

ADDISON

I'd like to think I'm a good person, but I have no way of knowing for sure. I don't remember my real name, where I'm from, or if I have any family. I must have friends somewhere, but the only ones I recognize are the ones I've made in the two years since the new me was born—every memory before that has been wiped away. I don't remember how I got the crescent-shaped scar on my knee or why the smell of roses turns my stomach. The only thing I have is here and now, and even that feels tenuous. There are some things I do know. I like chocolate ice cream better than vanilla, and I love to watch the sunset paint the sky in vibrant orange and pink at dusk. And I love taking pictures. I think it's because I feel more comfortable behind the camera and looking out. Looking inward is too painful when there's nothing much to see.

We're celebrating my engagement on this beautiful September day, and I'm surrounded by people who say they love me, but who is it really that they love? How can you truly know someone when their entire past is a mystery? Gabriel, my fiancé, is sitting next to me, looking at me in an adoring way that makes me feel warm all over. He's one of those people whose eyes smile, and you can't help but feel good when he's around. He is the one who is helping me discover the parts of myself that feel authentic. I take pictures. Gabriel tells me that I'm an amazing talent. I don't know if I'd go that far, but I love doing it. When I'm behind the camera, I'm me again. I know instinctively that this is something I've

done and loved doing for a long time. It's the thing that has saved me, given me a living, and led me to Gabriel. He's actually giving me my first break—a show at his family's gallery—in October. Soon, they'll be my family too.

The clinking of a glass gets my attention. It's Patrick, Gabriel's best man.

“As you all know, this clown and I have been friends since we were six. I could stand here all day and tell you stories. But since both our sets of parents are present, I'll spare you the gory details and just say that we've had our share of good times and laughs, and our share of trouble. I never thought he'd settle down, but the minute I saw him with Addison, I knew he was a goner.” Patrick lifts his glass toward us both. “To Addy and Gabriel. Long life!”

My eyes scan the restaurant and land on Darcy. Her glass is lifted, but her smile seems forced, and her eyes are sad.

We all raise our glasses and sip. Gabriel's sister, Hailey, is my maid of honor, but she cannot regale the crowd with stories of our shared past because, like Gabriel, she's only known me for six months. Despite the festive mood around me, darkness descends again, and I feel hollow. Gabriel seems to sense my mood shift and squeezes my hand under the table, then leans over and whispers, “You all right?”

I squeeze back and force a smile, nodding, willing the tears not to fall.

Then Gigi gets up and takes the microphone from Patrick.

“I may have only known Addison for a couple of years, but I couldn't love her any more. When she came into our lives, it was the biggest blessing we could have asked for.” She looks at me. “You're like a daughter to us, and Ed and I are so happy for you. To new beginnings.”

I know she's trying to make it right for me, but it's hard to

toast to new beginnings when they're all I have. I do it anyway, because I love her too, and because she and Ed try to be the parents that I don't have. Ed will give me away at the wedding, and while I'm grateful to have him, I can't help but worry that I have a father somewhere wondering what happened to me. That's what makes it so impossible for me to fully embrace anyone with my whole heart. What if my parents are out there somewhere mourning for me, agonizing over what's happened to me or thinking I'm dead? Or even worse, what if there is no one looking?

The doctors have told me that I have to be patient. That memory is a tricky thing. The more I try to force it, the more elusive it becomes. I have no real clues to my identity, no identification, no cell phone containing pictures or contacts. My body, on the other hand, shares some clues—the jagged scars that tell their own story—just not to me.

JULIAN

Julian Hunter had been melancholy all day. Another wedding anniversary coming up in a few months and only memories of happier times to comfort him now.

“Tell me again about the day you and Mommy got married, Daddy.” Valentina snuggled closer to Julian and rested her head against his chest. She smiled broadly at him, her green eyes fringed by thick lashes that were as raven black as her hair.

He leaned down to kiss the top of his seven-year-old daughter’s head. The familiar feeling of loss swept over him again, but he swallowed and began. “It started out as a beautiful November day filled with sunshine. We got married right here in the house—in the grand living room. Mommy wouldn’t let me see her or her wedding dress before the ceremony. She said it was bad luck.”

Julian smiled as he remembered how adamant Cassandra had been, insisting upon staying apart the morning before the ceremony. “You don’t really believe in bad luck, do you?” he’d asked her, and she’d looked at him, her eyes wide, and said she was just being cautious. Julian considered himself a rational man of science, and his career in medicine had shown him that luck had nothing to do with the course of people’s lives. But he’d decided to humor her.

“Daddy, keep going.” Valentina pushed against him.

“Right. So . . . it was a very small wedding, with just a few of our friends and your grandfather. A young music student from the

university played her cello as Mommy came into the room and walked toward me.”

“Did she look beautiful?”

“Yes, Valentina. She looked very beautiful.” An image from that day filled his head. Cassandra standing for a moment at the arched entrance to the room, in a high-necked, long-sleeved sheath that skimmed her slender figure and then fell straight to the floor. She smiled, her eyes meeting his as she walked down the aisle. When he noticed a white gardenia in her long black hair, he was touched by her loving acknowledgment of the flowers he’d given her the night he proposed.

“More, Daddy,” Valentina urged.

“That’s enough for tonight, sweet girl. It’s time for bed.” He gently rose from the sofa, but his daughter remained seated.

“No, please. Can’t I stay up a little longer?”

He reached down and wrapped her small hand in his, pulling her to her feet. “Afraid not, little one. What would Mommy say if she knew I was keeping you up past your bedtime?”

Valentina’s expression darkened. “Mommy wouldn’t care. If she cared, she would come home.”

Julian had no answer for his little girl. He’d tried to explain it to her so many times, but the problem was that there *was* no explanation.

He thought back to the last time he’d seen Cassandra, and the familiar ache of loss and regret filled him. They’d had their problems like any couple, of course. She could be mercurial and moody. He didn’t like to think about the night they’d had their worst fight, both of them spewing angry words neither could take back. Afterward he’d thought all was lost, that he’d have to raise Valentina alone. But then, miraculously, everything turned out okay. For a while, anyhow. Now, two years later, and not a trace

of her. It was unbelievable, really, as if she'd vanished into thin air. But he believed with every fiber of his being that she would be found. It was the only thing that kept him going. Well, that and Valentina, of course. She was the image of her mother, with Cassandra's face and hair, but her lips were Julian's, full and generous.

Now he steered his little girl to the stairs, and together they climbed to the second floor. "Teeth brushing and then a very short bedtime story," he said to her.

"Two stories?" she asked as she walked over to the white bookcases that filled one wall of her pink bedroom.

"Don't push your luck, little one. It's late."

After the bedtime ritual was over and he'd kissed his daughter good night, Julian headed reluctantly to his own bedroom. As he entered, his eyes went right to the antique dressing table, where all of Cassandra's lotions and perfumes sat just as she had left them, next to the jeweled hairbrush he'd given her on their first anniversary. He walked over and picked it up, raising it to his nose. He imagined he could discern her scent, but he knew he was kidding himself. Placing the brush back on the table, he moved to one of the large closets—*her* closet—and opened the doors. All of her beautiful clothes hung neatly, untouched since she'd disappeared. He couldn't bear to get rid of her things. That would mean she was gone for good.