

TYPE



CROSS



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Chapter One

The on-duty triage nurse interrupted Royce as he reviewed a patient's chart.

"We've got a motor vehicle accident coming in," she said. "Should be here in two minutes. EMT's on the line."

He hated Carnival Weekend for this reason. Always at least one major accident. Royce ran to the phone and took the EMT's call. "What do you have?"

"Two level one traumas, two level two. Motor vehicle versus motorcycle. Driver of motorcycle no vitals on scene. Down for five minutes before CPR started. Passenger of motorcycle unresponsive at scene. CPR started with spontaneous return of circulation. Two doses of epinephrine given en route, coded twice. Vitals—heart rate fifty, BP sixty over palp, respirations ten per minute, satting eighty-two percent, temp ninety-seven point two. No breath sounds on left side. Pupils 5 millimeters bilaterally and non-reactive."

Damn it. The cycle vic was in severe shock. Head trauma, probably tension pneumothorax. They'd need to do a needle decompression if the EMTs didn't. "Did you treat the pneumo?"

"Done."

He moved carts around and called orders to his staff. They prepared the bays and stood ready for the first ambulance's arrival. When the EMTs burst in, Royce rushed to them. He looked his patient over, running alongside the first gurney through the door, and listened to the EMT recite her condition again. He'd seen girls like her before. What a freak show. What wasn't covered in blood or embedded gravel was an equal mess of dyed hair and a facial homage to Alice Cooper. Maybe if her parents had done a better job with her, she wouldn't be in his ER.

No time to dwell on that, though. He had work to do. He started running through the checklist. Ellie and Savvi had already transferred her to the table and begun hooking up the monitors. Royce checked the EMT's work on the decompression to make sure the girl was getting oxygen. When he was satisfied, he checked her neuro function. She didn't open her eyes, didn't speak, didn't move at all when jostled or touched. Three of out fifteen. He called out her score. "GCS three. E-one, V-one, M-one at," he glanced at the clock, "ten oh-seven a.m."

Ellie glanced up, but Royce had to move on. He ran scissors up the center of her already-in-rags-anyway bustier. What kind of people let their daughter buy a getup like that, let alone wear it in public? Shaking his head, he tore the material aside, and started examining her for injuries. "Damn it." Her abdominal cavity was swelling. Had to be bleeding internally. "Savvi, we need blood."

"We're empty up here."

"We've got to have some. Go find some o-neg, now! Wade!" He called out the bay to another ER doctor. "Bay one! Get in here, I need you!"

He had no intention of losing this girl, and he'd be damned if he missed something that would cost her life. "Ellie, help me tip her over." The nurse helped him roll her onto her damaged side. Had she been responsive, it would have caused her pain, but she didn't move.

"Damn," Wade said when he entered.

"What?" Royce asked.

Wade nodded toward the top of the bed. Blood soaked the cot where the girl's head had been. Another fucking injury. Obviously she hadn't worn a helmet. A quick examination of her head and Royce knew things were severe.

"X-rays," he barked.

He had to find all the bleeders and get them under control. And he needed that blood.

The machines sounded shrill warning tones as numbers started plummeting.

"She's bleeding out." Royce started dressing the girl's head wound. "Where's the damn O-neg?"

"Savvi had to go downstairs for some," Ellie said. "She should be back any minute."

Just this morning, he and Vanessa had discussed her organizing a blood drive. His wife worked fast, but not this fast. This girl was fading on him for lack of blood. Savvi would start the massive transfusion protocol, and the blood bank would keep sending units up to them, but it could be too late.

"We don't have a minute," Royce said. "Type and cross her. Now!"

Ellie reached for the girl's hand and gasped. "Royce."

"Now, Ellie."

Ellie shook her head.

"Do it, or get the hell out of the way."

"It's Hope."

"Hope? Hope for what?"

"No. Your Hope."

Royce looked up from the head wound and saw Ellie staring at the girl's face. A face she recognized before he did. His daughter's face.

And he didn't even realize it.

What kind of father didn't even recognize his own blood?

The sounds of the room faded behind the thundering of his pulse. He could do nothing but stare at the damaged body on his table who barely resembled his baby girl.

"Royce? Royce!" Wade brought him back to reality.

"Forget about the blood," he said to Ellie. "Wade, take over here."

"What are you going to do?" he asked, switching places with Royce.

"Transfuse her."

"What?" everyone in the room asked at once.

"She's my daughter. I'm a match." He worked quickly, getting the tubing and the needles he needed. "Ellie, can you help me tie this around my arm?"

“You should wait for Savvi,” Wade said.

“You should step out,” Ellie said. “You can’t work on family. You’re compromised.”

“There’s no time. Besides, it’s okay. I know what I’m doing.”

“No, you don’t. Parents aren’t always matches for their kids.”

“I know I am. It’s fine.”

“But protocol says—”

“I know what I’m doing.” He attached a needle and tubing to Hope’s arm. “Now are you going to help me?”

She stood there, eyes wide.

He shook his head, irritated at her hesitation, and used his teeth to tie a tube around his bicep. Then he inserted the needle into his arm and watched as the blood began to flow from him into his daughter. Once it started moving, he released the band around his bicep and flexed his hand, helping the transfusion along.

“Wade, how’s it going back there?”

“Dressing’s done.”

Royce looked at the monitors. Her blood pressure had risen to fifty-five over thirty-five and kept climbing. Her pulse had increased to forty-five and grew stronger with each beat. “Good. Good. Let’s get her prepped for surgery, huh?”

While he watched Wade move over his little girl, he took her hand with his free one.

And noticed her skin felt warm. Too warm.

Royce looked up, his gaze meeting Wade’s. “Does she feel hot to you?”

The cardiac machine began its countdown again.

“Doctor,” Ellie said, looking at Wade. “Her pressure’s dropping.”

“No. No.” Icy desperation clawed at Royce. “That doesn’t make sense.”

“Her pulse rate’s rising,” Wade said.

“She’s in tachycardia,” Ellie said. “Stop the transfusion! Now!”

Savvi ran into the room. “I’ve got the O-neg. Oh my God, is that Hope? What are you doing?”

Royce looked down at his daughter as he clamped off the tubes and pulled the needles out of their arms. Her skin yellowed in front of his eyes. Hyperbilirubinemia.

“Jaundice,” Ellie said. “You know what this means.”

“This wound’s bleeding again,” Wade said, reaching for her head.

“So’s her arm where the transfusion needle was,” Ellie said. “And look at all the abrasion sites where she has road rash.”

Hope leaked everywhere. It wasn’t possible. What were the odds she’d have a reaction to a transfusion from him?

Royce broke out in a cold sweat. It seemed everywhere his daughter poured blood, he dripped sweat in terror and desperation. How had this happened?

“Ellie.” Wade started barking orders. “Get fluids going. Savvi, get that bag hooked up. We need to get a catheter in her...”

The machine mocked Royce with sputtering, rapid flutters.

“She’s in v-fib,” Wade said. “Starting compressions. Ellie, get the cart. Charge to one-fifty.”

“Charging to one-fifty.”

Royce watched, detached, as his friend worked on his daughter, pumping on her chest. He wanted to remind him of her fractured rib and punctured lung, but no words formed. Wade probably remembered. Wade seemed to know a lot more than he did right at that moment.

“CPR’s not working. Paddles,” Wade said.

Ellie handed Wade the paddles of the defibrillator. “Clear!”

Hope’s body twitched, then lay still. Wade resumed CPR. With each compression of his hands on her chest, Royce heard a mantra in his head. *You. Did. This. To. Her. You. Did. This. To. Her.* He heard the sentence six times, so he knew thirty seconds had passed. No change. Time to try defib again.

“Charge to two hundred.”

“Two hundred,” Ellie said.

“Clear!”

Again Hope twitched, then fell back on the table, still. The machine continued to hum its taunting tone at Royce, sounding more to him like a mourner’s dirge than a physiological monitor. Wade pushed harder on Hope’s chest, sweat beading on his forehead. His daughter was damaged, broken, and despite their heroic attempts to save her, they were just making it worse, prolonging the inevitable.

The machine wailed a steady tone.

His synapses fired at lightning speed, telling him to crack her chest cavity open and massage her heart muscle with his bare hands until it took over beating on its own.

But his own heart knew her abused body had had enough. Bruised and bloody, she had abrasions, broken bones. Internal injuries he hadn’t begun to diagnose. Fatal ones he had.

The work they were doing should be causing her agonizing pain.

But she couldn’t feel anything.

She was gone.

He couldn’t watch it anymore. Royce walked to his friend and put his hands over his, stilling his movements. Then he turned off the machine. “I’m calling it.”

“Royce,” Wade said. Then softer, “Royce...”

“Time of death,” Royce said, “ten twenty-two.”

“Royce,” Wade said again, the only word he could apparently manage.

Ellie took her mask off and left the room.

Savvi put her hand on his arm. “I’m sorry.” She followed Ellie out.

“Royce...”

“Wade, really, it’s... okay.” Royce put his hand on his friend’s shoulder. “I’m going to need a minute alone in here. And the rest of the day. And I guess the next few days.”

“I’ll take care of it. Whatever you need, buddy. Take all the time you need. Do you want me to call Vanessa?”

“She should probably hear it from me. I’ll just need some time first.”

“Sure, man. No problem.”

“Thanks.”

Wade threw his gloves, mask, and gown in the bin and met Royce’s gaze. “I’m really sorry, Royce. I tried. I mean, I did everything I could. I never wanted this...”

Royce nodded and turned back to Hope.

Only after everyone left did he let the tears fall. He stroked her hair back from her face and pulled a sheet up to cover her nearly naked and totally abused body.

How could he not have recognized his own daughter?

He’d like to think he’d focused so intently on his work that he just didn’t care who was on his table, but he knew that wasn’t the case. He remembered judging the girl on his table. He thought she was a nutcase and her parents were unfit.

Right on one count.

When had she turned her hair into a Dr. Seuss wig?

When had she started wearing more makeup than the whole Kardashian family—combined?

When had she decided lingerie made an acceptable fashion statement? In public, no less?

When had she met the biker she had been with? Who was he? How long had they... known each other?

When had he become the unfit parent he accused her of having?

When? When? When?

He allowed the tears to fall freely for a while as he reminisced. She was once, so long ago, his beautiful little girl. He’d held her on his lap and read to her. He’d received butterfly kisses as he carried her to bed. They’d shared ice cream cones and sticky hugs before catching lightning bugs and watching fireworks. He’d kissed boo-boos away before doctoring real ones, and he looked for monsters in her closet and under her bed... until she was too old for any of those things.

When was the last time he’d done any of it?

What had it been? Ten years? More? As she got older, she went to school and learned to read and put herself to bed. She didn’t care about lightning bugs anymore, and God help her if he found a boy in her bedroom at night. God help the boy, too. No, they didn’t share ice cream—or any snacks—any longer. In fact, he could hardly remember the last time they ate together. Well, the last time they’d shared conversation with a meal, anyway.

And he wouldn’t have the chance to offer to buy her a cone. Or a hotdog. Or even talk with her at one of her mother’s stuffy charity events.

Somehow he had managed to miss the last damn decade of her life.

And now she would miss the rest of his.

He walked over to the sink and filled two pans with warm water, added soap to one of them. It wouldn't be right to let Vanessa see Hope all bloody and mangled.

He took rags and the two pans over to his daughter and gently dabbed her body with a soapy cloth, then rinsed her off. In mere minutes, the water in both pans turned a violent red and needed replacing. After refilling the pans, he laboriously cleaned cinders out of Hope's flesh, taking special care with her face, her side, and her arm and hand. When he tried to get the cinders and blood out of her hair, he noticed that not only did the cotton-candy color wash out, but the wave came back. By the time he finished, she looked more like the innocent, fresh-faced, curly-haired beauty he remembered. He went and got a small pair of scrubs to dress her in, and threw away the trashy, ruined clothes she had been wearing. He covered her to her waist with a sheet, crossed her arms over her chest, and sat beside her, his ministrations a pitiful reminder of his attempts to right the wrongs of the past ten years.

"Royce?" The curtain slid back and Stanford Hammond stepped inside. A rumpled white coat, 'Chief-of-Staff' embroidered on the pocket, covered crisply pressed shirt and slacks. He held a medical bag in one hand and fumbled with his tie with the other. Frustrated, he finally pulled it off shoved it in his pocket.

"Stanford. What are you doing here?"

"Ellie called me. I rushed right over." He gestured to his pocket. "I wasn't even dressed when the phone rang. I'm so sorry to hear about Hope."

Royce nodded and turned his back to his friend and mentor. "I don't suppose you could call Vanessa for me?"

"What? You haven't called her yet?"

"I planned on it, but I don't really know what to say."

"The truth, boy. It's always best to tell the truth."

"I really don't want to have that conversation on the phone. And I don't want to leave Hope right now. And then there's the matter of the kids..."

"I'll send a car for Vanessa. But you owe her an explanation."

Royce turned and looked at Stanford. "I'm sorry? An explanation for what, exactly?"

"For what you did knowing what you knew."

"Stanford, you've known Vanessa and me for years. You know we don't keep secrets."

"What are you talking about?"

"What are *you* talking about?"

"Hope."

"Stanford, I'm not really in the mood for this right now. If you have something to say to me, just get on with it."

"You really don't know what I'm saying to you right now, do you?"

Royce just looked at him.

Stanford put a hand on each of his shoulders and met his gaze squarely. “Royce, remember, I’m always here for you as a friend. But right now I need to talk to you as your boss. Let’s go sit down a minute.” He let go with one hand and guided Royce toward the curtain.

“What? Wait. Where are you taking me?”

“We need to go have a talk.”

“I don’t want to leave Hope.”

“I’m not asking.”

Royce glanced back at Hope’s lifeless body as Stanford led him out of Trauma Bay One and through his ER. It didn’t escape his attention that most of his staff stared at them as they walked toward the elevator bank. With each step away from his daughter, away from his people and his unit, he left more and more of himself behind. As he stepped onto the elevator, the confident Royce he’d been that morning had been left behind. He turned forward as the elevator doors closed on the ER, Ellie’s disapproving look the last thing he saw.

“What’s going on, Stanford?”

“In my office.”

Each ‘bing’ indicating the passing of another floor sounded like the tenuous threads of sanity popping in his head. By the time they reached the tenth floor, Royce was certain he’d gone mad. He trudged along behind Stanford to his office, but what he really wanted to do was run in the other direction.

Stanford waved him into his office and stopped to speak to his assistant for a moment. Then he stepped inside and closed the door. Gesturing to a leather chair in front of his desk, he put his doctor’s bag on his desk.

“What are you doing with a medical bag?”

Stanford sighed, opened the bag, and retrieved a bottle of scotch and a glass. He poured a double and offered it to Royce.

“Liquor? At the hospital?”

“These are special circumstances.”

“I’d rather have coffee.” Actually, he’d rather have his housekeeper’s coffee. He didn’t know what she did to it, but she brewed a better cup than Starbucks.

Why the hell was he even thinking about coffee?

“Isn’t it a little early in the morning for the hard stuff, Stanford?”

“Not for this conversation.”

“I’m still on duty.”

“No, Royce. You aren’t.”

“I don’t drink.” He almost never had a drink—Stanford knew that—and certainly never at the hospital. He prided himself on always being in control of his faculties should he be called to work.

“You do today.”

Royce considered his mentor for a moment. He still held the scotch out to him. Apparently his bereavement leave had begun, so drinking a glass didn't break any rules. And if ever he could use a stiff drink, it was at that moment.

"Fine." He took the glass and Stanford continued to stare at him. Only after he brought the glass to his lips did Stanford seem satisfied. The burn of the liquid barely registered as he waited for his friend to continue.

Stanford paced the room, then joined him in front of the desk instead of behind it.

"I've had a rough day," Royce said. "Just get to the point."

"Before I came to see you, my phone wouldn't stop ringing. Several people grabbed me in the hallway. It's a damn mess."

"And?"

"And? And you don't care?"

"I have more important things on my plate right now."

"Don't you get it? Don't you understand why everyone's been calling?"

"To tell you Hope died, I guess."

"No. I learned that when Ellie called."

"Then what?"

Stanford sighed and rested his elbows on his knees. After a moment, he looked up and met Royce's gaze. "To tell me you *killed* her."

End of Chapter One

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