry into battle.

"You know Holly." The skewed look on Maxie's face conveyed she didn't. Tracey glanced at Holly for support. "You've been to her house. She's the doctor."

"Doctor..." Maxie laughed. "What's up Doc?" Her laughter continued until she saw the couple in an embrace. "You're supposed to be with me! Why don't you love me?" The glassy eyed woman leaned back against a porch column and slid to the wooden planks. Tracey hesitated before she stepped forward. She felt the reassuring touch of Holly urging her forward.

"Let's get you to the couch and take nap." Tracey knelt in front of her friend. With her fingers, she brushed an unruly lock of hair out of Maxie's eyes. "We'll talk about this later." Tracey helped Maxie to her feet, her eyes holding with Holly's as she led Maxie inside.

"Talk about what babe?" Maxie swayed until Tracey grabbed her around the waist to steady her.

"Holly?" Tracey called.

"Get her settled." Holly ran a hand through her hair. She questioned if Maxie had driven from the city drunk or if she started once she got to the house. She watched as the pair stumbled through the house to the sectional couch in front of the fireplace. Needing a little space, Holly walked over towards the black Range Rover. She knew Maxie had a good job and money. From the conversations she had with Tracey and the interactions she had with Maxie, something in her past still haunted her. In the Emergency Room, she treated people hurt by drunk drivers every day. She didn't want to knowingly let Maxie hurt anyone. The driver's door sat ajar and the keys dangled from the ignition. Sitting in the cup holder between the front seats, an empty fifth of Jim Beam Black rested. Lipstick the shade of Maxie's rimmed the lip of the bottle. She glanced back towards the house. Tracey unknowingly enabled her friend's behavior. She placed the bottle on top of the truck's roof, grabbed the keys from the column and shut the door. She carried the empty with her to show Tracey.

"She's asleep."

"She's passed out." Holly corrected and held up the bottle for inspection. "Is this normal for her?"

"No." Tracey stepped down on the steps. She wrapped her arms around her waist and leaned against the porch hand rail. "Something has to be bothering her. She's never this bad."

"Don't make excuses for her. She's lucky she didn't kill someone driving like that."

"Please understand." Tracey grumbled. Her mood completely ruined with Maxie's presence.

"Understand what? Your best friend is in love with you..." Holly's observation made Tracey frown. Holding her thoughts for a moment, Holly chose her words carefully. "She has a serious drinking problem Tracey. She needs help." She held up a hand to stop whatever retort Tracey was going to deliver. "She needs to admit her problem first. You can't do this for her. Believe me, I've seen it enough. She has to do it for herself." Holly walked up to where Tracey stood and placed a hand on her forearm. "You can support her. Be her friend, but don't make excuses for her behavior. She's an adult." Holly had experienced abusive drunks in the ER many times in the course of her career. Maxie didn't fit the typical mold. She was successful, with a career and money. And from the way Tracey defended her, the loyalty of her friends.

"She's got no one else."

"Support her." Holly repeated. She could see the tears forming in Tracey's eyes. "She has a strong connection with you. Stronger than I would prefer." Tracey placed her hands on Holly's face, bringing their lips together. The kiss was slow at first as Tracey savored every essence Holly had, tasting the moist texture of lips against one another, unbelievably soft, as a soft whisper escaped from Tracey. Holly opened her mouth, inviting Tracey to deepen the meeting. The lust filled need which drove them back to the house returned. Their mouths broke apart, yet their foreheads rested together. "Is that our first make-up kiss?"

Were we fighting?"

"Clearing the tension is more like it. If you kiss like that as a make up, I may start more fights with you."

"Watch it Graham, I throw a mean right hook." Tracey pulled away her eyes.

I don't plan on finding out. Let's take the boat for a ride and let Maxie rest." Holly held up the keys to the Toyota. "We can take these with us."

"Good idea." Tracey stepped to the grass and wrapped her arm around Holly's waist. "Just you and me." She trailed her finger down Holly's ribbed tank top, letting her hand come to rest on the waist band of her shorts. "Why don't you go change into your swim suit?" She tugged at the material. "Let me know if you need help."

"Right..." Holly said as she stepped past her. "We both know we'd never leave the room if you were helping me." < SPAN style="mso-spacerun: yes">

"That's why I'm being good and staying here."

~

The boat sped across the channel into the open water of the Chesapeake Bay. Tracey turned towards her passenger who stood with one hand on the frame of the front window and the other gripping the high cushioned seat. For the past hour, Tracey had played tour guide, showing Holly the ins and outs of the water ways. Spying the piece of land she searched for, Tracey eased back on the throttle. The Bayliner slowed as Tracey steered towards the small inlet.

"What's up?" Holly learned quickly to hang on to a part of the boat. Tracey thoroughly enjoyed piloting the twenty-two foot boat. Tracey pointed to the deserted sandy beach which seemed to stretch on for a mile.

"It's private for the association. Tomorrow, it will be packed. Today, it's all ours." Tracey let the engine idle as they entered shallow water. She taught Holly how to man the tow lines and anchor. When she nodded, Holly threw the heavy steel weight into the water. "Not shabby for a green horn!" Tracey teased as she let the blower run and placed the motor in neutral.

Holly leaned over the back of the boat surprised she could see the sand covered bottom. When Tracey shut off the motor, grabbed her beach bag and turned to Holly. "Ready to relax?"

"I'm more relaxed than I've been in months."

"Humm...I seem to remember you lying prone in a very relaxed position." Tracey recalled Holly turning to jelly and collapsing on the mattress hours before. The blush rising in Holly's cheeks made her center throb. No one had ever enticed such a response.

"Behave, or I will not be responsible for my actions." Holly slipped over the side. On her tall frame the water came to her waist. "Ohh!"

"Cold?"

"A little." Holly gestured for Tracey to hand her the bag. She lifted the bag high above her head and walked towards the shore. Tracey splashed into the water.

"Jesus..." Tracey hissed as her feet hit the cold water. Holly laughed as she reached the beach, watching Tracey quickly wade through the water. "That's cold."

"Yeah, but it's worth it." Tracey gestured towards the white sandy beach. "I'll rub lotion on you!" The raised eyebrows and the crooked grin had Holly pulling the large beach towels out of the bag and onto the sand. Settling her stomach on the surface of the beach towel, she handed the lotion bottle to Tracey.

Tracey took the lotion and bit her lip as she watched Holly's hands undo the top of her suit, holding the tiniest piece of material to her chest, and lay on the towel. "Sure." Tracey watched as Holly settled on the towel, her heart pounded against her chest as she took in the expanse of exposed skin begging for her touch. Tracey knelt on her towel next to Holly's. She looked up at the afternoon sun. If Holly wasn't careful, she'd burn.

"Are you comfortable?" Tracey heard the soft moan as her answer. She opened the bottle and placed some of the white substance on her hands. "It's a little cool to the touch." =2 0The murmur of a response was buried in the towel.

"You shouldn't have kept me up all night. I need to sleep." Holly shifted her hips. Her arms at her side, she waited for Tracey's weight to settle on her. When it didn't come, she let out a huff. "You're killing me."

"I'm not. Besides, you said you needed rest." Tracey settled on her towel. She lay on her back and placed a pair of sunglasses over her eyes. She stole a glance at Holly who had fallen asleep. "Get some rest, you're going to need it." Tracey smiled as she rubbed sun lotion on her arms and face. Maxie be damned, she was going to have a great weekend with Holly.

~

Chapter 16

Tracey tapped the toe of her Tommy Choo shoe on the floor of the banquet hall. In a moment of insanity, she had volunteered to chaperone the senior prom. Her reasons at the time were to get in the good graces of the budget committee, with the hopes of uniform approval. Her team really needed new uniforms for next season. When Mr. Holmes, the principal, asked for commitments from the staff for the May prom, Tracey raised her hand. Tonight, she regretted her decision. If she wanted to get dressed up and go out for a night on the town, she'd rather be with Holly than the senior students of Bayview High School. Her dress was one she had worn three years ago as bridesmaid for her college roommate. The emerald colored dress, altered from its original length, hung at the knee. For once, a bridal dress could actually be hemmed and worn for a special occasion. There was no way she was throwing three hundred dollars away on a dress she wore only once. The married couple was already heading to divorce court by the time Tracey found an alternative use for the dress. A smile crept on to her face as she recalled Holly's face when she walked into the ER earlier this evening.

The doctor was chatting with members of her staff when the dark skinned man who ran the admissions desk lifted his head as Tracey entered the unit. His bright white teeth shone in a smile as he nodded his approval to the teacher. Holly quit speaking when she realized her staff was preoccupied with something or some one behind her.

Tracey watched as the blonde haired doctor slowly turned to face her. The look on Holly's face went from total confusion to that of desire. Tracey walked up to the doctor and wrapped her arms around her neck. The light amount of pressure to the back of Holly's neck allowed their lips to meet. Tracey stood on her tip toes, running her fingers through the length of hair on the back of Holly's head.

"God... you're stunning." Holly said as soon as she lifted her lips from Tracey's. Their foreheads still touched as Tracey played with the hair at her collar. "I wish I was going with." Holly touched her lips to Tracey's again.

"We have a date afterwards, remember that Dr. Hot Stuff." Tracey let her fingers linger along Holly's shoulders and down her arms to her hands. With a quick squeeze, she turned away and headed back out the ambulance bay doors. "I just wanted to say hello." She gave Sandra a wink then turned to blow a kiss to Holly.

"I remember." Holly called. She stood there, stunned at the brazen actions of the teacher.

"Come on Dr. Hot Stuff, you've got a patient." Sandra shoved a file at Holly. The doctor grabbed it, but her attention was still on the retreating figure in the green dress. "I like her. Don't screw it up Doc."

"I do too." Holly said as she opened the file to attend to the next patient.

Tracey laughed all the way to the car. She would love to see how Holly was handling being totally groped in the middle of the ER. She knew the staff knew of Holly's relationship with her,

but you never can tell. Now standing at the entrance way greeting her students, Tracey looked at her watch, six and a half hours to go until she would find herself in Holly's arms for the night.

Tracey glanced towards the DJ who was spinning the worst music of any event she had ever been subjected to. She thought the Bar Mitzvah for her neighbor's son Barry had the most torturous music. At least that had been in Hebrew. Tracey was proud of her players. Zoey had shown up with her friend Malcolm. She tried not to have a bias towards Michelle, but ever since the incident at the grocery store, Tracey steered clear of her former player. She brushed the incident off. Holly became upset about the student questioning her private life. When Holly mentioned Michelle's appearance at the ER again, Tracey wondered if the student needed assistance or counseling. She wasn't going to worry about Michelle, since the senior never approached her directly. The senior would be on her way to college soon. Tracey wanted to concentrate all of her free time on her relationship with Holly.

Since returning from their get away weekend, they hadn't spent a lot of time together. The newest crop of interns starting at Jessup had Holly training and covering their orientation to the field of Emergency Medicine. Her pager went off constantly. Interns with questions about treatment, medications, schedules and whatever else came up bombarded the Attending at every hour of the day. Holly never complained. She'd rather them ask the questions than misdiagnose or exacerbate a patient's health.

Tracey stood knee deep in wrapping up the school year and dealing with senior angst. Some of these kids would be off to college and away from home for the first time. Her Advanced Biology class, which consisted of mostly seniors, was having trouble passing the class. If they failed, they didn't graduate. Tracey knew most of her students had the potential to pass the class, but senioritis was very contagious. If a few students didn't straighten out, they would be looking at summer school.

The music stopped for a moment and the DJ announced dinner service was beginning. Tracey and the other members of the faculty chaperones sat at the table assigned to them. Tracey had worked with a number of them for years. Among the group sat Gerald Washington, the Government and Economics teacher and his wife, Lucille, who worked with Maxie at the bank. When Lucille took the seat next to Tracey, she knew the conversation would turn towards Maxie eventually.

"How was your spring break? Do anything exciting?" Her colleague's spouse asked.

"I spent a couple of days at the shore."

"At Maxie's house?" At Tracey's nod, Lucille continued, her voice filled with excitement. "I love that place. It's such a waste she only uses it on the weekends. Was Maxie with you?"

"You could say that. She was there for a couple of days." Tracey thought back to the confrontation she had with Maxie, once she sobered up. She and Holly had just returned from their afternoon out on the water.

Tracey brought the Bayliner up to one of the dock's pilings. The sound of the powerful inboard-outboard motor approaching then slowing in the lagoon had Maxie waiting on the=2 Ostrip of grass between the house and water.

"Ummm..." Holly started.

"Why don't you take a shower and I'll start dinner. I want to talk with Max." Tracey maneuvered the boat in the water so its plastic fenders gently bumped against the protective covering on the dock. "Holly, grab that pole." The doctor reached out and grabbed the protruding metal of the dock.

Maxie hurried along the dock to assist with the boat's docking. She took hold of the rope at the front of the boat and secured it to a cleat on the boards. She had her hand against her forehead to block out the evening sun. She glanced at Holly, but focused her attention on Tracey. The scowl on the teacher's face had Maxie wondering if there was something wrong with the boat.

"Nice landing. You okay?" Maxie held out her hand to assist Tracey from the craft. Holly climbed onto the dock without any acknowledgement from the owner.

"Holly." Tracey called to the tall figure who had just reached the shore. "I may join you." The blush that colored her face made Tracey smile. The smile faded as soon as she turned her attention to Maxie. She disregarded the offered hand and climbed out of the boat.

"Well, hello to you too." Maxie crossed her arms over her chest and stood watching Tracey secure the boat to the dock. "You know you could at least give me a greeting, after all it is my house and my boat."

"Funny Maxine, we exchanged pleasantries a few hours ago." The strange look that passed over the banker's face let Tracey know she had no memory of their earlier exchange. "When did you get here?"

"Not that long ago." Maxie shrugged her shoulders.

"Really, try six hours ago. Holly and I came back from lunch and you were here drunk as a skunk."

"Yeah right. Tracey I just got here."

"How Maxie?"

"I drove."

"Where are your keys?" Tracey challenged. When Maxie felt her pockets, Tracey knew she didn't know where they were.

"On the counter probably, or in the Rover."

"I have your keys." Tracey held up the key chain that belonged to her friend. "I took them so you didn't go for another drive."

Tracey turned to face her friend, her hands planted on her hips. "What is going on with you?"

"Nothing." Maxie glanced towards the house when the screen door banged behind Holly.

"You said I could use the house this weekend." Tracey waited for her words to sink in.

"Remember, I wanted to have a romantic weekend with Holly. You said I could use the house and the boat. No one would bother us."

"No one is bothering you." Maxie answered.

"Oh yeah!" Tracey walked pass her to the shore. "You're here."

"It's my house."

"I know that." Tracey pinched the bridge of her nose, a habit she had when things weren't.

"How do you think it makes me feel when you're drunk and declaring your love for me in front of my girlfriend?" Tracey waited. "I'll tell you how it feels. It feels like you and I need to get a few things straight."

"Straight... yeah right." Maxie laughed.

"Go ahead and laugh. You drove here smashed off your ass. You could have hurt someone." When Maxie smirked at her, Tracey continued. "You were falling down and slurring. Gee Maxine, I don't know why I won't go out with you." Tracey watched as Maxie's jaw tightened and her smile disappeared. "I will not be your girlfriend ever ever again." Tracey pushed a finger into Maxie's shoulder. "Got it."

"You're being over dramatic." Maxie backed up a step.

"Listen to me. Either you leave or we will. I had very specific plans with Holly, which included as much sex as possible."

"Jesus, Tracey what is it with you and this doctor? Can't you see she's no good for you?"

"Are you kidding? Holly is the best thing that has ever happened to me. She is sweet, caring, and she makes me laugh." Tracey regarded the banker who just stared at her. "I'm in love with her."

"Does she love you?" Maxie's question made Tracey pause. The teacher knew Holly had never confessed her feelings. She knew there was an attraction but she wasn't about to let Maxie know the internal battle between her heart and her head.

"Are you leaving or are we?"

"Can't we all stay here?"

"You agreed that I could use the house. I told you I'd rent a place so we could be by ourselves."

"You don't need to rent a place. Jesus, you don't make that much money to go wasting it on her.E2

"It's not a waste!" Her finances were not a concern of Maxie's. "Again, we wanted to be by ourselves." Tracey brushed past the banker and headed into the house.

Holly stood at the bottom of the steps. Tracey wondered if she heard the question Maxie asked her. "Get packed, we're going to find somewhere else to stay." Tracey walked towards the phone hanging on the kitchen wall. She pulled out the yellow pages and began to look for accommodations. With each page she flipped, she cursed quietly. When she went to pick up the receiver, she looked at Holly. Holly gestured towards Maxie who appeared to be crying.

"I'm going to take a shower. Tracey, let me know what you've decided." Holly went to Tracey's side and kissed her temple. "Talk to her. She's confused and hurting. Just try for me."

Holly went up the wooden staircase to the second floor. Tracey placed the phone back in the cradle. "You know everywhere out here is booked solid for the weekend."

"Tracey, can't you stay?"

"We're going to stay. I just wish you had stuck by your promise." Tracey lowered her head. She started towards the steps. "I'll be down in a bit to start dinner."

"I can..."

"No, Maxie, I will cook. I don't want you to do anything for us." Tracey grabbed the hand rail and started up the steps. Half way up she turned to Maxie. "I don't understand why you do the things you do sometimes Maxie. I wanted to let you know you've hurt me for the last time." Tracey went upstairs and found comfort in Holly's arms. For the remainder of the weekend, they avoided Maxie. The banker proceeded to get inebriated each day until they left.

Shaking her head slightly, Tracey returned to the present and the question Lucille posed. "Sorry, I was thinking about something else. Can you repeat your question?"

"Have you seen Maxine lately?" Lucille folded her linen napkin on her lap. Gerald huffed out a breath and gave his wife a stern look.

"It's been a few weeks. We had a disagreement and haven't spoken since." Tracey refused Maxie's calls and ignored her when she knocked on her apartment door. Even Piper asked what was going on between her mutual friends. Tracey replied with Maxie's need to grow up.

"She's been missing work. I hope everything is alright." Lucille commented as the server placed her dinner on the table.

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"I'm sure she's fine." Tracey wondered if Maxie found solace at the bottle of a whiskey bottle. "Maxie wouldn't tell anyone if it wasn't."

Hours later when one of her co-workers mentioned the words "last dance" every bone in Tracey's feet rejoiced. The shoes she borrowed from her mother were fashionable not practical.

"Dance with me." Tracey's head shot towards the voice next to her. Michelle Stanley stood holding her hand out to the teacher. Tracey shook her head wondering if she had heard the student correctly. "Dance with me, Tracey." The student requested again.

"Michelle," Tracey started calmly but heard the screaming in her head to yell at this kid and get a reality check. "You are a student, I'm a teacher. It is highly inappropriate." Tracey heard the first bars of Whitney Houston's Saving All My Love. "Besides, this is a slow song." Tracey tried to make light of the awkward situation.

"You're a lesbian. You've danced with women before. Dance with me." Michelle demanded as she placed her hand on Tracey's forearm. Tracey's eyes shot towards Zoey and Malcolm, wondering if the students had broken their promise.

"No." Tracey's forceful rejection caught the attention of the nearby crowd. Tracey took a few steps backwards and into Mr. Holmes. "I'm not sure what you're referring to Michelle, but I think you'd have a much better chance of finding a dance partner amongst your peers." Tracey placed Mr. Holmes between herself and Michelle.

"Come on coach, I was just joking. Lighten up." The former center smiled sweetly and called to a passing boy.

"What was that all about Ms. Campbell?" Mr. Holmes took in her pale face and shocked expression.

"I'm not quite sure what to make of it myself." Tracey's hand had a vice-like grip on the edge of the table. "When I figure it out, I'll let you know." Tracey put a hand to her face. She was burning up. "I'm not feeling well. Do you mind if I call it a night?" Tracey asked as she opened her clutch purse searching for her keys.

"Not at all Tracey. I hope you feel better." The principal said as he watched one of his favorite employees flee the prom.

~

Holly waited impatiently in her living room. The flicking of the candle light danced in the air, making odd shadows on the walls. Holly had run around the house trying to get everything perfect. Since the strange weekend at the shore, she felt as if a gap was growing with Tracey. She could blame the crop of new residents she was overseeing. The medical board for the Emergency Room had yet to name the Chief Resident for the department. Once that was settled, Holly's responsibility would shift to them. As part of the board, she was balancing meetings, students, staff, patients, and her personal life. The neglect fell mostly on Tracey. Tonight, she planned on rectifying the situation.

Rushing home from work an hour ago, she immediately set the dozen pink roses in a vase on the coffee table and went through the house placing dozens of white candles. Once in place, she headed upstairs to shower and change before Tracey came home. The prom always seemed to be a traditional night of passage for most people. Holly never understood this concept, since she had never attended any type of formal dance while in school. She wanted to set the mood as if she and Tracey actually attended the prom tonight. Next year, she would ask Tracey to attend the HRC gala, instead of going as Greg and Mark's third wheel date.

Freshly showered, Holly dressed in a pair of brush black slacks, a white tuxedo shirt with pearl inlaid shirt studs. The matching jacket hung on the back of the dining room chair. The only thing missing was Tracey. The emerald green dress Tracey wore knocked Holly's socks off. She stood staring at Tracey's retreating figure long enough for her staff to be concerned. If Rollins hadn't smacked her in the arm, she would have stood there all night burning the memory of the teacher's backside in her mind.

Distracted for five minutes, she went a round the house lighting the candles. The plan called for Holly to surprise Tracey at the kitchen door dressed in the tuxedo with a rose. Diligently, she listened for the Jeep to make its way down the back drive and for the door to slam shut. She didn't know how it happened, but when she turned around from fixing the stereo, Tracey stood in the living room, basked in candle light.

"Shit." Holly pouted. Her plan ruined.

"Well good evening to you too." Tracey eyed Holly's outfit, then the candles in the room. "Are you expecting company?"

"I wanted to surprise you." Holly stood in front of Tracey, her head lowered. Tracey took her hand and lifted the doctor's chin to gaze in her soulful brown eyes.

"I'm surprised." Tracey's breath caught when she walked into the house. Her car refused to start and she was able to catch a ride with the Washingtons, since they were heading to Holly's side of town. The candle-filled room with the romantic music playing softly through the speakers and the sight of Holly in the tuxedo made her heart pound against her chest. The scrubs did not do the doctor's figure justice. "You look sharp." Tracey lifted an eyebrow as Holly ran her hand through her hair in frustration.

"I wanted to greet you at the door." Holly lifted a hand to cup Tracey's cheek. Her thumb skimmed across her skin lightly. "I can't seem to do anything right lately."

"What are you talking about?" Tracey leaned into the warmth of Holly's hand. "You haven't done anything wrong."

"It's just me." Holly pulled her hand away. She knew her insecurities were starting to rear their ugly heads. With Pam, the distance between them started slowly. Holly failed to recognize it until it was too late to do anything about it. With Tracey, she felt like she was losing the teacher's interest. "Hi." Holly leaned for a small kiss. "You look beautiful tonight."

"Holly, greet me at the door." Tracey gave her a small kiss then walked out the back door.

Knocking softly, Tracey expected the door to open immediately. Concerned when Holly didn't answer, she knocked again. The door opened hastily, Holly stood there looking dashing, her tuxedo jacket on, a single rose in her hand and Come on Get Higher by Matt Nathanson playing in the background. Her eyes looking only at Tracey, she smiled and handed her the rose.

"I never got to go to my prom. I thought you'd like to fill that void." Holly held a hand out. Tracey placed her fingers with Holly's, wondering how she got so lucky.

"Best offer I've had all night." Tracey said as she wrapped her arms around Holly's waist and pulled her in for a hug. Resting her head on Holly's shoulder for a moment, Tracey lifted her head and brought their lips together. Her hands roamed from Holly's waist, up her back and into her hair. The intensity of their kiss increased. Mouths opened as nips were exchanged.

"You're beautiful." Holly pulled away but grabbed one of Tracey's hands. She backed up into the living room. "That first night you came over, we danced in my living room."

"I remember." Tracey felt the blush in her cheeks. That cold January night seemed a life time ago. She couldn't imagine her life without Holly in it. The relationship started in such a strange way. She wouldn't change it for anything.

"Would you like to do that again?" Holly's quiet question pulled Tracey from her thoughts.

"Depends..." Tracey looked around the house that felt more like her home than her apartment. She reached out to touch Holly's waist. Gone was that timid stranger she had met months ago. Instead, she looked into the eyes of her lover, her other half, the woman who held her heart.

"On?"

"Do I get to spend the night?" Tracey squeezed Holly's hand. She saw the concerned look on Holly's face take on a mischievous quality.

"You could have spent the night here the first time." Holly spun her around in a dance move, bringing their bodies in full contact. "I would like you to spend the night. I heard it's a tradition to get lucky on prom night."

"You'll be the first one to score with me on prom night." Tracey went into the embrace of Holly's arms. The music played just like that night months ago.

"Did you like your date?"

"Let's just , compared to Nick Carson, you're batting a thousand." Holly laughed and lowered her head to Tracey's shoulder. They danced in a small circle between her couch and the television.

Tracey ran her hands under the tuxedo jacket and lifted it from Holly's frame. With a free hand, she threw it on to the back of the couch. "Better." She said as she ran her hands across Holly's shoulders and down her back. Pulling the white material from the waistband of Holly's pants, she groaned as her hands touched the warm flesh of Holly's back.

"You don't like the jacket?"

"I do, but I like you out of it more." Tracey let her hands wander across the planes of Holly's back. Holly lifted her head and began to place kisses on Tracey's neck, gradually making her way to her ear. She nipped at the lobe taking it between her teeth until Tracey started to squirm.

"This dress had me in a daze for a while." Holly confessed as she nuzzled her face against Tracey's hair.

"Is that right, Dr. Hot Stuff?" Tracey teased as she felt Holly's hand at the zipper between her shoulder blades.

"Yes..." The moaned word echoed in Tracey's head, as Holly lowered the zipper of her dress, letting the material gradually pool at her feet. "I've wanted to do that all night." Holly stepped back to inspect the matching burgundy lace bra and panties Tracey wore under the dress.

"Wow... I hope it was me you had in mind when you picked those out." Holly let her finger examine the silky material covering Tracey's breasts. Playing with her nipple, she circled her finger around the nub through the soft material.

"If you're a tall gorgeous doctor then..." Holly placed her lips where her finger had just been.

"Oh!" The moan escaped from Tracey as Holly pulled the nipple into her mouth letting her tongue circle the material.

"Do you like that?" Holly reached for the clasp between Tracey's breasts to free them from the constraining garment. "I love your breasts." Holly cupped one, then the other. Her lips and tongue covered the expanse of Tracey's torso.

"Why is it you always have more clothes on than I do?" Tracey began to work the studs holding Holly's shirt closed. Frustrated, she pulled the white shirt over Holly's head and began to undo her slacks.

Holly traced her finger along Tracey's jaw line and then her lips. She quickly replaced her finger with her lips. The kiss started slowly. Sweetness was savored as lips parted and tongues met. Urgency was felt as Tracey pulled Holly closer to her. Holly wanted to feel every part of Tracey's flesh as her hands moved from her hair down her side and up her back. She could feel their breasts pressing together. She wanted to feel Tracey's skin against her own.

"You feel so good." Tracey moaned as they continued to kiss. Holly's hand stroked her breast until the pink nipple stood rigid from contact. Her lips moved over Tracey's neck and nuzzled her ear. Holly stopped to look at Tracey. Her breathing was heavy and her eyes filled with excitement. She stared back at Holly with such intensity. "I've been thinking about you all night." Holly's knee pushed between her thighs.

"I want you." Tracey moved against Holly's knee. She slipped Holly's bra straps off her shoulders and began to lick and kiss her breasts. She captured one in her mouth and began to suckle on it. Her tongue flicked over the peak and she pushed down on Holly's hips, pulling her closer. A moan escaped Holly's lips as Tracey's pushed up towards her.

"Come with me." Holly whispered against her lips. She pulled Tracey by the hands.

They continued to kiss as they made their way towards the bedroom until Tracey pushed Holly up against the wall of the living room, capturing her hands above her head. She placed hungry kisses on her breast and her neck and recaptured her lips. She leaned into Holly's crotch, with her free hand pulling the black slacks to the floor. Holly let out a groan as Tracey's fingers slid across her wetness. Tracey released her hands and Holly placed them on her shoulders for support. Their mouths met again. Kisses were filled with desire and intensity. Tracey's fingers continued to tease and caress her, coming so close to the place Holly wanted them. Raising her hips, Holly tried to move so Tracey would ease her suffering. Tracey's lips left hers as she trailed kisses down her neck, across her navel and stopped between her thighs. Tracey knelt in front of her, kissing and caressing Holly with her lips and tongue. Lapping the flowing nectar from Holly's center, Tracey felt like a purring kitten. The pleasure of tasting Holly's essence tantalized her tongue. Holly fisted a handful of her hair as Tracey's tongue grazed her clit. Holly leaned against the wall, hoping she could continue to stand as Tracey's mouth worked its magic. Her body began to throb and convulse as Tracey's mouth and fingers worked her into frenzy. Holly's entire body rocked.

Tracey could feel the growing tightness as Holly's internal muscles began to clench around her fingers. Increasing the pace, Holly rode against her fingers while Tracey took the engorged clit between her lips, sucking and milking the orgasm, trying to prolong the wave of ecstasy she rode.

"Oh my God!!" Holly yelled as her hands pulled Tracey's head closer to her. Holly felt the sensation shake her. "Tracey!! Tracey!!" She called her name out. Holly fell to the floor,

pushing Tracey to the carpet. Hovering over Tracey, Holly kissed her, tasting her passion on her lover's lips.

Holly wanted to touch her. She pulled at Tracey's underwear and threw them to the side. Her hand felt the sweetness of Tracey womanhood, velvety smooth and wet, so wet. Holly's kisses intensified their feelings. Tracey clung to her as they moved together on the floor. She arched as her center tightened around Holly's fingers. Holly's thumb found her clit and began to caress her there. Tracey vibrated against her finger with each touch.

"You feel so good." Holly whispered with heavy passion. She barely recognized her own voice. She started down at Tracey's flushed face. Tracey trembled again, and a gasp escaped her lips. "I can't stop touching you."

"I don't want you to."

Holly shifted her weight and wrapped Tracey in her arms. They lay on the floor touching each other lightly. "Are you okay?"

"I think I could use another word to describe how I feel." Tracey smile widened. "Wow, would be one. Intense is another. Satisfied... happy." She looked around the room. "We never made it to the bed."

"Are you going to blame me for that? " Holly joked. She placed a hand on Tracey's cheek. "Your eyes are my weak point. I feel like you can see inside me."

"My eyes huh..." Tracey said as she rolled on top of Holly and stared down at her. Her hair was pushed to the side and framed her face.

"Yes, I lost it. One look and I was duh... duh." Holly teased her.

"You liar. You were all calm cool Dr. Hot Stuff. I was the one freaking out." Tracey touched her face. "So you like my eyes."

"I like you." Holly said, "Very much and it was much more than just okay." She closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Chapter 17

Humming along with the song playing on the radio, Holly pulled her Honda into the parking lot of Bayview High School. The blue skies above danced with fluffy white clouds. The warm May afternoon had the golf courses filled with business men ducking out of work early. According to Tracey, the kids were chomping at the bit for summer break. Holly drove around the parking lot looking for a visitor parking spot. Tracey's car had broken down the night of the prom and still sat in the shop. Frank dropped his daughter off in the morning and Holly accepted the task of picking the teacher up in the afternoon. Recalling her first time at the school, Holly came to

watch Tracey coach her injury ridden team. Although the team didn't fare well, the time she spent with the coach afterwards served as a foundation of their current relationship.

Exiting her car, Holly straightened her suit jacket. She had come from a department meeting. The decision to name the Chief Resident had been narrowed down to Lily Holt and Serge Phelps, both fourth year Residents at Jessup. Either selection Holly approved of, although Serge's demeanor with the other residents and patients appealed to her softer side. The young French Canadian learned conversational English quickly when he began rounds. Holly thought it amusing he drank milk instead of coffee and called his mother twice a week. Lily's strength of medical knowledge and diagnoses enchanted some of the staff. Her clinical approach to treating patients lacked emotionally.

Acknowledging the school's posted sign for visitors to check in, Holly went into the main office. The white haired woman behind the desk looked up from her computer to greet her.

"Good Afternoon." The woman stood up. Between her hair and height, the employee reminded her of the actress Betty White. "How can I help you?"

"Hello." Holly picked up the pen attached to the clipboard. "I'm here to see Tracey Campbell. She's having..."

"Car troubles. You must be Dr. Graham." Holly was relieved that she didn't refer to her at Dr. Hot Stuff, as the staff at Jessup would. "I am. Miss?"

"Mrs. Denton, I'm the school's administrator. I believe Ms. Campbell is finishing up graduation practice in the auditorium. I can have one of the student aides show you the way."

"I think I was supposed to meet her in her office."

"The dungeon." Holly's eyebrows quirked up at the comment. "Oh, her office is in the lower section of the girls' locker room, with no windows. I call it the dungeon because it doesn't have windows. No natural light." She quickly explained. "I'll get one of the students to show you the way."

"Hey Dr. Graham." Michelle Stanley greeted her as soon as she walked into the office. "Hello Mrs. Denton, love your pin." The older woman fingered the pin on her blouse and smiled at the student. "Thank you Michelle. It was a gift from my granddaughter."

"Are you looking for Coach Campbell?" Michelle asked Holly as she stepped closer to the doctor.

"Michelle, can you take Dr. Graham to the auditorium?" Holly went to voice an objection but the look of relief on Mrs. Denton's face halted her concerns.

"No problem. Dr. Graham, long time no see." Michelle said with a wink and a laugh as she held open the door for Holly.

"Miss Stanley, it seems to be coming a habit running into you. Literally." Holly thought back to the day she smashed into the teenager outside the ambulance bay. "You're lucky you got me." The teenager walked backwards, staring at her. Michelle looked around at her peers for a moment then turned to face Holly. "People can get lost in these halls."

Holly used every resource she had to refrain from berating the student for her behavior at the prom. Tracey thought it was a joke and the teen wanted attention. Holly wondered why this student seemed to show up around one of them all the time.

"How's your leg?"

"Hurts sometimes, usually when it's cold outside." Holly noticed a slight hitch in the teen's gait. No one else would notice but Holly did.

"You still have a slight limp. Are you going to Physical Therapy?"

"Once every two weeks." The teen replied as they rounded another corner and continued to walk into areas of the building Holly had never been to before. "What I'd really like is for someone to massage it. You know, one of those really deep, curl your toes massages."

"Are you sure she's here?" Holly wanted to steer away from any conversation involving massages with the teenager. Feeling a bit uneasy, Holly commented. "I should have checked her office. She said she'd be in the office."

"Are you looking for Coach Campbell?" A passing student asked the pair. Holly nodded at the student's passing by in the main hallway. "She's in the auditorium." The young man pointed down the hallway towards the back of the building.

"They were practicing a run through for graduation." Michelle explained as they turned down another hallway. Holly noticed the number of students in the halls began to dissipate. "I was just down here five minutes ago." Michelle said.

"It seems like we've been walking for at least ten." Holly looked at the empty classrooms and the lack of students and teachers. A bit of relief came over her when she recognized the student walking towards them, Zoey, the small blonde player.

"Hi Dr. Graham." The blonde greeted her. The angry look which passed between the students was not missed by Holly. There was no love lost between the teens. "Michelle, where are you going?" Zoey turned around questioning her classmate.

"Mind your own business Zoey." Michelle snapped.

"There's no need to be like that." Holly said as Michelle quickly looked her way and flashed a bright smile.

"She's jealous of me." Michelle flipped her long brown hair over her shoulder. "She thinks she's getting athlete of the year. There is no way Coach would go for her."

"I know Tra..Coach pretty well, I'm sure she'll select who is the best athlete." An eerie feeling came over Holly at that moment. Goosebumps rose on her forearms and she rubbed them away.

Michelle reached the end of the hallway and reached out to open a large blue double door. Rows of flood lights lit the stage area. Michelle looped her arm in Holly's and began to escort her towards the stage.

"I can't wait to graduate. Finally, I will be considered an adult and to do what I really want to do." She declared as her grip tightened on Holly's arm.

"What do you want to do?" Holly asked as she disengaged her arm from the teen's. Michelle stepped in front of her and headed towards the raised stage. Just as they reached the center, Michelle spun around quickly to face Holly. Her face showed the anger Holly had seen at the hospital.

"You're with Coach, aren't you?" Her question resonated with spite. She reached her hand out to touch Holly, running her fingers along Holly's forearm.

"What?" Holly was caught off guard by the abrupt actions and question.

"You and Coach Campbell..Tracy. You're together?" Michelle's fingers began to slide up to the lapels on Holly's blazer. "You like women, don't you?"

The hair on the back of Holly's neck stood up as she stepped back from the student. Michelle grabbed both sides of her jacket lapels and pulled Holly towards her with such force that it knocked them against the stage. Michelle brought her lips to the doctors. Shocked, Holly placed her hands on Michelle's shoulders and pushed away.

"Holly!" Tracy's voice reverberated in the auditorium acoustics. Michelle let out a scream and pushed past Holly into Tracy's arms. Hysterically she sobbed in the teacher's arms as another staff member stood at the entrance of the room. Dumbfounded by the actions of the teenager and the anger in Tracy's voice, Holly stared at the crumpled lapels of her blazer. She could still see the indentations from Michelle's fingers. She faced Tracy and the other member of the faculty. Zoey stood just outside the entrance watching the scene unfold.

Tracy's anger boiled over as she pushed the crying teen into the hands of her counterpart. With a gesture of her hand, she requested them to leave the auditorium. Slowly, she approached Holly. The fury in her silver eyes burned like lightning. "Tracy... it's" The movement of Tracy's hand was so quick Holly never expected the slap. The brute force of the blow caused Holly to stumble backwards. Her cheek stung as the blood vessels reacted to the impact. Putting her hand to her face, Holly stood numbed in silence staring at Tracey. "Leave, Dr. Graham. You're never to set foot in this institution again." Her voice cracked with rage.

"I love you." The words spilled out. Holly wanted to tell her during a special occasion, not like this. "Please Tracey, let me..." Holly tried to make heads or tails of the situation. This wasn't happening. She was here to pick up Tracey. They were going to dinner with Tracey's parents tonight. This weekend they were heading back to the shore to look at the house.

"Explain? Explain? You want me to listen to your excuse. If you "love" me, why were you and Michelle wrapped in each other's arms kissing? Please..." Tracey hissed out as she turned away. "I hope you have a really good lawyer." Half way up the aisle, she turned to Holly and added another nail to the coffin. "I see there are some things that do run in the family."

Staring at Tracey's back as she walked out of the auditorium, Holly was spent. How could Tracey accuse her of such actions, to put her in the same category as her father? Looking at her surroundings, Holly began to question everything. Her relationship with Tracey. Why Michelle Stanley attacked her. What had she done to the teenager to make her so angry and come after her? She didn't do anything wrong. This wasn't her fault. None of this was her fault. Maybe the same thing happened to her father. Were his actions mistaken for something else? For the first time in her life, she actually wished she had believed her father was innocent.

With her head lowered, Holly walked to the nearest exit, not caring whether or not a fire alarm sounded. Greeted by the bright sunlight, the heavy door slammed behind her. Losing her bearings for a moment, she followed a pathway around the school eventually leading to the main parking lot. She silently prayed Tracey would realize what happened in the school wasn't her fault and be waiting at her car. Instead, her gray CRV stood isolated in the half empty lot. She slid behind the wheel and wondered how her life became so complicated. They were supposed to go to dinner with the Campbells tonight. This weekend they were going to look at the house they explored out on the shore. In a matter of fifteen minutes, her life went from bliss to complete chaos.

Pulling out of the school, she wondered what would happen next. Surely, the school would see the crap Michelle was pulling. She was innocent. She had Tracey. Why would she want anyone else, especially a spoiled rotten teenager? Holly stopped at a red light. Everything happened so fast she didn't know how to react or what to do. And Tracey's actions. Her cheek still stung. She flipped down the vanity mirror and traced the visible handprint on her face. What Tracey said hurt more than the slap. The teacher's words echoed in her head. Was she like her father? She knew she was innocent. Was he innocent? Could the same thing have happened to her as happened to him? Some spoiled teenagers not getting what they wanted so they took it out on someone else. She remembered the girl who accused her father. Louise, she was a rich daddy's girl pining for attention.

What was Michelle's motive? The girl was showing up at odd times. She came to the ER twice requesting Holly treat her. God, what was that all about? Rollins was pissed off about the teen, but never said anything. When Holly mentioned the teen, she could tell Sandra was irritated. Michelle had touched Holly in the course of conversation and on more than one occasion. She winked at her and questioned her about liking women.

Pulling out her cell phone, she dialed Greg's number. As her superior and her friend, she needed to advise the hospital of the possible charges. She left him a message. When she pulled the phone away from her cheek she noticed the moisture and realized that she had been crying. She wiped away the tears and drove to home.

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Dumbfounded, Tracey sat in Andy's car outside her parent's house. Andy came as soon as she called him. She didn't remember dialing his number or their conversation. When her assistant coach knelt in front of her and took her hand in his, she began to cry. He wrapped her in a hug and tried to ease her suffering. Her heart was broken. Never in a million years would she have believed what transpired. She saw it. She saw Holly pinning Michelle Stanley against the stage in what was anything but a chaste kiss.

"Do you want me to take you home?" Andy's soft voice penetrated the fogginess around her. "My parents. Take me there." Tracey mumbled wondering how her world had turned upside down so quickly. Her heart felt as if it were being ripped from her chest. By the time, she heard the fire alarm go off, she had numbly stumbled towards the front office.

Rushing down the hallway towards her was Principal Holmes. His face showed concern as he reached Tracey.

"What the hell happened?" Morris Holmes had three teachers and a very distraught student waiting in his office.

"There was..." Tracey stumbled over her words. She didn't know how to articulate what she had just witnessed. "I saw..."

"Just take a moment." He placed a hand on her arm in a calming gesture. Tracey closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose. What had she seen?

"I got to the office and Mrs. Denton said my ride was here looking for me. That Michelle Stanley and Dr. Graham headed to the auditorium." Tracey paused. Michelle had been at graduation practice and knew they were finished. The only people left in the

auditorium were the audio visual crew. "So Karen... Mrs. Wagner and I headed back here to meet up with them." Tracey gestured back towards the section of the school she had just been in. "When we walked in, I saw Michelle Stanley being pressed against the stage and engaged in a kiss with Dr. Graham." In her mind, she replayed the scene over and over, Holly pressing into Michelle, their mouths touching. Even from the back of the room, there was no doubt of what was transpiring between the women.

"Shit! Michelle Stanley?" Morris placed his hand against his forehead. His run-ins with Geoff Stanley usually ended with the principal apologizing to the county official in the hopes of funding not being cut off. "Why in the hell was this Dr. Graham in the building?"

"My car is in the shop. I asked her to pick me up after school." Tracey didn't recognize her own voice, the flatness emptiness of it. She felt hollow.

"A woman? Dr. Graham is a woman?" Mr. Holmes' eyes closed as he tried to concentrate on the procedures for this type of situation. He ran off a mental tick list in his head. He needed to notify the board and the attorneys. "Please tell me Ms. Campbell, do you know of any interaction between this student and your friend?" When the teacher's face fell further, he knew there had been some contact.

"Dr. Graham treated Michelle after the bus accident. I believe there was additional contact at the hospital and possibly at a restaurant."

"Nothing else at the school?" "Not that I am aware of."

"It appears as if you are aware of enough Ms. Campbell. You are going to be placed on administrative suspension and will be contacted by the school district's attorneys." Shaking his head, he only had one week of the school year left, why did this have to happen under his tenure? The slumped shoulders of the woman in front of him conveyed her shock and disbelief as well. "Some times people are not what they appear to be Ms. Campbell. Think of this as a life lesson." Principal Holmes turned back towards his office, readying his brain to deal with the questions his superiors would have. "Ms. Campbell, don't talk to anyone regarding this situation. I do not want any aspect of this investigation to be compromised."

"Do you want me to come in with you?" Andy placed a comforting hand on her knee. When dead gray eyes looked at him, his heart went out to the pain Tracey was dealing with.

"Thank you for everything Andy." Tracey shook her head at his offer. She went through the motions of exiting the car and entering her parents' house without a thought. She immediately went to her old bedroom and collapsed on the bed. She didn't hear the door open or feel the bed sag when Ellen sat on it.

A warm hand on her back tried to sooth the sobs away, but nothing seemed to erase the image of Holly kissing her student. When Ellen lay down next to her, Tracey curled into her mother's arms and cried harder.

"It's alright." Ellen said as she kissed the top of her daughter's head. Andy called warned her something happened at school today, but she wasn't prepared for Tracey to be in a full out meltdown. "Nothing can be so bad it can't be fixed." Ellen offered encouragement.

"Oh mom, it's bad. It's so bad I don't know where I went wrong." Tracey cried into Ellen's chest. Her life was being ripped apart at the seams. She thought blowing out her knee in college caused her pain. That was nothing compared to the anguish she was dealing with. Her girlfriend was in a relationship with her student which she inadvertently introduced them and contributed to. She allowed a relationship to continue between Holly and her student even though Michelle reached out to her multiple times. Did she just miss the signs or had Holly been playing her the entire time? Maxie warned her, but she thought her friend's concern was out of jealousy. Was the story

about Holly's father a way to throw Tracey off the real reason for their relationship? Maybe that was the reason Holly refused to go into detail about her father's death.

Principal Holmes' comment about her awareness of the interaction between Holly and Michelle made her sit up in bed. Ellen looked stunned at the sudden change in her daughter's demeanor.

"Mom, I'm going to need a lawyer, a very good lawyer." Tracey cradled her head in her hands. She was going to have to deal with reality of the situation. An inappropriate relationship between her student and her friend developed. At the center of it, she introduced them. She knew about their meetings. She knew they had seen each other on more than one occasion. Michelle mentioned Holly in every conversation she had with Tracey, first at the grocery store and then at the prom. Eddie mentioned Michelle wanted to date someone more mature. Tracey realized how naïve she had been. The two seniors on her team were in a relationship until the day of the bus accident. Then Holly comes into her life and sweeps her off. The doctor plays it cool, letting Tracey set the pace for the relationship. When Holly finally declares her love, she was caught kissing a student. Holly said she loved me, Tracey let the through roll around her brain for a moment. In the panic of being caught with Michelle, Holly finally proclaims her love.

"Fool!" Tracey stated out loud. "Mom, I'm a complete idiot. I can't believe I let some dupe me like this."

"Tracey, what the hell is going on?" Ellen looked at the clock on the night stand. They were supposed to go to dinner in an hour, but from Tracey's state, it looked like those plans would be postponed.

"I believed her. I believed every line of crap she fed me." Tracey got to her feet and began to pace the floor in front of her window.

"I'll assume you are referring to Holly as her." Ellen sat on the bed, her back resting on the headboard. "Tracey, every couple has fights. It's part of a relationship to have disagreements." Ellen watched as Tracey quit pacing and fixed that steely gaze on her.

"Does making out with a seventeen year old student of mine count as a disagreement?" Tracey heard the resentment in her voice and felt bad for taking it out on her mother. When Ellen placed a hand over her heart, Tracey lowered her head. "I'm sorry mom. I'm just in shock. I can't believe it."

"Are you sure Tracey? Holly doesn't strike me as the type of person who would be interested in a teenager."

"Mom, I saw them. I'm the one who walked into the auditorium and caught them. I reported it."

"Do you know the student?"

"It's Michelle Stanley, the kid who broke her leg during the bus accident." Tracey sat down on the hard wooden desk chair. She crossed her legs placing an elbow on them and rested her chin in her hand.

"Holly treated her?"

"Yes. For Christ's sake, I met her in the middle of Michelle's room. She thought I was Michelle's mother."

"This is a lot to read into one meeting honey." Ellen thought about the shy physician who had been the center of her daughter's life for the last few months.

"There are other things." Tracey huffed out. Why didn't she see it? "Holly mentioned Michelle being at the ER a couple of times. She was at a restaurant when we were there for dinner. And..." Tracey debated on telling her mother about the conversations she and Michelle had. "Mom, she knew about Holly and me. She knew we were dating, a couple. She said I could do better and something about money."

"I know you're very quiet about your personal life at school, but is there a way she would have known?"

"Holly could have told her." Tracey thought about Zoey and Malcolm. "One night when we were out, a couple of my students saw us." There had been no indication from either teen that they spoke about Tracey's sexuality.

"Nothing about this makes sense." Tracey stood up in frustration.

"Tracey, what did Principal Holmes say?"

"He placed me on administrative suspension pending investigation."

"What about your job? Is there a possibility you could get fired over this?" Ellen got off the bed and walked to her daughter's side. She lifted Tracey's face to see the tear filled silver eyes.

"Mom, I knew about it. Not to the extent I know now." Tracey ran her hands through her hair in frustration. "How can I explain I knew they had seen each other?"

"Sweetie, you don't know if they are sleeping together."

"Ahhh! Great mom, now I have another visual." Tracey screamed out. "I'm going to have to explain why I didn't say anything and probably the extent of my relationship with Holly."

"One step at a time honey. Let's get your father dialed into the situation and see if we can call in a few favors. I think there is more than one attorney your father knows in Washington." Ellen wrapped an arm around her daughter's waist. "We'll get through this as a family." She hoped the reassurance in her voice filtered through her daughter's senses.

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Empty bottles of beer covered the back porch of Holly's house and the lanky doctor's frame strung across the chaise lounge near the planter box. Greg picked up a couple of empties and deposited them in the recycle box. In the middle of an emergency surgery when Holly left him a message, he called his friend back, but got no answer. Between the confusion in her voice and the sobs, he deciphered a small amount of information. He called her cell and the house but got no answer. His pages went unanswered also. Finally, he decided to check her house. Tapping her lightly on the cheek, he noticed the red blemish in the form of a handprint

"What the hell happened?" He asked as he tried to roust her again. "Holly... come on honey." Greg soothed her hair with his hand.

"Tracey?" A drunken response was his only answer.

"No. It's Greg. What's happening?" Stale beer permeated from her crumpled form. The suit she wore to the department meeting earlier was rumpled and skewed with what appeared to be stains on the front. Instead of the normal styled messing look, her hair stuck out in every direction with pieces of foliage sprouting from it.

"It's a bad dream..." Holly tried to lift her head but couldn't. She rolled towards the rail and puked. Greg stared at his friend, the best doctor he knew, and wondered what had turned her world upside down. He knew she drank, in fact he drank with her most of the time. He had never seen her drink as much as she did this evening. When he couldn't reach Holly, he called Mel and asked her to meet him at Holly's when she got off work.

"Sweetie, what happen?" Greg probed again. Holly swayed into a sitting position. She spit the foul taste out of her mouth. "Do you want something to drink?" She nodded and he went into the kitchen. More empty beer bottles lined the countertop.

"Jesus Christ, what is going on?" He grabbed a coke from the frig and went back out on the deck. He handed the can to Holly. She popped the top and chugged the contents. When she was done, she wiped her face with her forearm, not concerned with ruining her suit. Greg sat by her feet and rubbed his hand along her leg. She moaned, turned over and passed out. The forty-three year old doctor rubbed his hands across his face, scratching at the daily growth of his beard. He looked at his TAG-Heuer watch, Mel should be arriving any second. Maybe with some help from the EMT, he would be able to get Holly upstairs into the shower and to bed. Something traumatic happened to his friend, but he didn't know what.

The sound of two car doors slamming made Greg lift his head to the back alley. Mel stood next to her Chevy Colorado waiting for the tall blonde woman. They were talking, but stopped when they saw Greg on the back porch. Taking a quick glance at Holly's form, Greg met the couple in the small yard.

"Mel, what's going on? I get here and she's three sheets to the wind drunk. She keeps mumbling something about Tracey. That's about all I can make out." He said as his hands running through his curly salt and pepper hair.

"Greg, Vonnie Piper. Greg works at the hospital, another doc." Mel explained. Greg nodded his greeting to the tall muscular woman who looked vaguely familiar. "Where is she?"

"Passed out on the porch. Can you help me get her upstairs? Maybe a shower and to bed?"

"Sure." Mel took a tentative step towards the porch then turned to look at Piper, who nodded. "Greg, she's going to need an attorney. Vonnie is a police officer and charges have been filed against Holly." Mel felt Piper's hand on the small of her back. She couldn't believe it when Vonnie told her about the charges. Once the hospital got wind of Holly's troubles, Mel knew they would suspend the ER Attending.

"No fucking way. There has got be some mistake. What the hell is she charged with? Giving away free services?" Greg knew Holly waived her fees for family who could not afford the medical costs.

"Gross sexual imposition of a minor." Piper repeated the charge she had heard at the station. The guys were pissed because the minor involved was a female and the daughter of the county official and a well known doctor from Jessup. Piper pulled a few strings and got a look at the report filed by the school district and Stanley family. "Holly is being charged with having a sexual relationship with a seventeen year old girl."

"Preposterous." Greg's barrel chest puffed out like he was ready to do battle with Piper. "She doesn't know any teenagers."

"Greg, I don't believe the charges either, but that doesn't help her situation. The fact is charges have been brought against her. Innocent or guilty, she needs to start figuring out how to prove her innocence or have the charges dropped."

"I thought it was innocent until proven guilty."

"Not in this day and age." Piper knew first hand of how innocent people were scorned because the evidence pointed their way. She'd seen lives ruined, families broken apart before a case even went to trial. When both medical workers eyed her, she continued. "Let's hope she is treated differently. I have a feeling this is going to be the top news story."

Mel watched as Piper placed an arm under Holly's knee and under her back. The officer lifted the doctor effortlessly and headed into the house. Piper carried Holly up the stairs and into the master bathroom. With Mel at her side, she held Holly as her counter striped her clothes off.

"Please tell me she is still passed out."

"She's out. Why are you being so paranoid?"

"Melanie, you have to understand I've had limited contact with Dr. Graham and the contact I have had, let's just say, she's not one of my fans."

Mel reached into the shower stall and started the water. Testing the water's temperature with her hand, Mel winced at the coldness. She adjusted the knob and brought the water to a pliable level. She turned to see Piper struggling with Holly's suit jacket. For the past few weeks, she and Piper started to see each other. From the beginning, they decided their relationship would be theirs. They didn't want any outside influences from their friends or family. Mel knew her dating history was less than stellar. When Piper approached her at Holly party and started a conversation with her, Mel thought Holly and Tracey had set her up. Five minutes into their first meeting, Mel knew Piper was there of her own accord. There was no way, anyone could influence the officer into talking to anyone she wasn't interested in. When Holly and Tracey were no were in sight, Piper was at Mel's side trying to get to know the technician. Before the night ended, Vonnie asked for Mel's phone number. The next morning, Piper asked her to meet for breakfast, which led to lunch and eventually dinner. Mel's dating track record had her holding off telling anyone about her new relationship. This afternoon when Vonnie called her about Holly, Mel no longer cared. If Vonnie hadn't called her, she would be pissed. The tall blonde still held back from the spunky EMT, but tonight their relationship changed.

~

Tanya Pressmen, the local news anchor, sat on the set reading, "Noted Jessup Hospital physician, Holly Graham is being charged with gross sexual imposition of a minor. No details regarding how the doctor and the female minor came into contact. We hope to bring more information as details are released."

Frank flicked off the television with the remote. "Where is the justice system we founded this country on?" Holly's story made the first two minutes of the broadcast. Frustrated with the entire situation, Frank crossed his arms over his chest. Ellen took the remote control from his hand and placed it on the bedside table.

"She'll hear you." Ellen knew Tracey's room sat below theirs. Her daughter always had been a heavy sleeper but with today's events, she wasn't certain if Tracey could fall asleep.

"You can't tell me you believe Holly would do anything with some seventeen-year-old. I've talked to that woman. She doesn't let too many people in her life. I can't see it, Elle."

"Frank, we barely know Dr. Graham. I know Tracey's cares a great deal for her. Even loves the woman, but do we really know what anyone is capable of?" Ellen scooted down on the bed so she could rest her head on her husband's shoulder. Her hand ran through the patch of gray that covered his chest. "We need to support Tracey that is our role in this."

"And what about Holly? I'm telling you, 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark' and I'll bet the house that teenager has something to do with it."

"Holly's an adult who can take care of herself. Tracey said she's been on her own most of her life.

"Exactly. She would never do anything that would cost her everything she has scraped and scrapped for all her life. To throw it away...to throw her relationship with Tracey away. None of it makes a lick of sense." Frank huffed as he reached to turn off the lamp. He pulled Ellen closer and hoped Tracey would be able to pull out of the mess she was in the middle of.

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~ With All of My Heart ~

by Catherine Burke

Author's Note: Here we are again....I thought I'd try this again.

Category: Orig. Uber Alt.

Rating: R / NC-17

Summary: Doctor Holly Graham was going through the motions. Taught to rely on no one but herself, she toiled through the medical school and settled into a position at one of Baltimore's top trauma centers. Tracy Campbell had looks, a career, a loving family and loyal friends. Yet, her love life was lacking. Pursued by many a suitor, she never found what she was looking for until a snowy night on a Maryland highway.

Comments/Disclaimer(s): This is an original story. The story and characters belong to me. They are not to be used or reproduced without my express written permission. I have posted an similar story on another site under the kato5568@aol.com email....This is me. These characters are mine and not swiped from someone else. It's good to know people are looking out for us!

This story depicts a love/sexual relationship between two consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it.

Special Thanks: To J Brownell for ideas suggestions and getting me to actually post this. Kerrie who was able to beta and get this story back to me a very short time. Living half way around the world does have its advantages. Time differences worked well for us. I'd like to give a shout to

Powerbab, who actually writes about Cleveland where we live. We'll get together at the coffee shop soon.

I'm posting this in chapter blocks. Life gets in the way at times. Hope you enjoy. You can reach me at burkcatherine@aol.com

Chapter 18

The college aged assistant escorted Holly into the fourth floor conference room at Hauser, Smith and Keller. The room was long and narrow. In the center sat an oblong mahogany table with a half a dozen black leather chairs pushed under the polished grain. He pulled one of the chairs out for her as he explained his boss, Noel Keller, was running a bit behind schedule. Absently, Holly thanked him as she settled into the soft chair. She set her purse on the floor and folded her hands on the table top. It was apparent that Hauser, Smith and Keller spared no expense in furnishing their office. From the table to the matching book shelves which housed thousands of legal volumes and publications.

Based on Greg's recommendation, she decided to have the prestigious Washington DC law firm with a reputation for defending senators, congressmen, and lobbyists in compromising situations represent her. Although Greg had not needed their services, he had worked with Noel Keller, a key partner on a few projects for the Human Rights Campaign.

Since the afternoon in the auditorium, Michelle Stanley's accusations continued. The list of charges against Holly grew and included gross sexual imposition of a minor and unlawful sexual conduct. With Mark at her side and a representative from the Jessup, she turned herself in to the Bayview Police department. The county prosecutor wanted blood. He fought hard not to have bail granted by the judge. When Holly questioned the hospital attorney, he shrugged her off as if she had the plague. From his reaction, she knew the hospital was not behind her and she needed to find her own representation. Tired of racking her brain on how the situation with Michelle Stanley had spun out of her control, she needed to let the professionals handle the case. She could only tell the truth. She never touched Michelle Stanley. What happened at the school was a complete misunderstanding and the teenager had some sort of vendetta against her. The key factor in the case was Tracey's statement of how she witnessed Holly and the minor, according to the police report engaged in a passionate kiss.

Over and over, she replayed Tracey's hand smacking her across the face, followed by the hurtful words about her father. Holly shifted uncomfortably in her chair and raised her hands to her face. She scrubbed her hands across her face in frustration. She didn't know what hurt more, the physical sting or the reference to her being like her father. Her life had changed and there was nothing she could do about it. Tracey extricated herself from Holly without as much as a backwards glance. Calls and messages went unanswered or acknowledged. Tracey severed all communication with her. Mel and Mark assured her that Tracey was probably having a tough time with the situation and having to deal with the school and the authorities.

The door of the conference room opened and Holly thought it was going to be the assistant offering a cup of coffee or spring water. Instead, in walked a tall slender raven haired woman with a brief case slung over one shoulder. She offered Holly her hand and a bright smile. "Doctor

Graham, I am so sorry." The quick apology soothed Holly's ruffled feathers. "I admit my opposition's cross examination and tone was a bit dry, but the snoring juror offered us a bit of entertainment."

"I'm sure the judge made certain that wouldn't happen again." Holly took her soft hand and gave her a small smile in greeting.

"Judge Donovan's wrath was in full force." Noel set her briefcase down and pulled the chair next to Holly to sit down in. "He's quite a character."

The attorney eyed the defeated looking woman next to her. Holly Graham's shoulders slumped forward, her face looked gaunt and vacant. Noel wondered what the physician's demeanor was prior to the accusations. Her blonde choppy hair fell into her eyes while the rest fell into cropped layers. Brown lifeless eyes slid towards her, but settled on the rows of books behind her. "Tell me how you got here Doctor Graham."

Leaning back in her chair, Holly placed her hands on the arm cushions. Taking a cleansing breath, she recounted the events that brought her to the offices of Hauser, Smith and Keller. Her life was sucked into a vortex, with every aspect of it falling into an abyss. From the incident at the school, she recounted the call from the executive assistant of Jessup's Chief Operating Officer requesting her presence at an emergency board meeting. The hospital's policy regarding ethical behavior carried stringent guidelines. Any violation not reported to Jessup could result in immediate termination of employment. Numbly, she pulled herself together for the meeting. The time she spent in the room was brief and the burden she carried going in seemed to double when she left. The result of the meeting was suspended with pay until an investigation and cooperation with outside agencies could be complete. When hospital's lead counsel asked if her attorney would be joining her at the meeting, Holly was immediately thankful for her foresight in contacting Noel Keller.

Her name was headline news for every local station. The news vans seemed to be parked outside her house 24-7 until the police began to cite them for parking illegally in a residential neighborhood. Mel came over every night and stayed with her for a few hours. Even Tracey's friend, Piper, stopped by with Mel one evening. The police officer asked Holly about her mental and physical health, but refrained from mentioning Tracey, the school, or the student. As awkward as Holly felt at the moment, having Piper at her house still gave her a glimmer of hope, she and Tracey would get past this issue.

"How did you come in contact with this girl?" Noel pulled a Mount Blanc pen and yellow legal pad from her bag. "From the beginning, you don't strike me as the type of person who is hanging out at high schools." When the physician offered a quiet laugh, Noel watched as Holly spoke of the night of the January storm. Noel recalled the horrendous storm which crippled the east coast from Georgia to New England. When Holly spoke of her treatment of Michelle Stanley's broken leg, she had a reserved clinical approach to the patient. Holly's voice constricted when she spoke about meeting Tracey Campbell and explained how through the course of the night she went out of her way for the teacher. She allowed the coach the use of her office, and made an extra effort to make her comfortable.

"Is this standard procedure, for you to offer your office to a stranger, a stranded guardian?"

"No." Holly felt the blush rise to her cheeks.

"Can you explain?" The doctor's fidgeting body language made Noel cringe. If she represented Dr. Graham in a court room, she would have to work on the doctor's body language.

"Can you explain?" The doctor's fidgeting body language made Noel cringle. If she was going to put Dr. Graham on the witness stand or sit with her in the court, she would have to work on reigning in her emotions.

"Looking back at it now, it was instant attraction. I thought Tracey was cute. Frazzled looking, bruised and scared, I wanted to help her."

"Are you a lesbian?"

"Yes."

"Are you out at work?"

"Yes."

"Is she?" Noel was looking at her notes, the time table she established, the dates to review. When Dr. Graham didn't respond, she looked up. "Is Tracey Campbell out at her work?"

"Does that matter?"

"It's going to matter if we go to court to establish the relationship was between you and Miss Campbell not Miss Stanley."

"I never touched that kid." Holly instantly became defensive.

"That is a lie." Noel sat forward in her chair when Holly's face turned red. "You've touched Michelle Stanley when you examined her as a patient."

"I wouldn't call it a sexual."

"That is where you're correct. You had a doctor patient relationship with a young woman. I'm assuming it was not of a sexual nature."

"That girl kissed me. She grabbed hold of my jacket and pulled me into her." Holly ran a hand through her hair. "I didn't realize what was happening until it was too late."

"I have a copy of the police report." Noel slid a manila folder on the table. She pulled out a sheet of paper and read from it. "According to witness Tracey Campbell, teacher, she saw the adult

female and minor female engaged in an embrace and kissing." Noel slid the paper across the table. "Your girlfriend?"

"Not since this happened." Holly fingered the report and glanced at the formal statement with Tracey's name on it. "I can't comprehend why she did it. I went there to pick up Tracey because her car was broken down. We were supposed to meet in her office but the front office, said she was in the auditorium. Then Michelle Stanley steps up to offer to escort me there....I should have trusted my gut."

"Are you having a sexual relationship with Michelle Stanley, the seventeen year old student in question?"

"Absolutely not." Holly's brown eyes turned towards Noel and burned a hole into the attorney. "I would never touch a child."

"She is a child, you know." Noel stood up and began to walk a path next to the conference table. "The school board will be quick to use that fact against you. What about Miss Campbell, is there anything she knows, or could use to show you would want to have a relationship with one of her students?"

"I...I...oh god. My dad." Holly put her head in her hands and leaned against the table.

"You're going to need to tell me everything if you want me to represent you Dr. Graham." Noel placed her hands on the top of a leather chair and looked towards the woman she was debating about taking on. "Let's put everything out on the table and see where we are at. Dr. Graham, if you are as innocent as you claim to be, we are going to make certain the court sees it that way also." When the doctor lifted her head, Noel could see the brown eye rimming with tears. "How about I get Willie to order us a couple of sandwiches from the deli and we get to know one another a little bit better?" Noel pulled a package of tissues out of her bag and placed them on the table. "I'll be right back. Is turkey acceptable?" Holly's brisk nod sent her in search of her assistant.

Taking a couple of tissues from the small package, Holly wiped at her eyes, tired of crying. What she didn't tell Miss Keller was that if she was found guilty; she would lose her license to practice medicine in the state of Maryland. She wouldn't be able to do the job she loved as a sex offender. She would be relegated to a third world country to continue doing what she loved. She needed to check the laws in Delaware. As part of the life flight crew, she kept an active license in the neighboring state.

Noel Keller seemed nice and appeared to have Holly's best interests at heart. If Holly met her under different circumstances, she probably would make an effort to be friendlier to the raven haired woman. With her life in limbo, Holly just hoped the brash attorney could help bring her life back on track. Clearing her throat and wishing for a bottle of water, Holly jumped a little as Noel entered the room. She gratefully took the bottle of water Noel offered her.

"Thank you." Twisting the top off and pouring the clear liquid into the small glass tumbler.

"Willie will bring lunch in when it gets here. He'll knock three times on the door, it's our code." Noel gestured her head towards the door. "We could go into my office if you want?"

"No, here is fine." Holly set her glass down. "Where do want to start?"

"The beginning is always the best." Noel sat next to Holly, her yellow legal pad at her side. "You mentioned your father, let's start with you, your family."

"You're in for a long day." Holly folded her hands on top of the table.

"That's why I ordered lunch."

~

Trying to keep in step with Tommy's longer strides had Tracey questioning her decision to go running with her brother. Her main objective wasn't exercise. She wanted to clear her head. For the past week, her head was clouded with everything from opinions, judgments, legal jargon to the kitchen sink. As if the forces of the universe were working against her, her kitchen sink clogged up last night and Tommy came over to fix it. Moping around her apartment since meeting with Lee Christian, her lawyer, Tracey didn't know how she got into the mess she was in or how to fix it. If the legal system couldn't help, then she didn't know what would.

Tommy glanced at her and slowed his pace. Spotting a grassy clearing on the Gywnns Falls trail, he motioned towards it. "Want a break?" He called to her and watched as she fell to her butt in the clearing.

"You're trying to kill me." Tracey leaned back in the grass. She was exhausted from the three mile run they just did. Her legs felt like Jell-O. For the first time in days, she could only think of her aching limbs. She lifted her knees to her chest and groaned. Her hand lay against her hot sweaty stomach as she tried to catch her breath and slow her heart rate.

"Feel a little better?" Tommy sat on the grass his legs in front of him stretching his quad muscles.

"I can't feel a thing." Tracey placed a bent elbow over her eyes shading them from the afternoon sun. "Remind me why I went running with you?"

"To get your mind off Holly remember?" Tommy smacked her on the thigh. "Stretch before you tighten up. You're going to feel worse tomorrow."

"You said the H word." Tracey groaned.

"Yes, I did." Tommy glanced at his sister, the Holly turmoil had thrown her for a loop. Last night at her house, he was banned from mentioning the doctor's name. "I think you should talk about it. Forget what the lawyers tell you. Talk to me." Tommy watched as Tracey sat up and wrapped her arms around her knees resting her chin on them. She glanced at him, her eyes the color of silver, a shade they turned when Tracey's intensity rose.

"I saw her with one of my students." Tracey closed her eyes as the flash of Holly kissing Michelle Stanley replayed in her mind.

"Exactly what did you see?"

"Holly was in a lip lock with a student against the stage. Her hands were against the stage and the student was pinned between her arms and her body against the stage." As if a slow motion movie played in her head, she blacked out every thing else but Holly and Michelle against the stage.

"How far away were you from the stage?"

"Tommy, I don't need glasses."

"I'm not saying that. What I am trying to figure out is why if Holly has this secret relationship with this girl, would she make out with her in the middle of the school auditorium." Tommy waited for his sister's reaction. "She signed in. She was looking for you. Why would she take the chance and get caught?"

"She was horny." Tracey felt the sting of tears as the thought of Holly and Michelle sleeping together entered her mind. "You would think I would have known something was going on. Michelle seemed to conveniently show up at the hospital or in my neighborhood."

"Explain." Tracey told him about Michelle's visit to the hospital and her run with the teenager at the store. "Where were you standing when you saw them together?" Tracey rolled her eyes. She had been over the story a thousand times and nothing changed the outcome.

"I was behind them at the center aisle."

"Holly's back was to you?"

"Yes. What is your point?"

"Well, if I was cheating on my significant other and knew they were in the building, the last thing I would do is have my back turned to the entrance. Especially, if I'm screwing around with a minor."

"Good to know you're an expert on cheating and dating minors." Tracey huffed out. She didn't want to have this conversation. The ordeal was eating her up. She couldn't eat, she couldn't sleep. At night, she lay in her bed thinking about Holly. She went over their time together. How they met, the Valentine's Day they spent together. How Holly tried to make time in her schedule to see Tracey. Maybe she was balancing seeing Tracey and Michelle at the same time. Then there was their weekend at the shore. Even with Maxie showing up, they made the best of their time together. In the midst of all the chaos, Holly finally said she loved her. Tracey wiped away a lone tear that escaped.

"I'm saying remember that bar fight that I had to testify at during college?" Tommy placed a gentle hand on his sister's back and slowly rubbed small circles.

The comforting hand on her back put Tracey at ease. Tommy was trying to help. He wanted to view the situation from a different perspective. He had first hand experience with going against the majority. She recalled the fight on St. Patrick's Day where Tommy's testimony went against six other witnesses.

"That guy was drunk, but he wasn't stupid." Tommy lifted his face to the afternoon sun, looking through the canopy of branches above them. "He walked right up to that other guy at the pool table, his hands at his sides and head butted him. Usually blame goes to the guy who throws the first punch, but because that guy was smart, he had his back to everyone except for me and the guy he hit. I was the only who saw him head butt the guy first. That's what started the fight. The first punch was thrown by the guy after he was head butted. All the witnesses saw him throw the punch, not get hit first."

"I forgot about that." Tommy's testimony changed the outcome of the trial He cleared an innocent man and shifted the blame to the guilty party.

"Sometimes, we see what others want us to see. That guy in the bar didn't realize I was standing where I could see him hit the guy first." He moved his hand to her shoulder and stood up. "I really can't see Holly doing anything like this."

"I can't either. Tommy, it's a big nightmare." Tracey got to her feet. "I saw her." She pounded her fist against her chest. "I'm the one who made the accusation." Again, her fist hit her chest. "I brought it to the board and to the police. Me!"

"That girl has a part in this also. Remember that. It's not just your statement. She seems like trouble all around. How long has she been at the school?"

"Junior and senior year, she transferred from Bryn Mawr, the prep school in Baltimore. Her father is some big shot with the county." Tracey recalled Geoff Stanley and the offer he whispered in her ear at the restaurant. She shuddered at his suggestion of a threesome. She remembered how she made an excuse about her date being late. She didn't want Geoff Stanley to know she was a lesbian. It was bad enough he asked about the threesome, she didn't want to give him further fantasies of she and Holly together.

"Why would she transfer from a private prep school to Bayview?" Tommy questioned.

"I didn't ask." Tracey said. She never thought about the reasons for Michelle's transfer to Bayview. Tracey was ecstatic when the tall basketball player came to Bayview. She needed height on the team and Michelle Stanley had height. She had quirks. She didn't have a student who didn't. She never thought she'd be in this situation, on administrative leave from her job, in the middle of a criminal case against her girlfriend and not sure if she really wanted to know the truth once the investigation was complete.

"Maybe you should tell your lawyer." Tommy watched as a wince flashed across his sister's face. "Everything that you know, you need to tell him. Even if you think its going to hurt Holly, you need to put everything out on the table."

"Her father," Tracey lowered her head and hid her face in her hands. "Her father had an affair with a student. She told me just before Easter. She had such a shitty childhood. She has no one."

"She has you and she has us. If you love her, believe in her." He watched as his words penetrated her stubborn façade. "Come on, we need to run back." He checked his watch and began to run the back along the park pathway.

Taking a cleansing breath, Tracey started back the path they had run. She let Tommy run ahead, not even attempting to catch her younger brother. Her feet pounded against the dirt path that was used by bikers and hikers. She used to run the trail three times a week when she lived at home. Running was therapeutic for her. It allowed her to free her thoughts and get closer to nature. She pondered over her brother's wisdom. She wanted to call Holly, but Lee Christian told her to have no contact with Holly or the school. Although the attorney assured her she had done nothing wrong, Tracey wondered what the school board had up their sleeve. She questioned if Geoff Stanley could influence the school with funding. Principal Holmes seemed concerned when he found out what student was involved. Her career at Bayview was over. Officially, she didn't know this, but in her heart she knew the administration blamed her for the situation. The black mark around Holly would follow her for the rest of her career at Bayview. The students and staff never forgot. Instead, stories became embellished into classical works of fiction. By September, she was sure the story would be she was having an affair with Michelle Stanley.

Maybe this was the time to let go of teaching and follow her dream of teaching and coaching at the college level. After almost seven years of teaching at Bayview, it was the administration's choice to decide her fate. She hoped everything would be over with soon. Maybe then her life would get back to some semblance of normalcy. As her feet moved against the earth, she felt her muscle beginning to strain. Tomorrow, she would complain about her muscles. At least it would keep her mind off Holly and Michelle Stanley for a period of time.

~

Hours later, Holly sat physically exhausted and emotionally drained in the back booth of Johnny's Diner. Patsy poured her decaf coffee, mumbling something about sleeping. The owner kissed Holly on the cheek when she walked in the empty restaurant. Grateful for the quietness, Holly slid into the booth she spent so much time in as a student. Leaving Bethesda, she headed home, but aborted her journey when she saw the news vans parked along her street and a reporter knocking on her front door. The Roses had a news crew on their front porch also. Holly circled the neighborhood for a few minutes then decided to go to the diner. Patsy's greeting almost caused tears to fall again. She wanted her life back. She wanted to go home, crawl into bed and Tracey's arms and fall asleep. She sipped the hot coffee and went over the conversation she had with Noel Keller. They went over her childhood, her struggles once her parents were out of the picture. Noel became intrigued when Holly spoke of Jordan Norwood, the attorney who helped her as a teenager. Noel asked Holly's permission to contact the Ohio attorney regarding her

earlier case, stating she didn't want any surprises. Holly gave her consent, but was nagged by a feeling of uncertainty.

Patsy brought her food she didn't want, but picked at anyways. Johnny's usually attracted the late night drunks wanting some grease in their bellies before they attempted to drive home. She wanted to get out of the place before the crowd came in. She checked her watch and wondered how much longer the press would be hanging out at her house and bothering her neighbors. Ever since the release of her name, she rarely had a moment's peace. She kept a wardrobe of clothing in her car. Trying to avoid the press and sneaking into her house tried her patience, most of her nights she stayed at Mel's or Greg's house. At least Mel's sister Michelle's room would be vacant since her wedding was Saturday. Holly needed a day where she could spend a few hours with friends celebrating. There was no way she was going to drink. The amount of alcohol she consumed at the start of this ordeal still made her stomach roll. She didn't even want to think about drinking.

Gathering her bag and hugging Patsy good night, Holly stopped as the door opened. In the entrance stood Tracey, the disheveled looking teacher stared at her until Maxie, who was hot on her heels, slammed into her from behind. The two women stood staring at each other.

"Well, fucking look who's here the pedophile!" Maxie yelled so everyone in the restaurant could hear her. "Out looking for your next victim?"

Holly felt as if a knife had been sunk into her gut and twisted with every word spewing from Maxie's mouth. Standing out of the way so they could pass, Holly avoided eye contact with either of them. Maxie stalked up to her and stood toe to toe. The brunette spat in her face. Holly blinked a few times shocked that Maxie had the audacity to do something like that in public.

"None of that in here!" Patsy called from behind the counter coming to Holly's rescue. Maxie balled her hands into fists at her sides, when Piper walked in.

"What the hell!" Piper grabbed Maxie by the arms and pulled her away from Holly. "Are you insane?" Maxie began to struggle against the cop's strength.

"Don't even tell me you believe she's innocent!" Maxie scolded, outraged someone would prevent her from decking Holly.

"Maxie, go sit down." Piper pushed the banker towards a table at the rear of the restaurant and then looked at Tracey for the first time since arriving. Her face was coated with a fine sheen of sweat and paled as Piper touched her arm. "Tracey, you can't talk to her." Vonnie's words penetrated the trance like state that held Tracey immobile. "Go sit down. I'll handle every thing." Piper placed a little pressure on Tracey's arm, gesturing towards the table Maxie sat at stewing.

"Come on Doc, I'll walk you out." Vonnie held the door open for Holly, who stared at Tracey. "She's can't talk to you and you can't talk to her. You know that. The investigation will be screwed."

"I just..." Holly glanced at Vonnie then back at Tracey. She swore she could see tears in her eyes. "I'll go." Holly passed through the door.

"Fucking rapist!" Maxine hollered at her back. Holly knew she stiffened and would have turned around if it wasn't for Piper's hand on her back.

"Just keep walking Doc. I'll take care of big mouth." Piper stepped around the corner with Holly into the alley and pulled a pack of cigarettes from her pocket. "Want one?"

"Sure.." Holly said as she watched Piper cup her hand and light the smoke.

"Your premiums will go up." Piper tried to tease and she offered one to Holly. Taking her lighter, she lit the end with the small flame.

"I don't have any premiums any more." Holly leaned against the building and lifted the cigarette to her lips. She reflected on the last time she leaned against Johnny's wall. Tracey pushed her up against the hard brick and kissed her senseless. At least the barbs being thrown at her were from Maxie, not Tracey. "Aren't you going to get in trouble associating with the enemy?"

"Are you the enemy Doc?" Piper asked as she mirrored Holly's position on the wall. Holly shook her head. "I think we need the justice system to do its job and see where the chips fall."

"Look after her will you?" Holly heard her voice crack. She couldn't even say Tracey's name. "I'm putting my house up for sale. I don't have anything here anymore. Everything is ruined."

"You've got Mel, Greg and Mark."

Piper heard Holly quietly agree with her. "It hurts too much to be here. I lost the girl, my job, and my integrity." Holly pushed off the wall. "Thanks for the smoke Vonnie. I'll see you at the wedding?"

"I'll be there. Holly, take care of yourself." The cop's words echoed off the alley walls as Holly walked into the darkness. Vonnie walked back to the entrance, crushing her smoke out on the sidewalk under her shoe.

"How the hell can you have a conversation with that woman?" Maxine was at the door waiting for Piper.

"Why don't you chill out?" Piper brushed past her and sat across from Tracey. Patsy brought over a pot a coffee and filled Vonnie's cup. "Thank you Patsy." Vonnie lifted her eyes to the stormy gray irises across the table. Usually Tracey radiated with electricity, but the woman across the table seemed like a ship lost at sea. "You okay?"

"No....no, I'm not." Tracey wiped at her face. "I'm tired of crying. I'm tired of feeling like I did something wrong when I didn't." The momentum she had gained during her run disappeared. One look at Holly sent her reeling into an emotional roller coaster.

"Things will settle down. When they do, you'll be stronger for going through it." Piper reached for her hand.

"I don't want to be stronger. I want my life back. I want to run out the door and tell Holly it was all a big mistake." She thought about the conversation with Tommy earlier. She needed to really think about what she saw. She did contact Lee about Michelle Stanley's transfer to Bayview two years earlier. Also commented about how she felt Geoff Stanley's position with county could influence any decision the board made.

"It wasn't a mistake." Maxie argued as sat down next to Tracey. "You saw her with your student. Nothing can change that."

"Maybe I didn't see what I thought I saw." Tracey pulled her hand away from Vonnie. "I want to wake up next to Holly and have this whole thing be a bad dream." Tracey lifted her eyes to the owner, Patsy. The woman nodded and turned away.

"What hold does she have on you?" Maxie leaned back in her chair studying Tracey.

"It's called love Maxie. I love her. No matter what and that's what hurts the most. I love her and she is supposedly sleeping with one of my students." Tracey looked towards the window wishing Holly to return to the diner. She wanted her to walk through the door and ask her to go for a walk so they could talk.

"She's sleeping with her. I have no doubt."

"Well, I have doubts and I'm the one that matters." Tracey stood up and walked out of Johnny's.

Looking up at the night sky, Tracey knew it was a bad idea to come to Johnny's. There were too many memories in the restaurant to sit there and try not to think of Holly. She didn't care what Maxie said. Holly would never take advantage of anyone. She had been through too much in her life to jeopardize her career. Deep down inside, she wanted to forget what she saw and have Holly be innocent. She'd take Tommy's advice and tell Lee about her suspicions surrounding the Stanleys and how Michelle was the key to the entire puzzle. The truth would come out eventually. Like Piper advised, let the justice system run its course and see where the chips landed.

When she left the diner, Tracey didn't realize she had set a course for Holly's house, but as she rounded the familiar corner she saw the house. A news van passed her on its way back into town. There wasn't a light on in Holly's house, but in the light from her neighbor's house, she saw the real estate sign in the front yard. Stopping in her tracks, Tracey heard a gasp escape from her lips. Holly was leaving. Was the situation so bad Holly had to sell the one place she called home? Tracey had thought of Holly's home as their home. She turned away quickly and ran back the way she came. She didn't stop until she got to her car. Sitting in her SUV, her legs and lungs screamed at her. Tears streamed down her face and she let out a savage cry of pain. She was losing everything she found. Holly's home was their home. Selling the house meant the doctor was leaving. The one thing Holly said she was scared that Tracey would do. Scared Tracey

would leave her. Instead, Holly was leaving and Tracey let circumstances come between them. Piper and the attorneys told her she couldn't talk to Holly, to cut all ties or the investigation would be compromised. Like Tommy said, if she believed in Holly, she would know what the truth was.

Tracey thought she believed in Holly, but knew she let the doctor down. The words Tracey threw in Holly's face made her sick. She used information to hurt Holly. She was just another person who failed Holly, just like her parents had. Wiping the tears from her face, Tracey wished she could go back in time and ask Holly not to pick her up from school. Instead, she basked in the memory of dancing with Holly in the living room.

Pulling herself together, she pulled her truck out of the parking lot and headed back towards Holly's house. Stopping in front of the house, Tracey wrote down the number from the sign. She let her gaze travel to the upstairs bedroom, there was a small light showing through the window, the only sign of life coming from the house. Fighting the urge to walk up to the front door and beg Holly for forgiveness, she silently prayed that in time, they could find a way to come back to each other. She loved Holly and knew Holly would never betray her.

Chapter 19

Years... the adverb rolled around Holly's head. It had been years since she set foot in her home town. She came searching for a Mecca, a place to absolve her of any wrong doing. She knew she was innocent. What she didn't know was if her father had been unjustly accused. The nagging question of whether or not her father was innocent plagued her. Noel Keller contacted Jordan Norwood, the attorney who represented her after her father's death. Her current attorney gave no indication of her opinion on her father's case, which irritated Holly. She didn't know if Noel probed her father's case or not. When she questioned Noel about her conversation with the Ohio attorney, the partner stated she didn't have the answers to the physician's questions. She wanted to know what happened with her father, and Jordan Norwood knew more than she did.

Holly drove to Ohio to her home town to look for answers regarding her father's case, to find if the charges against Donald Graham were similar to her own. She knew she was innocent, and was relying on Noel Keller to prove that fact to the court. If she wanted to get to the bottom of her father's charges, she needed to go home and find out exactly what happened with her father.

Believing it was her right to know the facts behind her father's case, Holly asked Noel to petition the court to leave the state. After numerous conversations, Noel grew tired of Holly pestering her about Jordan and her father's case. In an effort to contain her sanity, the attorney petitioned the court's permission to allow Holly the ability to travel to Ohio to settle a family matter. The judge allowed it, as long as Holly was in constant contact with her attorney and reachable at any time.

Rolling to a stop at the main intersection in town, Holly was amazed by how much the small farming town had grown. What once was a town of fields of beans, corn, and vineyards with only one red light, matured into a large shopping metropolis with every chain store under the sun congregated in the town's shopping center. The rows of grapes she raced through as a young girl were gone, replaced by strip malls, coffee shops and home improvement stores. Waiting for one

of the six red lights, Holly wondered what type of relationship her father had with his student. Did they even have a relationship? Did he have to deal with a confused teenager?

The scandal she found herself in the middle of seemed to mirror the situation her father went through close to twenty years earlier. Having a major déjà vu moment, Holly pulled her silver Honda through the intersection as memories of her childhood flooded her thoughts. The woods she explored and played in as a child were replaced by residential developments. Across the street from her home sat a cemetery, but even that had changed. A large mausoleum sat where a rose garden had once been, the drive way had been relocated to the perimeters of the property and a large archway announced Rest Haven Cemetery. She drove on to the cemetery property. Her father had been buried here, across the street from her childhood home. Gathering her bearings, she realized her father's headstone was no longer close to the driveway. With the change, Holly got out of her car and found her father's headstone five rows away from the pavement.

Taking a moment, Holly stared down at her father's name. The shame she felt twenty years ago melted away. She missed her father. She never gave herself the time to actually mourn the man who had brought her into this world, encouraged her studies and had the confidence in her to become a doctor.

"I did it daddy." Holly brushed the cut grass from the headstone. She sat down on the grass next to the heavily carved stone and stared at it. She wondered who actually purchased the marker. She didn't remember much from her father's death, other than her life seemed to be over. She'd ask Jordan Norwood when they were scheduled to meet. "I'm sorry I've never been here before. I just was so lost for such a long time." She wiped the lone tear that fell on to her cheek. Holly pulled her knees to her chest and rested her chin on them.

For an hour, she sat at the grave talking with her dad. Telling him about all the things that had happened to her over the years, she was quiet for a while when she got to the part in her life when she met Tracey. "I met someone. Her name is Tracey." She felt a heavy pressure filled her chest. Tracey. Would they ever get back what they had? She wanted Tracey in her life. Somehow she hoped the teacher would see through the manipulation and lies. "I love her. She's a teacher like you." Holly wiped at her eyes. "She's beautiful dad. I think you would approve. I just need to get through this. Once I get through this, I plan on spending the rest of my life with her."

Holly could only hope that she and Tracey would come to some type of reconciliation. She didn't want to be angry with the teacher, but she was. How could Tracey think she would ever cheat on her? Holly barely had any free time to spend with Tracey, let alone have some type of secret affair with a teenager. Holly's anger was centered on Tracey's choice to believe the worse, instead of trusting her or believing her.

Getting to her feet, she didn't have time to think about Tracey. She was here to find out the truth about her father. Wiping the rear of her jeans off, she walked to her car and drove to the one place in town she used to spend a lot of time at. The beat up Honda pulled into the library parking lot. As she got out, she heard the roar of the crowd at the city baseball field which sat next to the library. The noise of the spectators drew her attention. She grasped the door handle

for a moment. Changing her mind, she strolled towards the ball field. The rusted chain link fence stood at the four foot mark. She thought it was much taller as a child. The low chants of 'hey... batter... batter' brought a smile to her face as she thought back to such an innocent time in her life, a time when she trusted the world and loved freely. Leaning her elbows on the rusty chain link fence along right center field, she watched the game progress. The game moved slower than she could remember and she found herself wondering if the pitcher was ever going to throw a strike. Just as the thought registered in her brain, the batter swung and hit a line drive right back at the pitcher. In the fifty to sixty feet between the hitter and pitcher, the young boy did not have time to react.

Thump! The sound echoed through the air as the young boy fell backwards, propelled by the velocity of the impact. Screams from the stands and parents on their feet began the all out chaos. "Jesus!" Holly grabbed the fence and jumped over, running through the grass covered outfield towards the fallen player. Stopping at the edge of the crowd, she was unable to penetrate the circle formed around the mound when someone pushed her back.

"I'm a doctor." She said, loud enough for the crowd in the immediate area to hear. A path opened like the Red Sea. She crossed to the dirt covered hump in the center of the field. An umpire and coach were at the boy's side.

One of the coaches looked at her and said. "I can't find a heartbeat."

"Call 911." Holly calmly stated as she knelt down next to the boy. She felt for a pulse at his at his carotid artery. Placing her ear on his chest, she heard no heartbeat. Her adrenalin began to pump. She may have been out of the ER for a couple of weeks, but she was still a doctor. Her instincts took over as she placed the heel of her hand on the boy's sternum and began CPR compressions. Her brown eyes caught and held the coach's scared baby blues. "I need you to breathe for him." Holly instructed. The man nodded. She was counting out loud but didn't realize it until she heard the sirens in the distance. "Is there a defibrillator here?" She said between compressions. A simple piece of equipment could activate the boy's heart. She looked at his bluish face and saw how young he was.

"Sammy..." Someone called from behind her. She could hear the voice of a parent, a mother... the pain she had heard many times in the ER.

"Breathe..." The coach pinched Sammy's nose and filled the lungs beneath her hands with air.

"How long?" The EMT asked as he cleared the crowd. "His heart is stopped. Start charging." Holly directed as she continued compressions. Sweat was running down her forehead and her back between her shoulder blades. The dark haired EMT's head snapped up at the direction given by the woman working on the boy's chest.

"It's been five minutes since he went down. Started CPR instantly."

"Miss, let me take over." Another EMT tapped Holly's shoulder and took her place.

"Doctor Graham." Holly sat back on her haunches as the EMT sliced open Sammy's uniform shirt, revealing a large bruising mass covering the chest.

"Clear!" The dark hair EMT called out and all hands went up. The punch of the electric charge hit the young body, calling awake the strong beat of his heart. Relief coursed through Holly's body, her hands shaking and her heart rate elevated. She wondered how what had once been a daily event in her life felt so foreign. Her arms quivered as the unused muscles began to relax. Her reflexes were still intact and she knew what to do, but it was so personal now. She looked at the young boy's face and wondered if he would make it.

Where had her life gone? Her soul searching journey to find the truth had brought her home. Brought her to this ball field where a young boy needed her. She watched as the monitor heartbeat blipped stronger and stronger with each beat. Her eyes went to the coach who watched the monitor intently.

"You did well." Holly touched his shoulder.

"Thank God you were here." The gravity of the situation began to hit the balding thirty something man. Tears formed at the corner of his eyes as he looked at Holly. "Sean Hill." He wiped at his eyes with his hand and then extended it to Holly.

"Holly Graham." She shook it gently. The calluses on his fingers scraped her palm. Mr. Hill was a laborer, his broad shoulders and sturdy frame a testimony to his career choice. "Thank you for helping." Holly sat on the grass, pulling her knees to her chest, resting her chin on them. She watched as Sammy was placed on the stretcher and rolled off the field. His mother walked by his side, crying as she held on to his hand. The crowd dispersed as teammates hugged their parents and whispered fears for Sammy. Holly got to her feet and brushed the grass off her backside. She heard clapping but didn't realize it was for her until she looked at the backstop. Parents, coaches, umpires and spectators gave her a standing ovation.

"Thank you..." She said softly as she felt the blush rising up her chest to her face. "What about Coach Hill?" She deflected the attention to the wide eyed man at her side. Sean lifted his hat in salute to the crowd as the cheers continued.

"Dr. Graham." Sean walked next to her as they exited the fenced off diamond. "Can I buy you a beer?"

"You know Coach Hill... that's the best invitation I've had in quite a while." Holly smile widened as Sean's face flamed red.

"Do you know where ZZ's is at?"

"Same as twenty years ago?" She asked. Sean nodded. "Good, then I won't get lost." She walked past the stands and back towards the library. Whispers and murmurs were hushed as she walked past. Her eyes caught a tall auburn haired woman with a familiar look to her. Most everyone she

had grown up were part of generations of family that raised family in the once quiet farm community.

In her car she took a deep breath. Her heart was racing. Placing her hands on the steering wheel she caught her reflection in the rearview mirror. Her eyes were wide and scared, she felt like her first day on the floor at the hospital. She had been young and innocent, trying to save everyone no matter how hopeless the situation appeared. Too many what ifs running through her brain. She needed to calm down, relax... have a beer with a guy who looked scared shitless.

ZZ's bar sat on the corner of one of the main streets. She pulled into the parking lot of the familiar yellow two story free standing building. A traffic light was proof of the town's expansion, hung at the intersection marking the parking lot entrance of the tavern. Gravel crunched under the Honda's tires as it dodged the large indentations left by some heavy vehicle during the last rain storm. The outer door had changed, a makeshift wooden structure protected the interior from the direct impact of the environment. Holly passed through the four foot by six foot structure and into the bar. Darkness engulfed her. A moment later her eyes adjusted as her nose twitched at the smell of stale beer and cigarettes. She felt all eyes fall on her as she stood getting her bearings for a moment.

"Hey honey! I got a seat for you!" A cat call from the bar along the back wall came. Holly searched the faces for Sean. He stood up and waved her towards the open stool. At his side was the auburn haired woman from the stands.

"Dr. Graham, my wife Krista." Sean signaled to the bartender to get a beverage for Holly. "What would you like?"

"Beer's good. Miller Lite."

"So what brings you to our town and the ball field?"

"Strange as it is, I grew up here. I haven't been back in almost twenty years."

"Holly Graham..." The auburn woman said meeting Holly's gaze. "I'm Kristy MacGregor. I was a couple years behind you, but I remember you." The woman's face showed no distance, in fact more of an understanding of the pain that Holly went through. "No one knew what happened to you. You just disappeared out of town like your mother."

"Not the best of memories." Holly said as she took a sip of her beer. She racked her memory of the woman sitting a stool down from her. A bright red-haired girl with massive amounts of freckles across her face and down her arms crossed a reference point in her brain. "You're Red!"

"It's been a while since I've heard that, but yes. Red was the beautiful name the boys and bullies gave me."

"Sorry." Holly felt the surge of guilt for called the acquired looking child names just for her features. "You look great."

"Doesn't she?" Sean smiled brushing a soft kiss on his wife lips. "We met in college."

"So what happen out there with Sammy?" Krista absently rubbed circles on her husband's back. The tension was still held in his shoulders.

"I've seen it once or twice in the ER. Commotion Cordis. When a ball strikes the chest cavity at the right time, it can cause the heart to short circuit. It's rare, but if the impact happens at the right time during the heartbeat cycle it can be serious. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time."

"Why are you in town?" Sean asked as his wife nudged him. At that moment Holly knew only a few people knew the story and maybe it was good to find out the truth.

"I got caught up in a situation and I found myself in the same position that my father was in years ago." Holly leaned forward to keep Krista in her line of sight. "I know the truth of my situation and I hope the courts will see that. There was always such a mystery of what went on with my dad and he's not here to answer the questions. So I came back looking for information or a person who can tell me."

"She's here and still a royal bitch. I feel bad for Wendy." Krista said with a sigh and took a drink of her beer.

"Wendy Richmond?" Sean asked. Stopping abruptly he studied Holly, taking in the high cheekbones and the soft brown eyes. The visitor was definitely an attractive woman. He knew he had never met her before, but yet he thought she looked so familiar. "Jesus, I can see it." Sean gasped out loud.

"Louise Richmond is who I'm referring to. I was on my way into the library to see if I could look up her or the family." Holly said. She knew the Richmond family was one of the predominant families in town. "The ballgame distracted me. So, Louise still lives in town."

"Actually in the same house, her parents retired to Florida and stay there for most of the year. Are you going to call? Set-up a meeting?"

"Most people are honest when you catch them off guard, so probably not. I waited all these years, I'm not gonna wait for her to clear her schedule. What's the worst that can come of it? My dad's gone. Any hurt she caused me has been buried for so long, I can't recall why I didn't like her."

"If you want I can ride along with you. Maybe make it a little more comfortable for you."

"Are you sure? It could get ugly. Although it's been a long time, we were never the best of friends. After what happened with my dad, I doubt we ever would be." Holly wondered why Krista would want to place herself in the middle. She had already voiced her opinion of Louise, so maybe it was for moral support. It would be good to have someone by her side. For a while,

she wouldn't be alone. "I'm not here looking for friends. I want answers about what happened with my dad. Louise Richmond is the one person who can do that."

"Are you sure this is something you're ready for?" Krista pulled her lower lip between her teeth.

"I've been waiting twenty years. I'm ready for anything. Louise doesn't scare me. I'm not a teenager she can bully around."

After a few beers, Holly wanted to head to her hotel. She made arrangements for Krista to pick her up at there. Saying goodnight to the couple, Holly waved as she headed out the door.

An hour later, Sean opened the door for his wife and slipped into his side of the truck. He settled in the seat and looked at Krista. "Is Wendy her sister?"

"There was always a rumor." Krista confessed. "Louise went away for a year or so and when she came back the Richmond's adopted a 'cousin' from out of state. No one really knew for sure. Mr. Graham killed himself before the trial. He was a math teacher at the high school. I was younger, but Jessie said he was a great teacher." Krista said as she placed her forehead on the cool glass of the window. "He was charged with raping a minor."

"Are you sure you want to be there tomorrow? This woman shows up looking for the truth about her dad. She doesn't know about Wendy. Jesus, just by looking at them you can see the resemblance."

"I want to be there for Wendy. She doesn't deserve this. She's a good kid. She can't help the adults in her life aren't the best examples." His wife's explanation resonated with him. He liked the college student and knew Krista's presence would make her feel safe. He just hoped that Holly Graham was ready to meet Wendy Richmond.

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Finally the last hour of the University of Maryland Youth Basketball camp was coming to a close. Tracey wiped her brow as she watched the young girls chattering in the circle at the center of the court. This week the eight to twelve year olds girls invaded the basketball field house at the university. Tracey had always enjoyed teaching the kids the basic skills of a sport she loved. This year's camp stressed her out. She knew most of her stress came from the Michelle Stanley situation.

Four weeks since she walked in to the auditorium and found Holly kissing Michelle. A month had passed and still nothing was settled. The Board of Education placed her on paid administrative leave immediately, for conduct unbecoming a teacher. She consulted her attorney earlier in the week, but Lee didn't have any update, they were maintaining status quo. She didn't want to be surrounded by unknowns. She wanted her life back. Instead, she felt as if a black hole had sucked up everything she cared about except her family. Her teaching position at Bayview was in serious jeopardy. The school had a history of placing teachers on leave and cutting their positions due to budget constraints. Then there was Holly. She thought long and hard about what

Tommy said. She knew what she saw. The question that still plagued her was why? Why would Holly want to kiss Michelle? The spoiled teenager demanded her peers cater to her every whim. She suspected Michelle followed in her mother's footsteps. Although Tracey never interacted with Mrs. Geoff Stanley, she suspected the teen learned how to be a royal bitch from her mother. Tracey had a bad taste in her mouth any time she thought about the Stanley family. There just seemed to be something off about the family. Tracey couldn't place her finger on it. She had a feeling if Lee Christian did a little digging into the Stanley's background, the attorney would find a few anomalies.

Seeing Holly at Johnny's last week opened a flood gate of emotions. The initial shock of seeing the doctor made her aware of how much she missed her. She loved Holly. She didn't want to believe Holly would toss her aside for a fling with a teenager. As Tracey looked over the heads of the campers, she realized how ridiculous the thought of Holly being with Michelle really was. Holly was a professional, a well respected physician, a busy doctor who barely took time away from work. Holly did make time to have a relationship with her. They started slow and got to know each other. Tracey thought back to the conversations they had about family and trust. She felt a sharp pain pierce her chest. She didn't believe Holly was innocent. She didn't trust Holly enough to think beyond what she had seen. Tommy's words flooded her brain again. Was she seeing what Michelle wanted her to see? Not what actually was happening? Holly's expression seemed confused. Tracey thought it was because she was caught. Maybe it was because she was confused. Holly had come to the school to pick up Tracey. She didn't plan on meeting Michelle. Tracey felt the pick of tears in her eyes. She had gone over and over the scene. She didn't want to think about it any more.

"Coach Campbell!" Renee Gates, the University of Maryland Women's team assistant coach and Tracey's former college teammate called from across the field house and pointed to her watch. The kids finished the drill Tracey had them running. Taking the whistle from the center of her chest, Tracey put it in her mouth and blew. The high pitched sound grabbed the girl's attention.

"Okay ladies!" Tracey called. "Huddle up!" She was greeted with mostly wide eyed stares as the young girls gathered around her. "Congratulations ladies! You have successfully completed the University of Maryland's basketball camp!" Tracey began to clap and the girls joined in. "Before you head home, make sure you pick up your certificate at the door along with some pretty cool stuff." Tracey had seen the treats packed inside the camp bags. Everything from a University of Maryland t-shirt, a MP-3 player, towels, Nike water bottle, and additional small stuff sponsors gave the camp. "Remember what I said about your grades?"

As if on cue, the girls recited, "Grades first, basketball second!" The chorus of voices filled the air.

"You got it! Have a great summer ladies. Dismissed." Tracey smiled as she watched the youngsters race towards the exit.

"Are you ready for a beer?" Renee quietly asked as she approached her former college teammate.

"God yes!" Tracey smiled as Renee tried to hold her laugh in.

"Tell me how you feel. Don't hold anything back." Renee teased.

"Is it me, or was this year really trying?" Tracey wondered if the kids had always been difficult. She noticed it more this year because of her stress levels. "I mean, I was ready to quit on Tuesday."

"It's always like this. Leslie always goes out of her way to make sure everything is taken care of at the house because I'm such a bear during camp." Renee smiled as she said her partner of six year's name.

"I never noticed before."

"You never wanted to be anywhere else but here." Renee commented. Tracey looked at her for a moment. Renee was right. Tracey lived for her job, basketball and the kids she taught. Being with Holly she had a glimpse of what it was like to have someone substantial in her life.

"You're right." Tracey eyed the tall ebony skinned woman with the short tight hair style. Renee broke eye contact and laughed. "Jerk." Tracey smacked her in the stomach.

"So, where do you want to go?"

"Is Leslie going to meet us?"

"If you want? I thought you might want to talk."

"Renee, I am so talked out. I just want to have a couple beers with good friends and rehash how I used to kick your ass in the paint."

"In other words, you want to get drunk and make things up. Because you're delusional if you think you ever got past me in the paint!" Renee placed her large hands on her hips and challenged Tracey to correct her.

"I want to get drunk!" Tracey laughed. "Maybe it was the wing where I kicked your ass."

"Want to try it. I'm still in shape. Let's go Navy!" Renee began to remove her sweatshirt and wind pants. When Renee called her by her college nickname, Tracey went over to the ball rack and grabbed a ball.

"To eleven. Have to win by two. My ball." Tracey dribbled the ball between her legs as she moved towards one of the smaller half court baskets.

"No way. My ball." Renee challenged.

"Your court, I'm the visitor. My ball." Tracey readied her approach. She knew the former center would be waiting for Tracey to take the shot from behind the line. Instead, she did a quick step, driving the ball to her left, blowing past Renee and putting the ball in the hoop.

Renee grabbed the ball and said, "So that's how we're going to play. You're in trouble, Navy." And Tracey was. A thorough trouncing by Renee had Tracey gasping for breath. They showered and dressed at the school. Beers became dinner and Leslie was more than happy to join the friends for a night out.

Tracey sat on the bar stool at Cocoa's. She took a pull of her beer as another shot was placed in front of her. She eyed the bartender, knowing she didn't order the clear liquid in the shot glass.

"Hey what can I say, you're a popular lady tonight." The large woman said as she moved away to wait on another customer. Tracey looked around to see who had sent over the shot. She didn't notice anyone taking credit. She lifted the glass and smelled apples. Lifting the glass to her lips, she let the liquid run down her throat, smooth nice vodka apple taste. When she set the glass down and looked at the mirror behind the bar, she saw her and knew who had sent the shot.

"It's called an Apple Fucker." Pam Farmer lifted Tracey's discarded glass and sniffed. "Did you like it?"

"What do you want?"

"How about a thank you?" Pam slid on to the empty stool next to Tracey. She leaned forward into Tracey's personal space. "Or a kiss would do." Pam leaned towards her and placed a hand on Tracey's denim covered thigh. Pam's audacity shocked Tracey. Sitting facing the arrogant EMT, Tracey slapped her hand away. She was just about to stand up when she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Hi! Are we interrupting?" Piper's hand squeezed her shoulder. As soon as Tracey heard her friend's voice she relaxed. Vonnie's presence always reassured her.

"As a matter of fact." Pam began, then noticed Mel Watkins standing next to the muscular blonde.

"Still up to your old tricks Farmer?" Mel said as she wrapped an arm around Vonnie's waist. "Is she bothering you Tracey?"

"I just bought her a drink and..."

"And was leaving." Tracey finished Pam's sentence. The EMT scrambled to her feet and left the bar in a hurry. Mel sat in the newly vacated seat. Tracey looked from Mel to Vonnie and back again. "What's up?"

"Renee called and said she left you here. She was a little concerned about you getting home. Are you doing okay?"

"I'm pretty drunk so I was going to cab it home." Tracey said as soon as the words left her mouth, she felt the room tilt - too much alcohol in her system. "What's up with you two? When did this happen?"

"Ahh..." Piper started then looked at Mel. "The party at Holly's, we exchanged numbers. From there we started talking." Mel felt Piper's hand on her back. "We didn't hide it from our friends. We just didn't want to make a big deal out of anything in case..."

"We fizzled." Vonnie ordered two beers from the bartender. "Besides, you have a lot going on. I didn't want you to feel awkward."

"Awkward, does Holly know?"

"Yes, but..."

"Great." Tracey stood up and looked at the couple. "Just great. Am I the last to know about everything? Did you know she was cheating on me?"

"Holly never cheated on you." Mel got to her feet yelling. "I can't believe you have the nerve to say that, to even think it."

"Why is this happening?" Tracey crumbled. She folded her face in her hands and began to cry. "Let's call a truce here and get you home."

"Take me to Holly's." Tracey said. She stood up and stared at Mel daring the smaller woman to fight her. "Piper, I want to see her."

"Tracey... the case."

"Fuck it! I miss her. I want to see her."

"She's not home." Piper said holding Tracey's eyes so the teacher knew she wasn't blowing smoke.

"Where is she?"

"Ohio."

"Why would..." The realization dawned on her that Holly went home. "By herself?" Tracey asked. When the women nodded, Tracey looked down at her feet. "Can you please take me home? Or I can get a cab."

"Sit down, both of you." Vonnie settled on a stool emptied by an annoyed patron. "I just ordered beers and you need to chill." Mel sat down first and took her beer from Vonnie. Tracey stood debating whether or not to sit. She felt her cell phone in her pocket. She wanted to call Holly, but she didn't know if Holly would talk to her. Instead, she slid back on to the barstool and finished her beer.

"I miss her." Tracey whispered. "I hope she's okay."

"She'll be home in a couple days." Mel informed her. "Maybe you should talk to your attorney. See if it's okay to talk with her."

"I already did. I can't until this is all over. What if I loose her? What if she finds someone else?"

"If she's found guilty, I guess we will know for sure if she found someone else." Vonnie commented. In her heart, Tracey knew Holly wasn't with anyone else.

"She loves me." The truth finally hit sunk in. Holly was in love with her and would never even look at anyone else certainly not Michelle Stanley.

~

The morning sun reflected off the black hood of the car as the two occupants sat. Adjusting her position in her seat, Holly looked at the large Tudor home in front of her. She had passed it hundreds of times in her younger days, but now she was here to find out the truth. What truth was she looking for? That she wasn't like her father. Or the truth that she had fallen prey to the manipulation of a teenager. She glanced at Krista, the auburn haired woman sat behind the wheel. This was another step in her journey to get her life back. Maybe she would find the answers she was searching for and finally let the past go.

"Do you want me to come with you?" Krista asked.

"No, thank you, this is my quest." The tall blonde got out of the car and slowly walked up the cement sidewalk to the front door. A steady gait hid the tremors coursing through her nervous system. Eighteen years was a long time, but hopefully she never had to think about Louise Richmond again.

Holly rang the doorbell and waited on the front stoup. She could hear steps approaching from inside. As the mahogany door opened to the foyer, a slightly older and rounder Louise Richmond stood there. The look on her face went from a pleasant greeting to one of contempt. For many years, Holly wondered what happened between her father and Louise. The expression on the woman's face revealed Holly's presence was not welcomed.

"What do you want?" Louise's words were clipped as her gaze shifted past the doctor to the car parked in front of the house.

"Answers." Holly stated. She looked Louise up and down. The years had not been kind. "I want to know what happened between you and my father."

"Ha... as if half the town doesn't want to know that." Louise stepped out of the house, leaning a hand against the side lights of the door. "Why are you here?"

"Closure. I loved my dad. He was my world. My family was ripped apart by you and your accusations. I never got answers from my parents. My dad committed suicide and my mom took

off. All the rumors centered on you." Holly took a step closer. Louise retreated until her back pressed against the doorframe. It was as if she feared Holly's presence.

In the background, a small chime could be heard repeatedly. Louise remained silent. Footsteps fell across the foyer floor on the opposite side of the door from the interior of the house. When the door opened, Louise jumped. She hadn't expected the door to be opened. Holly didn't bother to look at the door. Her focus was on the woman clearly avoiding her questions.

"Lou!" A young woman's voice penetrated Holly's concentration. "You're leaning on the bell!" Louise's eyes flickered from the doorway to Holly's face. The anger quite visible earlier was replaced by fear.

"Sorry." It was a whisper of response Holly could barely hear. The doctor took a look towards the person at the door. Holly's breath was sucked out of her lungs. She stared at the teenager and backed away. Her steps faltered and she couldn't catch her breath.

"I'm okay. Go back in the house." Louise ordered the girl at the door. Holly placed her hands on her knees and looked at the teenager again. She took in the lean frame and the long blonde hair, the big doe like brown eyes and the down turned firm set facial expression. She knew this person. The recognition hit her like a ton of bricks.

"Shit." She straightened her frame and ran her hands through her hair and holding them there for a moment as she caught her breath. "Shit... shit... shit." Holly mumbled. The answer she searched for stood in the doorway. Louise and her father did have a relationship and a child, a teenager standing ten feet away from her.

"Lady, are you okay?" The teen asked. "Louise, what's going on?" The girl took a step out of the house and towards the stranger standing on the cement apron trying to catch her breath.

"In the house now!" Her voice screeched at the teenager.

"Jesus, you're a piece of work. Did he know? Did you tell him?" Holly went into a crouch. The reality of the situation came to the front. "Does she know?" Louise looked as if she was about to break. She avoided looking into Holly's eyes.

"Go away Holly. You're not wanted here." The cold voice spoke as Louise raised her head. Her blue eyes met Holly's stare.

"Funny, I don't seem to be wanted anywhere." Holly laughed at her own words, knowing how true they were. "I feel for you kid." Gaining her composure and straightening her posture, Holly turned and walked back the car.

"Who was that Lou?" The young woman asked as she watched the black sedan pull away from the curb.

"Damn it Wendy! Get in the fucking house!" Louise screamed at the top of her lungs.

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~ With All of My Heart ~
by Catherine Burke

Author's Note: Here we are again....I thought I'd try this again.

Category: Orig. Uber Alt.

Rating: R / NC-17

Summary: Doctor Holly Graham was going through the motions. Taught to rely on no one but herself, she toiled through the medical school and settled into a position at one of Baltimore's top trauma centers. Tracy Campbell had looks, a career, a loving family and loyal friends. Yet, her love life was lacking. Pursued by many a suitor, she never found what she was looking for until a snowy night on a Maryland highway.

Comments/Disclaimer(s): This is an original story. The story and characters belong to me. They are not to be used or reproduced without my express written permission. I have posted an similar story on another site under the kato5568@aol.com email....This is me. These characters are mine and not swiped from someone else. It's good to know people are looking out for us!

This story depicts a love/sexual relationship between two consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it.

Special Thanks: To J Brownell for ideas suggestions and getting me to actually post this. Kerrie who was able to beta and get this story back to me a very short time. Living half way around the world does have its advantages. Time differences worked well for us. I'd like to give a shout to Powerbab, who actually writes about Cleveland where we live. We'll get together at the coffee shop soon.

I'm posting this in chapter blocks. Life gets in the way at times. Hope you enjoy.
You can reach me at burkcatherine@aol.com

Chapter 20

Uncertainty filled Holly's thoughts as she entered the crowded restaurant. She and Jordan Norwood, the woman who helped her as a teenager, were meeting for brunch. The arrangements made mainly through Jordan's assistant. The attorney quit practicing a few years ago, but she continued to consult if needed. A benefit of being semi-retired, the assistant explained.

Holly checked her reflection in the mirror behind the hostess stand. The restaurant had a pleasant atmosphere. There wasn't an overwhelming sense of formality with the staff or patrons. Wearing a green polo shirt tucked into a pair of tan chinos, she hoped she appeared professional yet casual at the same time. Meeting Jordan as an adult instead of a confused and disoriented teenager had Holly wondering what her one time savior would think of her. She asked the hostess for the Norwood party. The young woman smiled and ushered her towards the tables overlooking the patio. Sitting at the table was an older, grayer, Jordan Norwood. The years had been kind to the attorney. She had a pair of glasses perched on her nose as she read the menu. In front of her was a steaming cup of coffee.

"Here you are." The hostess gestured towards the table.

"Thank you." Holly gave her a slight smile and turned to see the shocked expression of her former attorney. "Ms. Norwood." Holly extended her hand. "It's good to see you again."

"Holly Graham." Jordan got to her feet and she was at least four inches shorter than the doctor. "You look absolutely marvelous." Holly chuckled as she thought about the Billy Crystal comedy skit. She welcomed Jordan's embrace like a warm blanket being wrapped around her. "You've done well for yourself Dr. Graham." Jordan commented as she stepped back from the hug.

"Thank you. You look wonderful." Holly took in the woman standing next to her. Jordan had gained a little weight, but she expected a person to change in twenty years. She wore very little jewelry, but what caught Holly's eye was the simple silver band on Jordan's right ring finger. Holly wondered if the ring had always been there. "Sit, please." Holly gestured to the table.

"You don't know how many times I wondered what happened to you." Jordan said as she settled into the chair placing the cloth napkin back on her lap. "At this moment, I don't care what brought you calling, just promise, it will not be another twenty years before I hear from you."

"I promise." Holly said as she sat in the chair across from the attorney. "You look wonderful."

"Pish posh..." Jordan sipped her coffee. "You do know how to make an old woman feel good though. So out with it, why are you here? I get a call from an attorney in DC about you. Three weeks later you come into town and want to meet."

"My life is a mess." Holly placed an elbow on the table and rested her cheek on it. "I got caught up in a situation similar to my father's."

"Holly, you are a successful beautiful doctor, somehow I doubt there is any similarity between you and your father." Jordan reassured her.

"I know." Holly thought back to the young woman with similar features and color to her own. All night she had tossed and turned, wondering what her father had been thinking. "I went to the Richmond's home." The attorney's face remained impassive. "By chance I happened to meet the girl."

"Holly, that's speculation."

"It's like looking in a mirror." Holly huffed as she motioned to the waitress who approached with a coffee pot. "It wasn't my goal to mess up some innocent kid's life. I wouldn't wish that on anyone." She thought about how Jordan swooped in and saved her when her parents abandoned her.

"Do you want to tell me about your trouble?"

"I do. I finally had everything going my way. My job and career have always been the focus. Then I met someone. Someone special and I started figuring out there was more to life than just work."

"Tell me about them. How did you meet?" Jordan leaned back in her chair waiting. Holly told her the amusing tale of meeting Tracey and how their relationship developed.

"She sounds amazing and good for you." Jordan paused a second then added. "What happened, since you used a past tense?"

"I haven't gotten to how the situation gets messed up." Holly continued to tell her tale. Jordan listened intently to her as Holly wrapped up with her trip to Ohio and the idea of her father being caught up in the same situation.

"I guarantee you that you have nothing in common with your father. Although, I do not condone what your father did, he was a trusted educator and a lonely man."

"What suggestions do you have?"

"Your attorney, Ms. Keller seems very sharp. I think that was a step in the right direction. Holly, the defense is going to have to prove a relationship with the young woman. If you never interacted with her inappropriately, you should be cleared."

"It's the 'should be' part that is killing me." Holly picked up the menu and glanced at the selections.

"What about your friend, Tracey?" Holly felt as if the wind had just been taken out of her sails when Jordan mentioned Tracey. Her face dropped and she stared at her lap for a moment. "Have you had any contact with her since this all happened?"

"Not really. Noel advised me it would be best not to have contact with her. We have run into each other once. It was a pretty ugly scene." Holly remember standing in Johnny's and staring at

Tracey. The insults Maxie flung her way and how Piper ushered her outside away from the scene. Vonnie walked a fine line between her friends and making sure Holly taken care of.

"Was Tracey being ugly?"

"No." Holly came to the realization that Tracey hadn't said a thing to her since the auditorium. "No, a friend of hers was extremely vocal as to her opinion of me."

Jordan smiled. "It's not her friend's opinion that should matter. It's her opinion or feelings on the matter. Do you now how she feels?"

"I'm not sure. At first, I think we were both in shock. She said some hateful things." Holly thought about that day. She went there to pick up Tracey and go to her parent's for dinner. "I have no idea how she feels about me."

"How do you feel about her?"

"I love her." The simple phrase flowed like lyrics to a song. Holly didn't have to think about the words. She knew in her heart she loved Tracey. She wished she had been brave enough to share her feelings earlier in their relationship. When she finally did utter the words, the teacher didn't believe her. "She loved me at one time, but I have no idea how she feels now."

"If she loves you and has a lick of common sense, she'll see the truth. It's clearing all the muck that takes the time." Jordan reached across the table and covered Holly's hand with her own. "She'd be a fool to think otherwise. I don't think you're the type of woman who falls for a fool."

"I'm not. Nor am I the type to fall prey to a teenager, yet I did." Holly heard the sadness in her voice. She wished she knew how Tracey felt. She didn't want to be with anyone else.

"We all make mistakes Holly." Jordan said as she signaled for the waiter. "That is a story for another time. Let's order some food and you can tell me about medical school and hospital you work at."

"Sounds like I'm going to be doing all the talking." Holly raised an eyebrow at the attorney. "I'll make you a deal. You tell me about retirement and I'll rehash my dull school years."

"You're a beautiful woman Holly. I doubt your school years were dull."

"Sure, medical school for a teenager was all fun and games." Holly teased. "You try to get out of a refrigerated cadaver drawer and then we'll talk." Jordan's laugh filled the restaurant.

"Oh you poor thing, you have to tell me." And Holly did.

~

The insistent pounding on the door roused Tracey from her bed. Her head pounded. With the amount of alcohol she consumed yesterday, she vowed never to drink again. She leaned against

the hallway wall, trying to get the apartment to stop spinning. In the moment she took to pause, the pounding continued.

"Hang on!" Tracey yelled back, grimacing at the sound of her voice. Her head pounded more and her stomach threatened to roll. She didn't remember getting into bed last night. She hoped Piper was the one who helped her undress. She would never live it down if it was Mel. Somehow she managed to get out of her jeans from last night and was wearing a ratty pair of sweat pants and an oversized Ravens t-shirt splattered with paint. Running a hand through her hair she tried to flatten down the puffiness of bed head. She glanced at the clock, eleven thirty. She couldn't yell at the visitor for an early morning interruption. If it was a solicitor, she was going to go off the deep end. Tracey placed her hands flat on the door. She didn't care what she looked like. Anyone who knew her wouldn't care either. Taking a breath, she leaned to look through the peep hole. Standing on the other side was Zoey Pope. The recently graduate looked upset and panicked. She unhooked the chain and turned the dead bolt. Pulling open the door, Zoey rushed into her apartment.

"Miss Campbell, they got it wrong! Everyone is wrong!" Zoey came into the apartment, her hands flaying in the air as she paced towards the picture window. She turned and looked at Tracey. "You look like crap." Zoey's attire ran the opposite side of the spectrum, pressed black slacks and a silk purple button down shirt.

"Thank you." Her sarcastic comment was met with a confused look. "The story of my life of late." Tracey moved into the kitchenette to start a pot of coffee. "So what's got you all riled up?"

"Is it true you are suspended and not coming back?"

"Zoey, this really isn't a conversation I should be having with you. Technically, you shouldn't be in my home." Pushing the start button on the machine, she turned towards the small blonde in her living room. It was mornings like this one where she wished she spent the extra cash for a Bunn. She wouldn't have to wait the five minutes for a cup of java.

"What? That is bullshit! This whole thing is bullshit!" Zoey practically yelled across the apartment. The teenagers face turned beet red.

Tracey's patience was at its breaking point. "What are you talking about?" Tracey moved to the couch and sat down, watching the teenager pace back and forth in front of her window. The pounding in her head eased when she shut her eyes.

"Are you still with Dr. Graham?"

"Zoey, my personal life is really none of your business." Tracey answered as best she could. She practically told Holly to get out of her life.

"Coach Campbell, I know what happened." The small blonde spoke softly. "I was there that day. I passed Michelle and Dr. Graham in the hallway." Tracey crossed her arms over her chest and

prayed Zoey didn't come here to confess she slept with Holly. Just the thought of it made Tracey sick.

"Zoey, maybe this is something you need to tell your mother or an attorney." Moving her hands to her thighs, Tracey held on, hoping Zoey didn't drop a bomb shell on her. She watched Zoey back away to sit on the window ledge. In her hand she held a small package.

"This is something I need to tell you, show you." She pulled a jewel DVD case from the package. "Do you love Dr. Graham?"

Tracey's mouth dropped open than quickly snapped shut. The question felt like a shot to her gut. "With all of my heart." The answer hurt as Tracey felt her chest constrict and tears threatened to spill.

"So no matter what you saw or the fact she could have been with Michelle, you still love her."

"A harsh reality, but true." Tracey leaned her forehead against her fingers. "Part of being in love is getting hurt, putting yourself out there, taking a chance." Tracey knew she was rambling.

"Love is not easy...love is hard. Trusting someone, being vulnerable ...it's hard. And once you have been burned or hurt, you wonder if it was worth it."

"Is it worth it?" Zoey's big blue eyes looked up at her former coach.

"Every moment I spend with Holly was worth it. If we ever get past this situation, I'm not sure what will happen."

"I have something for you. You should get it to your lawyer and probably Dr. Graham's." Zoey stood up and set the package on the coffee table.

"What is it?" Tracey eyed the small package.

"Last night, I went to see my grandparents. They live in a nursing home outside Hagerstown. They weren't able to get to my graduation so I had Malcolm record the ceremony." Tracey nodded knowing Malcolm frequently taped events at the school. "The beginning is what I am sure you will find it interesting."

Zoey walked to the door. "By the way Coach, I wrote my address and phone number on the tag in case you need it." Zoey started to exit. "I really like the doctor. I hope things work out for you. Do you remember that day in the locker room before the accident when you talked about people believing in you? Maybe you need to believe in the doctor, because I think she is worth having in your life." Zoey waved as she shut the door behind her.

Tracey went to the window that overlooked the parking lot. A small compact car pulled in front of the entrance doors and stopped. Zoey glanced back at the teacher just before she got in the car. Holly recognized the driver as Malcolm. She hoped her students were able to shed some light on the situation.

After the car had pulled away, she picked up the case and walked into the house. The square shaped package was hard and light weight, she opened it and found a reflective DVD inside. As Zoey had stated, her information was written on the tag. Checking the opaque box Tracey went to the entertainment center. Turning off the cable box and popping the DVD in the player, she pushed play. The black screen lit up to the high school auditorium. The date on the edge of the tape displayed the same date she accused Holly of touching Michelle. The time on the display was close...really close. Could this possibly be?

The video was just running of the empty auditorium. Tracey went to her knees and saw her reflection in the glass of the screen of the television. Intensely studying the picture in front of her, she heard the sound of the door opening first. Her eyes followed Michelle's form as she walked down the main aisle. The captured images were shot from just to the left of the stage. Tracey watched as Holly entered the auditorium behind the student. A feeling of anxiety washed over her, was I so blind? Tracey thought, knowing the doctor's body language seemed tense. Michelle abruptly stopped and the conversation could be heard and was crystal clear.

"You're with Coach aren't you?" Seeing Michelle's hand running up Holly's arm made the hair stand up on Tracey's arm. "You like women don't you?" When image the revealed Michelle grabbing Holly's jacket, a feeling of relief washed over Tracey.

She knew Holly would never be with this student. She rocked back on her heels, her smile lit up the room. She forgot all about her pounding head and her hangover.

Now, she had the proof the courts needed. This was what Holly needed to clear her name and hopefully get their relationship back on track. The smile on her face faded as she watched her form come into the auditorium and confront Holly. The hateful words spewed at Holly. The sound of the slap against Holly's face seemed to echo. She placed her hand on her cheek as if she had been the one slapped.

Did Holly still love her? Could the doctor love a woman who wouldn't even attempt to listen to an explanation? Why did Zoey ask her all those questions? The student knew what was on the DVD. Would she forgive her girlfriend if they treated her this way? If they didn't believe in her, probably not, she didn't care. She stopped the tape and headed to the shower. She was going to show this tape to Lee Christian, her attorney. She didn't care if she didn't have an appointment. This mockery had gone on for too long. She wondered what Lee had dug up on Michelle Stanley and her family. She needed to talk to someone about this. What she really wanted to do was give the information to Holly. The DVD would exonerate her. She'd find Mel Watkins. If she could get hold of the EMT, she would find Holly. When Piper and Mel dropped her off, she remembered the couple commenting about a quiet weekend at home grilling out. Tracey looked at the clock and hoped the couple hadn't changed their plans.

~

Holly's phone rang as soon as she crossed into Maryland on Interstate70. The digital read out let her know it was Mel calling.

"Hello."

"Hey. I was wondering if you're coming back home?" Mel asked.

Holly fixed her ear piece and answered.

"Do you miss me already? Won't Number 3 wonder if you have a crush?"

"Don't call her that. She's right here." Holly listened as Piper could be heard in the background. "She's being nice." Mel said half way into the phone. "Listen, we are grilling out and wanted to know if you want to come over."

"I just hit Hancock, so I should be there in a couple of hours. I want to stop at home, take a shower, check messages, and the mail."

"I left it on the counter next to the frig." Mel watched her house on a number of occasions.

"Thanks, I'll see you later."

"Wait a minute, how was Ohio?"

"Mel, that's a story to be told over a beer or two."

"Or two huh? You'll tell me later right?"

"You bet." Holly wondered what her friend's reaction would be when she told her about Wendy. "Mel, thanks for everything."

"No problem Hol, that's what friends are for."

"Tell the officer I'll see her later. Do you need me to bring anything?"

"Just you."

Close to three hours later, Holly shut her car door and headed around the side of Piper's house to the backyard. She had more messages on her machine than she expected. A call from Dr. Nguyen threw her off. She hadn't expected to hear from her immediate supervisor until the charges were dropped or there was a change in her status. She called him back but got his answering service. There was an odd message from Tracey. Holly stood frozen looking at her machine when she heard the teacher's voice. There was a lot of background noise and Tracey rambled into the phone. By the number of cries, slurs and sighs into the phone, she knew she wasn't the only having troubles with the separation. She found some comfort in the fact the teacher hadn't erased her number even if she drunk dialed.

Changing into a pair of cut of jeans and a faded grey Orioles t-shirt, she figured she'd stay at Piper's for a couple beers and some food, then head home to finish the laundry she started. On Monday, she'd contact Noel Keller and let her know about her findings in Ohio and approach the

subject of speaking with Tracey. The lawyer scoffed at her request last week. Maybe Holly just needed to take the chance and speak with Tracey.

"Well I don't give a shit about your reasons!" Mel's voice bellowed over the six foot privacy fence. Holly grimaced, wondering if she was walking into a lover's spat. She really didn't want to get in the middle of that. With her hand on the gate's handle, she debated if she should turn around and leave.

"This doesn't concern you Melanie!" Tracey voice shouted back.

"Holly is my best friend and if you're going to fuck her over, I swear to ..."

"What's going on?" Holly opened the gate as soon as she recognized Tracey's voice. She saw Tracey and Mel locked in stare down. Although she thought Tracey still looked beautiful, she knew the teacher looked tired, thinner and pissed. The women turned at her question. Neither spoke. "What's going on?"

"I told her it's not a good idea that she's here because..."

"I need to talk to you..."

Holly tried to figure out which one she should listen to first. Her eyes stayed on Tracey. She didn't care what her attorney told her at this point. She knew she was innocent and from the call on her machine, she knew Tracey thought she was innocent.

"Hang on." Holly held up her hand. She turned to a red faced Piper who was busy fussing with the coals. "You!" Holly pointed to Piper. "Talk."

"Come on Doc." Piper shoved a poker in to the BBQ grill.

"Spill it."

"Tracey called and asked if I knew where you were. Technically, I didn't, but I knew you were coming over here later." Shifting uncomfortably on her feet Piper looked towards Mel. "It seemed important that she sees you and after Friday, I think..."

"Vonnie!"

"Mel, what if this happened to us? Would you like it if someone else told you we couldn't talk, couldn't see each other."

"We wouldn't get caught up in something like this." Mel crossed her arms over her chest and immediately regretted her words. "I'm sorry." She apologized to Holly then looked at the unshed tears in Tracey's eyes.

"Never take anything for granted Mel. Believe me I know that now." Holly walked over to Tracey and placed a hand on her cheek. When Tracey leaned into her caress, Holly watched as Tracey's eyes closed for a moment. She stood and stared into silver eyes. "I'm sorry I got us into this mess." She wanted to take Tracey in her arms and kiss her, but held back.

"It's not your fault, Holly. None of this is your fault or my fault." Tracey placed her hand over Holly's

"Still, I should have known better." Holly's head dropped. She felt Tracey's fingers tilt her face up. "I'm so sorry." It was Holly who was crying this time. She thought about all the what if's and the time lost between them. "My attorney instructed me to stay away from you but I really don't care anymore."

"Good, because neither do I." Tracey wrapped her arms around Holly's neck and brought their lips together. The brunette's kiss was soft but firm as if she was trying to reassert her place in Holly's life. Holly clutched her like a man overboard held on to a life preserver. She didn't want to let Tracey go, but she did pulling back to look into the teacher's eyes.

"I'm in love with you. I wanted you to know that."

"I know. Lately, I've been unsure of everything."

"Is that why you drunk dialed me the other night?"

"I did not."

"Yes, you did, and I still have the message to prove it." Holly leaned her forehead against Tracey's as she wrapped her arms around her waist. "I've missed you."

"God, I've missed you too. Oh!" Tracey said as she pushed away from Holly and went to her bag. She pulled out a DVD. "This is for you." Tracey handed Holly the box.

"What is it?" Today was her birthday, but she doubted the opaque disk was a present. She didn't expect Tracey to remember her birthday, not many people knew when it was anyways.

"I think we should all watch it and then you can decide what you want to do with it." Tracey looped her arm in Holly's. When Piper pointed to the coals, Mel slapped her on the arm. "Five minutes Vonnie."

Gathered around the family room television, the woman watched as Tracey popped the DVD into the machine and pressed play. Tracey didn't watch the screen, she knew what was playing. Instead she focused on Holly's reaction.

Larger brown eyes glanced from the screen to Tracey. As if someone had just handed her a present, Holly watched her image on screen. The camera angle captured Michelle Stanley grabbing and kissing her. She moved closer. "Replay that." Holly said. Piper hit the remote as the

screen reversed. Frustrated, Holly took control of the remote and watched over and over, as Michelle grabbed, kissed and released. Falling back on her haunches, Holly looked at the faces in the room.

"Where did you get this?"

"One of the students, Zoey, dropped it off at my house this morning." Tracey said. "This shows what really happened. I'm sorry for doubting you." Suddenly, the room felt small and hot and Tracey needed to escape. She fled from the house out the gate.

Holly watched in amazement as the scene played out on the television. She heard Tracey's response but didn't realize the teacher had left until she heard the storm door shut. She looked at the space where Tracey had been standing and found it vacant. Scrambling to her feet, she chased after Tracey. Running down the side walk, Holly saw Tracey getting into her Jeep.

"Where are you going?" Holly grabbed the door just as Tracey went to shut it. Tears ran down the teachers face.

"I didn't think you'd want me around."

"What? Tracey, of course I want you around. I love you. Do you love me?" Holly asked. Tracey declared her love early in their relationship. Holly was the one who held back on declaring her feelings. Holly didn't expect Tracey to laugh at her question but the teacher did. "You think I'm being funny?"

"No, Zoey asked me the same question before she gave me the tape."

"What did you tell her?"

"I said I loved you with all of my heart." Tracey answered as her door was pulled open and Holly leaned in and kissed her with such passion she felt the air surrounding them sizzle. The intensity of the kiss increased when Tracey wove her fingers in Holly's hair, pulling her closer. Deepening the kiss, Tracey opened herself to Holly's probing as the desire they had held at bay for almost two months came on with full force. "Take me home." Tracey whispered. Their passionate kiss cooled into a kiss that communicated the need for an emotional reconnection.

"Don't want to make a scene in Piper's neighborhood?"

"Don't temp me doctor." Tracey teased. "I'll see you at your house?"

"I'll be right behind you." Holly eased the car door shut and waved as Tracey headed towards her house. Running back to Vonnie's, Holly was greeted by the laughing couple.

"Let me guess, you're leaving?" Mel teased.

"I'll call you tomorrow. Maybe we can meet for breakfast." Holly knew if she and Tracey were back together, they wouldn't make breakfast. "How about dinner? My treat?"

"Call us if you feel like company, okay?" Mel left the invitation open. Holly waved and turned to her car.

"Hey Doc!" Vonnie called out and threw the DVD to Holly when she turned. "You need to get that to your lawyer."

"Thanks...." Holly looked at the women. "I mean that. Thank you both for being there for me. I know it wasn't easy to go against friends and"

"Holly, enjoy your birthday and don't worry about anything." Mel laughed as a Holly's cheeks turned crimson. Holly thought that everyone had forgotten her birthday. With everything that had been going on, she actually forgot what day it was. She knew Mel wanted to tease her about being a year older. She actually wouldn't be surprised if there was a cake on the counter with her name on it.

"Oh by the way, I met my sister." Holly told Mel as she quickly got in her car. Grinning like a fool, Holly knew the EMT would stew over her comment until she saw her again.

~

Tracey hadn't used her key since May. She had often wondered if Holly changed the locks and the security codes. When the lock released and she punched in the code 0726 Holly gave her, she realized today was Holly's birthday. *Shit!* Tracey thought as she leaned against the kitchen counter. At least she could spend the night with Holly. Tomorrow, she would go get her a birthday present. The house was spotless except for the pile of mail and the note pad on the counter. Mel had said Holly had gone to Ohio. Tracey wondered how the trip went. She looked over the note pad next to the phone and saw her name written down with a question mark and a heart. Tracey pulled out her cell phone and searched through her dialed calls. Indeed, she did call Holly after Vonnie and Mel dropped her off at the house. She eyed the machine and thought about erasing the evidence, but knew Holly probably wanted to save it for blackmail purposes. Tracey didn't mind, she would do anything Holly asked her. Dr. Nguyen's name was underlined a few times with his number scratched out. Tracey hoped it was good news.

"Hey!" Holly said as she walked in the back door. Seeing Tracey in the kitchen felt great, like they were a couple again.

"Happy Birthday!" Tracey put a hand on Holly's forearm. "I forgot until I put in the alarm code."

"It's not a big deal. I forgot myself."

"It is a big deal." Tracey ran her hand up and down Holly's arm. "Is there anything you want?" The breathy question sent shivers up Holly's spine.

"You, I want you." Holly bent over and scooped Tracey up in her arms. "I want you in my life, my bed, my house. I want to be with you for the rest of my life." Holly kissed her as she carried her upstairs to the bedroom.

"Why Dr. Graham, I think that can be arranged!" Tracey squealed as Holly dropped her on the bed and covered the length of Tracey's body with her own. Neither of them cared if the entire neighborhood heard them or not. Zippers were undone, shoes went flying as clothes were stripped by wandering hands. The need to feel, reconnect became the focus of touches, nips, kisses, and caresses. Frantically, they battled for dominance as flesh slid against flesh. Tracey was on top, then positions were reversed by Holly. She wrapped her legs around Holly's hip, groaning and grinding her pelvis wantonly against the long, lean body. When Tracey tried to buck Holly off, Holly leaned down and kissed her nose. "It's my birthday remember. I get what I want." Holly continued her kisses, touching every inch of Tracey's body. Along her neck, past her clavicle, to her breasts where she took her time, licking, sucking and fondling the warmth. Tracey moaned then pulled Holly closer when the doctor's mouth closed around her nipple and sucked.

"Harder!" Tracey lifted her hips as the sensation at her breast traveled straight to her center. "More..." Tracey let her head lull back against the pillow.

"Patience, my love." Holly said as her hand replaced her mouth and she squeezed the rock hard nipple. Tracey moaned at the touch. Holly circled her naval with her tongue, wanting to imprint every sound, touch and taste in her memory. She never wanted to forget what it was like to make love to Tracey.

"Please Holly, touch me. I need you to touch..." Tracey barely got the words out as Holly answered her plea with penetrating fingers. Tracey moved, gyrating her hips as her desire swelled. Clutching handfuls of Holly's hair, she rose and fell, meeting each of Holly's thrusts. Bodies' slick with sweat moved against each other as bodies tensed and internal muscles contracted around Holly's fingers. Groaning and gasping, Holly felt Tracey climax as she quickly followed, slumping against her lover.

They made love through the night, finally falling asleep exhausted in each other's arms. In the early morning sunlight, Holly's heart swelled as she watched her lover sleep. Leaning on an elbow, her face resting in the palm of her hand, she watched as the sun glittered off the dust particles and bathed Tracey in its warm glow. With her fingers, she traced a lazy path along the sleeping figure's shoulder and down to the roundness of her hip. Time wasted, so much time wasted. She loved this woman the same way Tracey had said earlier, with all of her heart. Never again would anything come between them. Cloudy gray eyes flickered open as Tracey woke.

"I was afraid to wake up." The soft confession purred for the figure lying naked on her stomach with a thin sheet covering from the waist down.

"Why?" Holly leaned closer and whispered in her ear.

"I didn't want this to be a dream." There were unshed tears in those cloudy eyes.

"No sweetie, not a dream. Never again, will something come between us. Never!" Holly kissed her with the heat of a thousand flames. She would never let anything come between them again.

Chapter 21

Tracey tapped the toe of her black leather pump on the marble floor. Sitting in the main floor of the office building which housed the law firm of Boardman, Boardman, and Boardman, she waited for Noel Keller and Lee Christian.

Since Holly's return from Ohio and the new evidence Zoey provided, their lives became a whirlwind of hurry up and wait. Meetings led to more meeting and soon the couple's attorney's joined forces. Holly filled Tracey in on her trip home, meeting with Jordan Norwood, and the Richmond's, including the possibility of Wendy being her half sister. Tracey didn't hesitate when Holly asked her to move in. She had her brothers, Mel and Vonnie help her empty her apartment and move her things to Holly's or into storage. Since the incident at Johnny's, Tracey avoided Maxie. Although she still thought of the banker as a good friend, she knew Holly was deeply hurt by the banker. Tracey just thought her friend wouldn't understand why she went back with Holly. Tracey questioned if Maxie had an alternative motive to keep them apart.

Today, she sat in the common area coffee shop waiting for the meeting upstairs to conclude. Their attorney's were invited to an early afternoon meeting with the legal team representing the Stanley's. The attorney's requested that Tracey or Holly be available if needed. Tracey glanced at the watch which read just past two o'clock. Holly had an eleven o'clock meeting with Dr. Nguyen and members of the hospital's board. Although the doctor wanted to be here, her responsibility to the hospital came first. Whatever happened in the conference room upstairs would happen whether or not she was waiting with Tracey. She wasn't sure what was happening in the meeting but she thought their attorney's were presenting the recorded evidence to the opposition.

Tracey really wished she could be a fly on the wall when Geoff Stanley watched his little princess fall from her pedestal. Just as the thoughts left Tracey's thoughts, a commotion at the elevator grabbed her attention. Geoff Stanley stepped in to the lobby, his hand firmly grasping Michelle's elbow. The teenager struggled as her father tried to move her out of the building to the awaiting Lincoln Town Car idling at the curb. Michelle pulled away from her father and began to scream and cry.

"I didn't do anything wrong!" The teen called out to anyone who would listen. Geoff's face turned a deep red as he continued his mission. His eyes darted around the building as he dared anyone to question him. He stopped in his tracks when his eyes landed on Tracey. Michelle followed his gaze as her eyes landed on Tracey.

"You did all of this! You set me up! You and that friend of yours! You're a sick bitch!" Michelle screamed at her. The teen would have launched a full out attack on her if her father's arm hadn't held her back.

Tracey felt her defensives rise as the teen began screaming. She looked around for the security guard. Places like this always had a rent a cop or two in the lobby. Getting to her feet in case Michelle broke free, Tracey stared into her former students eyes. "The truth is out Michelle. You can scream all you want. The more you drag Holly's name through the mud, the hole you're in gets deeper."

"That bitch is ..."

"I'd advise your daughter not to complete her sentence." A tall raven hair woman in a power suit warned Geoff Stanley. "My client is not here but this is a public place and we know what damage your daughter has already done." Tracey had yet to meet Noel Keller, but she realized who the woman protecting Holly's name was.

"Michelle! Car now!" Geoff's voice echoed off the marble floor. The teen's face turned ashen as she turned and stomped towards the exit.

"Mr. Stanley, we'll be in touch." Noel stated dismissing the county official. Geoff straightened his shoulders and nodded to the women. Waiting until he cleared the doors, Noel let a smile crack through. "Interesting family."

"I'll second that." Lee Christian said easing the tension. "Tracey, let me introduce you to Noel Keller, Holly's attorney." The small blonde introduced the raven haired woman.

"Tracey, good to finally meet you. I've heard a lot of good things about you." Noel extended her hand to the teacher. "Did Holly make it?"

"No, she had a meeting at the hospital. I thought she'd be here by now." Tracey had a small inkling of worry creep into her subconscious.

"We thought we could take you and Holly out to dinner this evening. Maybe invite Zoey and Malcolm."

"Malcolm left for school. He received a scholarship to UCLA film school."

"What about Zoey?"

"She's still here. I'm pretty sure she won't pass up a meal." Tracey joked about the small blonde that was always hungry.

"I have to go. I will see you both tonight?" Noel asked as she hoisted her bag on her shoulder. She stared a little bit longer at the blonde attorney.

"Absolutely, Brewster's Art at eight." Lee replied. "Do you want me to call for reservations?"

"No, I will have Willie do it. If I don't he thinks I'm out to replace him. The little bugger doesn't realize I can't get a thing done if he isn't around. I will see you tonight." She waved to Tracey and

Lee and began to walk away. "Oh Lee!" Noel turned and called to the blonde. "Great work up there." Noel winked and walked away.

Tracey watched the blush rise in Lee's cheeks as her eyes were settled on Noel's retreating form. When Lee realized Tracey was watching her, she looked away. "Things went well?" Tracey asked trying to gain the attorney's attention.

"Yes, very well. I'm just glad I didn't have to go up against Noel. I think she would have wiped the floor with me."

"What did she do upstairs?"

"Showed them who the big fish was in the pond and ate those guys for lunch." Lee smiled at the memory. "So do you want to meet at Brewer's or should I pick you up?"

"We'll meet you there. I'll call if there is an issue. Thanks for everything Lee." Tracey gave the attorney a hug.

"Tracey, thank you. And thank Zoey and Malcolm if it wasn't for them, I don't think Holly would be cleared so quickly."

"We've lost enough time haven't we?" Tracey thought about the two months away from Holly.

"Yes, now go see what's keeping her." Lee waved as she watched Tracey head home.

~

Holly's meeting at the hospital ran much longer than she anticipated and there was no way she would make it to the meeting with Noel Keller, so she headed home. As soon as Holly pulled down her street, she sensed something was out of place. She knew her neighbors. Over the years, she had been invited to block parties, first communions, graduations and every other celebration under the sun. She tried her best to interact with them, but her work hours fluctuating. She barely had time to see her house in the day light, let alone be social. Since being suspended from Jessup, she found time to clean up the yard and redo the landscaping along the porch front and the flagstone walk. With some friendly green thumb advice from her neighbor, Mrs. Rose, her flower beds in full bloom.

If the evidence Zoey gave Tracey was enough proof to exonerate her, she could get back to some normalcy. Yet she had to wait. Noel planned on not only having the charges dropped, but to file a counter suit against the Stanley's for defamation of character. When she confided in the attorney about being back with Tracey, the raven haired attorney laughed and said she knew. It was her job to know facts about her clients. Also, she didn't blame Holly for wanting to be with the person she loved. Tracey attorney, Lee Christian contacted Noel with her findings on the Stanley family. Lee had research every avenue she could find including emails, chat rooms, blog postings and findings. Noel guaranteed Holly all charges against her would be dropped. With Noel and Lee's joining forces, Holly knew the women would not let her or Tracey down.

Normally, she would drive past the front and turn down the alley and park in the driveway. She slowed her Honda as she passed the front of her house. Parked on her curb was a worn and torn maroon Pontiac Grand Prix with Ohio plates. The sight that set her back was what she found on her porch. Sitting on her stoop was a familiar blonde teenager with her knees pulled up with her chin resting casually on them. Her hair pulled back with a blue painter's bandana. Wendy Richmond found her and was sitting on her porch.

"Son of a bitch." Holly let the profanity slip from her lips as she made the turn down the alley. She wondered who she pissed off to be going through all this crap. Noel's last piece of advice to her stood out as she felt her blood pressure rise. Her attorney advised her to maintain a low profile and to stay out of any situation involving teenagers. Now sitting on her porch was her eighteen year old half sister. At least she told Noel about her father's actions and the strong possibility of a half sister. The proof was walking talking and about to throw a monkey wrench into her life. *What did Wendy want?*

Her visit to Ohio was definitely eye opening. She expected to hear some type of correspondence from the Richmond family. Like a letter to stay away for the family. In the weeks since she returned, there had been no correspondence. Jordan Norwood was contacted by Noel to see if anyone reached out to her directly. Yet, sitting on her front porch was Wendy.

Holly parked and went into the house via the back door. She didn't stop, heading straight for the front door. Wendy jumped in surprise as the front door opened. She looked at Holly, her large brown eyes red rimmed and fresh tear tracks covered her cheeks. The bandana covered her unkempt hair. She wore a wrinkled disheveled Cleveland Indians t-shirt with cut-offs made from a pair of cotton pants. Trek sandals donned her feet as she leaned her back against the porch post.

"Having a rough day?" Holly asked as she sat down against the opposite post. She let her long legs stretch to the second step. Her anxiety disappeared as soon as she saw Wendy's face. The girl was having a hard time. The last thing Holly wanted to do was add to her angst.

"I hate her." Wendy confessed her voice crackling as she spoke. She tried to hide the tears. Holly didn't bother to ask who. She carried the same feelings for Louise Richmond a long time ago. "It's hard enough that I thought she was my sister. Now," Wendy caught her breath and rubbed her face. "She's my mother. I hate my mother. I do."

"I'm sorry." Holly admitted. She went home to clear her father's name. Instead she opened Pandora's Box for this young woman. "Have you talked to your parents? The Richmond's?"

"And say what?" Wendy cried. "They are just as guilty, probably more. I always thought Lou hated me. Now I know why." Wendy pushed her feet out and leaned forward. The world the teen knew was crumbling around her. "She was sixteen and pregnant by her Math teacher. I sure the hell wouldn't want to keep the baby. Is it right to have your parents adopt your child and raise it as a sibling? How fucked up is that?" Wendy put her hands on top of her head. She closed her eyes and wished for inner peace. "I'm so fucked up."

Holly studied her for a moment. "They did what they thought was right."

She recalled going through a similar situation when she was sixteen. "You can't pick your parents. Believe me." Holly stood up and brushed the dirt from her dress slacks. "If we're going to have this conversation, I'm going to need to change and a beer." Crossing her arms over her stomach, she looked at the car parked out front and the condition her half sister was in. "Where are you staying?"

"I booked at a room by the horse track."

"Did you get an hourly rate?" The shock on the teens face caused Holly to laugh. "Stay here. Get your stuff put in the guest room. Take a shower and meet me out back when you're done." Holly left before Wendy could protest. She really didn't feel like arguing.

"Thanks." Wendy stammered as she watched the tall blonde doctor walk into the house. She looked at the clothes she had been wearing since yesterday afternoon. Half way to Baltimore, she pulled over in a Pennsylvania rest stop and slept in the backseat. Lifting her arm and sniffing, she grimaced. Ripe was a good adjective. She chuckled. Her mother and Lou would have a fit if they knew she spent the night in her car.

For the first time in weeks, she smiled. This was something she wasn't able to do since the mysterious blonde appeared at her front door. Lou went into a hissy fit as soon as she closed the door. Mrs. Hill was with the stranger. The way the woman outside acted. Made her believe there was something serious going on and Lou was not telling her. When Wendy started to ask her sister questions, Lou got pissed off and told to go to her room.

"You're not my mother." Wendy snapped back and watched as Lou's face turned a ghostly white. Her sister reached for the support of the door jam. A defeat Lou looked into her brown eyes and quietly asked for Wendy to go to her room. For some reason the look in her sister's eyes scared her.

For days on end, the stranger with Mrs. Hill continued to bother the teenager. She had seen her somewhere before. The woman was just so familiar. Wendy couldn't place her, but she knew she knew the woman.

"Lou, who was that woman?" Wendy asked as she climbed the stairs to her room.

"No one important." Lou immediately turned and went into their father's study. Wendy heard the phone being picked up just as Lou closed the door for privacy. For no one important, the family attorney's were quickly called into service.

The last couple weeks had been complete hell for Wendy. Her parent's immediately flew home from Florida. There was closed door meeting after closed door meeting. Lou refused to look at Wendy and was constantly crying. Wendy overheard a discussion regarding assault charges being filed against Dr. Holly Graham, the mystery woman. *Why would assault charges be filed?* The woman didn't get within ten feet of Louise. The talk around town was that the doctor had actually saved Sammy Dixon's life. There was no reason the doctor would want to talk to her sister. She needed to talk with Mrs. Hill. She had babysat for the Hill's two kid's dozens of times.

The house felt like a prison. As if it went into lock down as soon as the attorney's left the house. Wendy argued desperately to go to her team's championship softball game. Finally, her father granted her request as long as she did not speak of the incident with the doctor.

"Whatever Dad." Wendy said staying in the house was driving her stir crazy. She couldn't wait to escape to George Washington University in the fall. She needed to get away from her family. The ball fields were still buzzing with the gossip about the doctor. Wendy felt the hush come over the crowd as she walked towards the field. Her ball bag slung over her shoulder. She waved hello and smiled at friends and church members. Their responses threw her off. Normally, Mrs. Forrest pulled her aside and inquired about her parents in Florida. Today, the woman barely returned her greeting. As soon as she got around her teammates, Jessie Barton pulled her aside.

"Is it true?" Barbie, her former classmate asked. Friends since grade school, the freckle faced girl was always stirring the pot.

"Is what true?"

"The doctor who saved Sammy, is she your sister?"

"What?" Wendy was completely taken back. "My sister is Louise."

"That's not what Mrs. Lennon at the store said. She said Louise is your mother."

"Fuck you!" Wendy punched Barbie before she realized what she was doing. She heard someone screaming and realized it was Barbie holding her eye. Grabbing her bag, she headed towards her car. In the parking lot leaning against her hand on Wendy's Pontiac, Mrs. Hill waited.

"Are you alright?"

"No." Wendy shook her head and began to shake. Her sister was her mother? The doctor was her sister? There were too many thoughts swirling in her brain.

"Come on we'll go for a ride."

"My dad." Wendy felt the bitterness of fear creep into her thoughts.

"You're dad is trying to protect you. We can talk." Wendy watched as Mrs. Hill made her way towards a mini-van with a decal soccer ball on the back window. In the hour she drove around with Krista, she refused to be called Mrs. Hill any longer. Wendy learned about Donald Graham, the teacher accused of having an affair with his student, Louise Richmond. She learned about how the Graham's daughter, Holly was caught up in the middle of a domestic meltdown. How the "girl genius" as the town described her, broke away from her family and left town. The ugly divorce and the charges the Richmond's and the county prosecutor filed against Mr. Graham.

Wendy felt exhausted. Her family, her existence wasn't what she thought. Her entire life was a lie. When she got home, she quietly went to her room. The next morning, she confronted her

parents and Louise. Soon talk circled to bringing slander charges up against Krista Hill. Wendy looked at her parents and Louise. There was definitely a family resemblance. She had some but nothing like looking at the doctor. Holly Graham looked so familiar because Wendy looked just like her. Blonde hair, brown eyes, lean muscular build and the height, all of it was like looking in a mirror.

Five days later, she gathered some cash from her accounts, packed her belongings and headed towards Baltimore. School would start in a few weeks. She'd find a place to stay until the dorms opened. Popping open her trunk, she grabbed her duffle bag. She didn't expect to be waiting for Holly Graham on her front steps, but she was here. So far, the doctor hadn't sent her away. Instead, she invited her to stay. She'd take a shower get cleaned up and than get some of her questions answered.

As soon as Wendy went upstairs, Holly picked up the phone and called Noel's office. She didn't want anything to jeopardize her case. Wendy's presence in her home could do that, especially if the girl was a run away. Technically, the teen was a legal adult, but she didn't want to take the chance. Holly talked with Willie and requested her attorney to make inquires into any missing person claims associated with Wendy Richmond and Ohio. Holly waited until she heard the shower start and she retreated to the back porch, beer in hand.

Twenty minutes later, a much cleaner and relaxed looking Wendy appeared at the back door. "Thanks." Wendy said her hair still wet and slicked back against her scalp.

"Grab me a beer before you come out. Get yourself one too." Holly motioned with a gesture of her hand.

"Really." The teenager's excited voice filled the air as she turned toe towards the kitchen and returned with two very cold Coors Light's bottle. The blue mountains incrustated with a thin coat of ice. She handed one to Holly than took a seat in one of the empty forest green Adirondack chairs.

"You're a long way from home." Holly said as she removed the cap from the bottle. "Want to enlighten me?"

"Things went crazy after your visit. Lawyers were called. Mom and dad came home from Florida. There were all these meetings. Christ, I felt guilty and I didn't do anything."

"Exactly, remember that you didn't do anything Wendy." Holly closed her eyes and tilted her head back letting the afternoon sun warm her.

"I know. I'm nineteen years old and my life is a mess."

"I'm thirty four and my life is a mess. Nothing is easy." Holly commented. She held her bottle up for Wendy to toast. "Does your family know where you are at?"

"I'm an adult."

"That's not what I asked." Holly opened an eye and looked at the teenager. "Being an adult is being responsible for your actions."

"No, they don't."

"You can call them from here." She heard the rumblings of a protest from Wendy. "I don't need the cops beating at my door again."

"What? Never mind." Wendy asked as she took a sip of the hoppy beverage. "I'll call them later. Payment for the beer?"

"Maybe." Holly lifted her head from the chair. So much had changed in her life. She never imagined being suspended from the hospital and her license being in jeopardy. Nor did she ever imagine having a sister, let alone sitting on her back porch drinking beers. She took a sip from her bottle.

"Lou called you a dyke." Wendy said trying to catch the doctor's eye.

"If she did, not much has changed with her."

"She doesn't know I'm gay." Wendy confided in the doctor.

"What?" Holly said as she sat up in her chair and turned to the blonde sitting next to her.

"I'm a lesbian. I've known since I was in eight grade. Don't even go there with the phase thing. I've had enough girl friends to know it's not a phase." Wendy stretched her back one way then the other trying to loosen the tightness. She shifted her eyes to the two by two slates on the back porch. "My family doesn't understand. They'll freak out and send me to the preacher or some deprogramming program to turn me straight."

"I think I understand more than you know." Holly reached a hand out and roughed Wendy's hair. "Why are you here?" She asked the question Wendy had been expecting first thing. Instead, the doctor had offered her a place to stay, a shower and a beer.

"I want to know the truth." Wendy was grasping at straws when she left home. She wanted to find Holly to get her answers.

"The truth hurts sometimes. That's what I found out. My trip home was to find out the truth about my dad. I found it alright and it's sitting on my back porch drinking a beer."

"So it's true."

"There are ways to find out."

"I'm not asking Lou." Wendy protested.

"Tests. Medical testing to determine DNA matches. Nothing fancy, plain old biology. A simple blood test would do it." Holly explained.

"Genetics." Wendy replied and Holly nodded. "We wouldn't have to have Lou's DNA."

"If we are related, our profiles will be enough to prove it."

"Can you do the tests?" Wendy felt the burden of the unknown lifting from her shoulders.

"You're a doctor right?"

"Well that is all in semantics at this time." Holly waited for another question from the teenager.

"I called my lawyer when you were in the shower."

"Ah man!" Wendy cried and got to her feet. "Why I didn't do anything illegal."

"It's not about you." Holly began. "I had some things happen this summer. As of today everything is looking better, but I still need to be careful."

"Why did you go back home after all these years?"

"I wanted to prove my dad was innocent."

"He wasn't innocent was he?" Wendy whispered as the realization of Holly's visit had a purpose.

"Yet to be determined but if he isn't, I'm glad I have a sister." Holly stood up headed for the kitchen. "Want another one?"

"Absolutely." Wendy downed the last of her beer and handed the empty to Holly just as a red Jeep pulled down the alley and stopped in the drive way. Wendy watched the beautiful looking brunette exit the truck and walk towards the porch.

"Hello sweetie." Tracey looked at Holly then the teenage girl sitting next to her. Walking up the steps, she approached Holly and placed a kiss on her lips. "Who's your friend?"

"Tracey, meet Wendy. Wendy, my girlfriend Tracey." Holly introduced them then wrapped her arms around Tracey's waist. "I was just going to get a couple of beers, do you want one?" Holly asked as Tracey's eyes slide quickly to Wendy and back.

"No, you stay here I'll get them. Wendy, nice to meet you. Are you in town visiting?"

"You can say that." Wendy shrugged as she watched Tracey walked into the house.

"She's a teacher?"

"Yep."

"If my teacher's looked like her, I would..."

"Tracey isn't your typical looking teacher." Holly smiled as she watched Tracey through the window.

"She hot."

"Smoldering." Holly laughed remember making love to Tracey all night long.

"Smoldering huh?" Tracey said as she handed the beers to the blondes. "I'll take that. We were invited to dinner by Lee and Noel. I'm sure they won't mind if Wendy joins us. Zoey will be there."

"Dinner? Why?"

"To fill us in on what happened this afternoon. Noel had to run to court so there wasn't a lot of time to debrief. How did your meeting go?"

"Better than I expected." Holly smiled and reached a hand out to grab Tracey's. She pulled the teacher close and on to her lap. "Smoldering..." Holly said as she nuzzled Tracey's neck and placed the cold bottle against the small of her back.

"Hey!" Tracey squealed as she tried to get away from the frozen mountains. Getting to her feet, she felt a swat on her rear.

"That's for ease dropping."

"I didn't know it was a secret that you find me attractive." Tracey teased.

"It's not. Neither is the fact I love you." Tracey felt the tears form in her eyes. Holly was immediately on her feet and pulling into an embrace. "I love you Tracey."

"I love you too." Tracey said into Holly's shoulder. Savoring the warmth of Holly's body against hers, she almost forgot their guest. She felt Holly's hand in her hair as her head was pulled back slightly for Holly to access her lips. The kiss was slow, methodical as if Holly wanted to convey all the love she felt for Tracey into that moment. A kiss Tracey would never forget. Breaking apart and staring into each other's eyes. They heard Wendy clear her throat.

"How long have you guys been together?" The teen asked as she wiped her rear off.

"Close to eight months." Tracey replied. She didn't want to think about the two months they spent apart.

"You act like you've been together a lot longer. I'm happy for you both." Wendy said as she stepped past the couple. "I'm going to call my mom and let her know where I am at. I don't want to get you in trouble Dr. Graham."

"Please call me Holly."

"Okay, Holly and Tracey?" The teacher nodded. "So where are we going to dinner and who are Noel and Lee?"

"Our attorney's." Tracey replied as the teen grimaced at the occupation. "It's a long ugly story, which hopefully will have a happy ending soon."

"I'll second that." Holly said. "There's a phone in your room if you want some privacy." The teen nodded and head upstairs.

"Did you know she was coming here?" Tracey asked as the teen turned the corner.

"God, no. I had no idea. I pulled down the street and she was sitting on the porch. She got a room at a motel by the horse track."

"Yuck."

"Exactly, that's why I told her she can stay here. I think she's scared." Holly turned to look in the house. "I'd be scared too."

"So how long is she here for?"

"School starts soon. She's at GW."

"I remember." Tracey placed a hand on Holly's cheek and directed her attention back to her. "What happen at the hospital?"

"I was reinstated."

"Thank God!" Tracey said as she felt relief wash through her body. She knew she would not return to Bayview High School at least Holly had her career back. "That's great news honey. Did you see our staff? Did Rollins give you a hard time?"

"Tracey, they...." Holly pulled away and walked across the porch. "They offered me a promotion, Chief of Emergency Medicine."

"That's absolutely"

"In Chestertown. At Chester River Hospital."

"On the shore?"

"Yes."

"Why are you hesitant? This is what you wanted. You even said you wanted to move to the shore?" Tracey recalled the couple of days they spent at Maxie's house.

"I did, but your family, your job, your friends, they are all here." Holly ran her hand through her hair. "I don't want you to lose those things."

"My family will love me no matter where I live. They will probably invade us during the summer. My friends will visit as well. My job, well that isn't a factor."

"What do you mean?"

"Budget cuts happened earlier this summer and my job was cut." Tracey knew the politics behind the decision but it didn't matter. She really didn't want to go back to teaching. Michelle Stanley ruined any trust she had in her students.

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I've applied for collegiate level teaching positions even a couple coaching positions at junior colleges." Tracey stepped closer. "I didn't want to tell you because it doesn't matter. I have some savings and if I need to I can borrow from my parents."

"You knucklehead, you don't have to borrow from your parents. I thought we were a couple, partners."

"I thought so to, but I didn't want to burden you with it." Tracey confessed.

"Honey, if we are going to make it as a couple, we need to talk. You would never be a burden. I never want anything to come between us. Including money."

"What do you think is going to happen with the law suit?" Tracey suddenly remembered Holly could have lost her livelihood.

"If Noel has the backup, the Stanley's are in for a rude awakening."

"She definitely has the backup. I saw some of the information Lee gathered." Tracey moved closer and looped her arm around Holly's waist pulling her close. "I'd take a dollar just to prove a point."

"I think Noel has more in mind than just a dollar. Come on let's go inside and see if we can kill some time before we have to go to dinner."

"Do you have something in mind?" Tracey stood on her tippy toes to kiss Holly's lips.

"First a shower...."

"Race you..."

~

Holly pulled Tracey's Jeep to the front of Zoey's apartment building. The small blonde waved to her coach as she approached the car. Zoey pulled open the back door.

"Hello. Dr Graham, a pleasure to see you again. I'm very happy about that." Zoey smiled at Holly.

"Me too, Zoey. Me too. Thank you for what you did." Holly looked at Zoey, but stole a glance at Tracey. "We can't thank you enough for your help."

"Dinner will make us even."

"We're not buying, the attorney's are. We'll figure out a way to repay you." Holly placed a hand on Tracey's knee. "Zoey, this is Wendy, a family friend from Ohio. She's in town visiting before school starts."

Zoey had noticed the blonde in the backseat as soon as she approached the car. She just didn't want to acknowledge how cute she thought the girl was. In fact, as she looked from Holly to Wendy, the resemblance was uncanny. "Hi Wendy. Where do you go to school at?"

"GW. What about you?"

"U of M, Baltimore to start. I hope to get enough money to transfer to main campus."

"Zoey won an academic scholarship to University of Maryland." Tracey said as she pulled into traffic.

"That's great. I should have paid more attention in school; maybe my grades would have been better. Instead, I have to rely on my parents for support."

"Did you talk with your mom?" Holly looked in the rearview mirror into the eyes that matched her own.

"Yes, she's upset, but better now that I called." Wendy looked towards Zoey. "I had some stuff going on at home so I came here to escape."

"Did it work?"

"No, but I'm here and I got to meet you so things are looking up." Zoey smiled as Wendy spoke.

"So where are we going coach? You got me all gussied up. Are you and the doc cruising for high school chicks again?" Zoey teased. Tracey almost drove off the road and Holly went into a coughing fit. "I'm joking. Don't have a heart attack Doc. Coach just got you back. I don't think she'd be forgiving if something happened to you."

"Zoey, I will agree with you on that, but if you make a joke like that again, you're walking home."

"Got it coach!" Zoey tapped her fingers on Tracey's seat and laughed.

~

Chapter 22

Labor Day weekend signified the end of summer. Holly drove down the familiar road towards the house she and Tracey had recently purchased. They originally looked at the house during their first trip to the shore in the spring. When the offer to take on the position of Chief of Emergency Medicine at Chester River Hospital Center, Holly knew it was her dream job. Her worries stemmed from wanting Tracey to move to the shore with her. Her worries were nullified when Tracey set her straight. Officially, Holly took the job the last week in August. They closed on the house last week Monday. Today, Tracey, Mel and Piper were bringing the last load from the old house to the new house. During the week, Tracey's brothers made a couple trips each with the moving van. Only Tommy grumbled about his sister moving twice within a month. Holly thought it was more of a tease than an actual grumble.

Holly pulled into the driveway. The For Sale sign no longer sat in the high grass of the front yard. There were other changes. A fresh coat of sky blue paint brightened the house and the dove gray shutters made perfect accents. The porch power washed and clear from sticks and leaves. Holly glanced at the clock on her dash board, she was late. There was an end of summer party at Maxie's house down the road. Since learning of the couple buying the house, the banker tried her hardest to try to befriend Holly.

Holly tried. She really tried to like Maxie, but every time she saw the banker, she felt as if she had to lay claim on Tracey. The banker loved Tracey and did not try to hide it. Holly just felt odd that she had to be nice to someone who wanted to sleep with her partner. She really didn't want to go to Maxie's. She would go because Tracey asked her, but she didn't want to. Shaking the foreboding feeling from her head, she went into the house to change and head to the party. A quick outfit change, Holly wore a pair of khaki shorts, a navy short sleeve Henley, and a pair of Merrell sandals on her feet.

Working in her new position at the hospital for a couple weeks and developed relationships with most of the staff, EMT's and the volunteer emergency response teams from across the area. Holly thought the volunteers were the best. For little or no pay, they gave it their all on every call. Being new to the area, she started to carry a handheld radio for emergency responders. If she was going to live here, she could offer her services in case of an emergency. It wasn't like Baltimore where there were plenty of resources. She hooked the radio on her hip as she passed by the bedroom Wendy had been staying in. Yesterday, Zoey and Wendy headed out on a camping trip. Holly laughed if those two thought they were being sneaky, they had a lot to learn. Since the night at the restaurant, Wendy and Zoey became quick friends. A couple weeks separation while Wendy went home to work things out with her family had Zoey depressed. Since Wendy's

return, the small blonde was bubbly and full of life again. Holly couldn't wait to see Wendy and tease her. Heck that was what big sister's did.

After a quick trip down the road, she pulled her car into Maxie's drive. Sensing a moment of déjà vu, she looked at her surroundings. The last time she was here, Maxie was drunker than a skunk and driving her Land Rover. The sand and sea grass hit the underside of the Honda, sounding like tiny bullets pinging off a target. Just as Holly went to get out of her car, Wendy and Zoey pulled in next to her. The teens smiled and waved.

"So how was camping?" Holly asked as Wendy popped out of the car to give her a hug. Stepping back to examine the large hickey on Wendy's neck, Holly reached out to touch the bruised skin. "Wow, mosquitoes are huge out here."

"Stop it. Jerk." Wendy brushed Holly's hand away. "I almost said I missed you."

"You got one too." Holly said as Zoey approached. The large purple mark on her neck resembled Wendy's. "You guys need bug spray."

"Ha! Ha! Doc, you crack me up. Not!" Zoey said as she looked out over the water. "This place is nice. Too bad Maxie's such a drunk."

"Zoey." Holly warned. She felt the same way the teenager did, but she acted like an adult.

"Come on Holly. That chick is wasted all the time." Zoey said as they watched the sun began to settle on the horizon. "I wouldn't go out on that boat with her driving."

Holly watched as the group of women began to get into Maxie's cruiser. She looked around for Piper's truck and didn't see it. Relief washed over her because she knew Tracey wouldn't be a passenger.

"Here comes Mel and Piper." Zoey waved at the two women in the approaching SUV. Holly glanced at the crowd of women packed on the boat. She squinted at the approaching truck looking for Tracey. Tracey was supposed to be with Vonnie and Mel.

"Hey guys. Where's Trace?" Holly didn't want to panic but when Mel opened the door, she and Vonnie were the only occupants of the car.

"Here. We went to town to get more ice. The ice maker here couldn't keep up with the demand." Vonnie said as she swung four bags of ice out of the truck bed.

~

Fingers of light dance across the water's surface as the setting sun met the horizon. Maxie turned the blower on the cabin cruiser. She demanded her guests take one last ride of the evening before the insects started forming swarms over the cooling water. Off to the side sitting on the slope of the hill, Tracy had her knees pulled to her chest and her arms holding on in some form of

security. The teacher was waiting for the doctor to show up. Maxie felt her chest constrict with jealousy.

"Come on Tracey, one last cruise around the bay. The good doctor won't be here for another hour." Maxie teased as she past Tracey on the way to the boat. Her hand lingered on Tracey's shoulder for a moment. "Are you happy?"

"I was so lost without her. I don't know what I did to get a second chance but I'm grateful for it." Maxie nodded but thought it was the doctor who should count herself lucky. Tracey was a keeper, a woman you wanted to have children with, grow old with. She'd bide her time and let Holly screw up. She did it once. Odds were the doctor would do it again.

The group ten women loaded into the twenty eight foot cabin cruiser. It was a bit tight, but Maxie like the feel of Tracey against her side. The sun casted a blinding glare off the water as the soft bubbling of the motor propelled the craft away from the dock. Maxie swung the boat around and tried to look for traffic. Traditionally, Labor Day had triple the number boats on the water. Maxie couldn't wait to open the throttle of the powerful engine on the open water. She tossed back a few drinks today, but it was her party after all.

Tracey took the spot between the two captain chairs against the windshield. She felt Maxie lean against her as she turned the wheel to head out into the Chesapeake.

Casually, she glanced back towards the house and saw Holly's car sitting at the top of the hill. Holly stood talking with Mel as Zoey, Wendy, and Piper tromped towards the house with bags of ice. Tracey didn't realize they were there when she got in the boat. She stood straight up straining to see the tall beautiful woman who captured her heart. A quick whistle called out to the boat as Holly signaled to the departing group.

"Maxie!" Tracey moved to the side of the boat closest to shore. "I'm going back." Tracey glanced around noting they were a hundred yards from shore. She placed a foot on the storage hole on the port side of the boat. Maxie looked at her as if she is crazy.

"I'll take you back in." Maxie complained as she turned the wheel. The last thing she wanted to do was return Tracey to shore and watch her and Holly make out. It made her sick that Tracey took her back without a second thought.

"I'll swim." Tracey said as she lifted her shirt off and threw it on the seat of the boat. Getting ready to jump into the water, she felt the boat surge forward.

On the shore, Holly looked across the water at Tracey standing in the boat. Her foot was propped up on the edge as if she were going to jump in. When the former teacher whipped off her shirt, Holly felt her knees go weak. The sight of Tracey wearing a bikini top sent Holly's mind into spinning. Before she went to work this morning, they had spent most of the night making love. The last twenty four hours were deeply embedded in her memory. Holding on to Tracey as she called her name out over and over, sent her blood pumping south. How could just the sight of the woman cause such a reaction?

Because I love her... It was the simple truth. No matter what happened or what they had been through, Holly loved her. As Tracey stepped on to the side, she turned to speak to Maxie. Just as she was about to dive into the green water of the bay a blast of a horn filled the air.

Holly watched as Maxie's boat sped into the path of an oncoming speed boat. Instead of slowing down or swerving, it seemed as if Maxie notched the speed up and headed towards the boat.

"No!" The horrific scream filled the air. Holly knew the call came from someone. It wasn't until she could see the underside of the other boat. The fiber glass hull shot through the air and landed across the starboard side of Maxie's boat. Realizing at that time, the scream came from her.

The back of the cruiser buckled from the impact and began to sink in the awkwardly still water. The two boats lying on top of each other like children's toys, slowing sinking into the depths. If Holly didn't witness the accident, she would have never noticed Maxie's boat under the broken fiberglass pieces. Debris from both boats scattered across the top of the water. The air was eerily silent. Until the wind carried screams and smoke to the shore.

Grabbing the radio off her hip, Holly made a frantic call to the local station just as Piper, Zoey and Wendy rounded the corner of the house. Piper stopped Wendy shouting commands she sent the girl back to the house.

"Holly!" Piper shouted and shook her out of the shock. "We need you." Piper headed down the hill to the water. Running full speed off the dock, she dove into the water and came up twenty yards from the dock.

"Zoey...get a hold of Captain Kelly, Jerry, tell him we need the chopper...Level 1- eight to ten victims possible fatalities." She handed the small blonde the radio and took off towards the water.

All of her training was being tested at this moment. She was too close to this situation. She had never run into this in her life. Every trauma case she treated was a distant face, not a friend and certainly not a lover. The cold water instantly jolted her systems. The drop in temperature could either help or hurt. Breaking the surface of the water, she caught up with Piper as she pulled herself up on what was left of Maxie's boat. The body of a young man in his late twenties was strung across the stern of the cruiser his head impaled on a cleat. Piper puked at the sight.

"In the water look in the water!" The shout came from the neighbors who had journeyed to the end of their docks and into their boats after they witnessed the collision.

"Jesus...no!" Holly jumped over the side to the body which was sinking. She wrapped her arms around a body's waist kicking with all her might she shot to the surface. A number of boaters had come to aid. Holly managed to pass the woman to an older gentleman and a young boy who pulled her in, the man at the controls of the outboard headed to shore. They needed to get everyone out of the water and into shore so they would be cared for.

Another scream filled the air. Holly made her way to the spot where the boaters pointed. The sight of the Coast Guard boat was a relief. On the shore she watched as Zoey and Wendy had set up every flat surface they could find as make shift back boards. She watched as a lifeless body was placed on a back board and two men began to do CPR.

"Where else?" Holly treaded water. She tried to count the number of victims on the shore...eight. How many were there? She bobbed up and down in the water. Wanting desperately to know where Tracey was.

"Doctor Graham!" The EMT crew from the point called to her. "They need you on shore." The team fished her out of the water. "Life Flight is on the way. We need to get at least one critical to Jessup. Captain says you're riding shotgun!" The paramedic explained as they brought the doctor to shore.

Holly hit the beach and ran up the slope to the open doors of the EVR. The victim's dark hair was matted with debris and blood. The skin of her face was flapped over. There was no way to know who it was; female white, mid twenties to early thirties. A laceration from a sharp object slit her throat across the carotid artery. The EMT held pressure of the seeping artery. The panic in his eyes took the truth.

"What's ETA of the chopper?" Holly shouted to the bystanders.

"Five minutes" She closed her eyes and rolled her shoulders. They'd never make it to Baltimore.

"Listen to me honey...you need to stay strong, Slow down. We are gonna take care of you." She looked at the hands of patient hopping to for some recognize mark that would let her know if this was Tracey. No familiar signs, nothing, no scars, no tattoos. This still could be her lover.

Focus! Holly took a deep breath and went through the trauma steps. In the distance, she could hear the beating blades of the chopper. She had done this a thousand times. She needed to stabilize the patient. Don't think about Tracey, whoever this woman is, she needed Holly to save her life.

~

After a rocky take off, the chopper settled into the darkening sky. The air thick with humidity felt like a heavy blanket. Holly held tight to the bandages on the woman's neck. Even with the clamp attached, she could feel the blood pumping out of the woman. The blood pressure cuff was wrapped around her other arm, a pulse oximetry machine was hooked to her finger tip, and a heart monitor blipped out the rhythm like a video game. Holly constantly oversaw her condition.

"She's got ten minutes maximum, Eddie." She told the pilot through the helmet mic. "Jessup, come in Jessup." Holly called to the trauma center. "Life Flight 4 to Jessup. Come in Jessup."

"Jessup to Life Flight 4, Go."

"Incoming, ETA nine minutes. Need eight units of blood, O-. Blunt trauma to multiple areas, significant damage to the carotid artery. Prep surgery, we're landing hot."

"Roger that LifeFlight4. We'll be waiting. Good to have you back Dr. Graham." The voice on the other end relayed.

"Hang on, I'm got an all clear from Air Traffic Control." Eddie called as he pushed the chopper towards Baltimore.

Within minutes, they were landing on the roof at Jessup. A dozen members of the staff lined the cat walk waiting for the all clear. Strapped to the back board, with an IV running from the back of her hand, the landing jolted the occupants. As soon as it was clear, Jessup's staff swarmed the chopper. The patient was lifted to a gurney on wheels and whisked inside and off to surgery. Holly had no idea what to do. She looked at the blood covering her gloved hands. She needed to find out if it was Tracey.

Following the gurney into the hospital, Holly stopped when the crew entered into the sanitary area. Holly waited outside the room waiting for an update on the patient's condition. Her brown eyes swept the familiar surroundings of Jessup's treatment center. The next few minutes could decide the fate of the patient in the trauma room. Sighing she leaned against the wall.

"You okay Dr. Graham?" Rollin's voice penetrated her thoughts. Looking up she saw the ebony skinned nurse. Holly felt her walls begin to crumble. She shook her head and fell into Rollins comforting arms. Tears fell for the woman she brought to the hospital. Tears fell for Tracey and the fate of the victims of the boat wreck. The world around her went black as she slumped to the floor.

~

Holly jolted awake. It took Holly a few moments to realize where she was. Sitting up in a bed in the On-call room at Jessup, she tried to remember what happened. Slowly the blanket of fuzziness lifted. Rollins had helped her change out of the wet clothes roused her into a warm shower and put her to bed. Rubbing her eyes, she wondered if it was her beeper or Rollins that woke her. Looking around the small room she noticed the silhouette of a woman sitting in the chair next to the small locker. Cloaked in darkness, she tried to make out the woman's features. She turned and banged her elbow against the bed rail.

"Ouch..." She rubbed her elbow.

"Holly..." The woman's sleep filled voice called out. "Hey baby!" Tracey stood up and came to Holly's side. Holly forgot about the pain and grabbed a hold of Tracey. Pulling the brunette on top of her Holly held her tight and kissed her. Not ever wanting to let go of the former teacher, Holly finally lifted her lips away.

"Oh my god. I thought it was you." Holly cried as she hide her face in Tracey's hair. "There was so much blood, I couldn't tell. I didn't want to know." She confessed as she pressed her lips against Tracey's neck.

"I'm fine." Tracey cooed as she kissed Holly back.

"I saw you on the boat and then there was such a mess." Holly ran her hands over Tracey body making sure she was okay. Tracey leaned back and placed her hand on Holly's cheek.

"A little bumped and bruised, but I was thrown clear. I dove in before the impact. I grabbed a person and swam her to safety. It was crazy at the scene. I was just grateful I knew where you were."

"Who was on the chopper?" Holly asked as she watched the tears form in Tracey's eyes.

"It was Maxie." Tracey's face fell as she thought about her friend. "She didn't make it."

"Oh Jesus. I'm so sorry honey." Holly wiped a falling tear.

"I know you did what you could. She died in surgery." Tracey pushed Holly back against the mattress. She wrapped her arms around her waist and placed her head on Holly's chest. "It could have been anyone. Maxie was standing at the wheel. According to the investigator, it appears she was hit by the other boat." Holly felt the tears against her chest. She wrapped her arms around Tracey tighter. She had differences with Maxie but she never thought the woman would die.

"She was a good friend of yours." Holly said. "Does Vonnie know?"

"Yes, she and Mel drove me here. It took a little longer than a helicopter ride. I needed to see you. I wanted to make sure you knew I was okay."

"Thank you." Holly felt the tears in her eyes and her throat constrict. "I did. I don't know what I would have done if something happen to you."

"Nothing happened so you don't have to worry about it. I promised you nothing would ever come between us again."

"You did, didn't you?" Although Holly couldn't see Tracey, she could hear the smile in her voice. "Don't want to break your word, Dr. Graham."

"It would break my heart to lose you again." Holly kissed the top of her head.

"You're never gonna loose me. In fact, you're stuck with me for the rest of your life."

"The best thing I've heard all night."

"I love you."

"I love you to."

The End.

Thanks to everyone who has followed this story. It's been a journey. If you like the story please let me know. If you don't you shouldn't have read the entire thing

Take care and I promise only to post entire stories. This pieces part thing is for the birds.

Catherine Burke
