

A Season With Hope

“Unbelievable”

Tilly puts his phone in his pocket and takes the small bandage off his arm before walking to Hope’s examining room. He turns back toward Jake. “I’ll hang around for as long as you want me to. I wasn’t kidding when I said you’re now part of the Dodgers family. Your mom too.”

Jake smiles as Debra rubs his back, displaying a sign of compassion that Jake sorely needs. He leans back in his chair and puts his arm around Debra and kisses her cheek softly. “Thanks so much, Deb, for sticking around too. You’re a doll.”

“It’s the least I can do. I’m really worried about your mom and I’ll hang with you for as long as you want me to.”

“Well, I guess our first date kinda changed a bit, huh?” says Jake. They warmly embrace.

A soft knock on her door quietly awakens Hope. “Jake said you wanted to talk to me?”

Trying to sit up in her bed to gain a better view, she adjusts her pillow.

“Here’s another pillow to put behind that one,” says Tilly.

“Thanks, Dave. Yeah, I just want to thank you for everything today. Jake’s contract and giving blood and just being here with the two kids while I go through this.”

“Don’t worry about it, Hope.”

Hope clears her throat and takes a sip of water from her bedside tray. Appearing restless, Hope adjusts herself again in her bed.

“What is it, Hope?”

“Remember when I asked you about the M Lounge?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I don’t know how to explain it, but when I was out, I had a dream that had me in that place and meeting you. I even remember what we were both wearing. I think I was there when I was waiting for a blind date and I think he never showed up.”

Tilly, taking a deep breath, moves his chair closer to Hope’s bed.

“We met there, didn’t we, Dave?”

“Yes, Hope, we did. When I first saw you at the game today, when I was walking up from field level, I felt almost immediately that we knew each other. It took me a while to place all the facts, but it eventually came to me.”

“Well, it came to me too and it took me passing out for it to become very clear,” Hope says.

“It happened during the last week of my pro career. I went to the Marriott with a few of my teammates after a game and I saw you there, sitting all by yourself.”

“My blind date never showed up.”

“No, he didn’t. We had quite a few drinks and the time just slipped away from us. Before we knew it, the bar was closing down.”

“And then we sat in the lobby.”

“Yes, we did. You do remember all the details.”

“Yes, Dave, I do, and I vividly remember what happened after that.”

Tilly looks away for a brief moment and looks back and locks in on Hope’s eyes. “It was the best night of my life, Hope.”

“Mine too, Dave. But why didn’t you ever call me? I left my phone number on a piece of paper on the desk right by your room key. I never heard from you and I knew you played

baseball, but I guess I never really looked hard enough to find you. I thought if you weren't going to call, I was just another notch on your bedpost."

"Oh, not at all, Hope. I thought I had put your number in my wallet, but I must have thrown it out accidentally. I remember rushing around that morning to try and get out of the room quickly since it was close to check-out time. I used to go back to the M Lounge at least once a week, a different night each time, to see if you were there, but I never saw you."

"Yeah, I was thinking of doing that too, but I just waited by my phone instead. Maybe I should have driven over there. But after a while I got back to my life. I moved up here after a few years and started focusing on my job and, of course, Jake."

"And now how ironic in that we find each other again because of Jake," says Tilly.

"Yeah, I know. Life is so strange at times."

"What happened to you all these years? I can't believe you never got married."

"As I told you at the restaurant. I dated a lot, but no one ever captured my heart. I know we only spent one night together and a very short time before that, but what I felt that next day, it wasn't infatuation, but what I thought was a real connection with you. It was something that I never found again with anyone else. I always hoped you would call, but you never did."

"I'm so sorry, Hope, that I never called, but for the next few months, you were all I thought about. You have to believe me. I even called back to the Marriott and asked them if I could look in the trash."

Hope laughs. "You really did ask them that?"

"Yes, I did. They laughed too and I gave up on that idea pretty quickly." A nurse enters Hope's room and asks her how she's doing and if she needs anything. "No, I'm okay. Thanks."

“The doctor should be in fairly soon to discuss your MRI and then we’ll take you down the hall for that procedure, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Are you feeling any better, Hope?” Tilly asks.

“No, I’m not, and please don’t say anything to Jake. He worries so much about me. I’ve never felt this weak before and my side is really hurting. I’m praying that maybe with a transfusion I’ll begin to feel better. I know it helped me in the past. I hope you or Jake are a match, but O negative is so rare. There’s always just one or two bags at my oncologist’s office. Sometimes, they tell me I may have to be driven to LA for a transfusion because there’s more available blood down there.”

“I’ve never needed a transfusion, but I know my type is rare and I’m thinking I am O negative. That sounds familiar to me even back when I was playing for the Dodgers.”

Hope takes another sip of water. “Dave, why did you stop playing? I even started watching baseball games on TV thinking I may see you, but I never heard your name at all.”

“Hope, I liked to drink too much and it affected my pitching. The team grew tired of my lack of dedication. I can’t blame them for letting me go. I was stupid, but you know what?”

“What?”

“I haven’t touched a drop of liquor, even a bottle of beer, since a few months after we met.”

“Really? That’s amazing. Good for you.”

“Yeah, after I couldn’t find your number and was driving back to the M Lounge for about two months, I knew my life was not in a good place. I made a promise to myself that I needed to get on a better path. And while I never found you or someone else to love, I’m proud that I’ve

been sober for over twenty years now. I just wish I made that decision while I was still playing. I probably had another good four to five years left.”

“You can’t move on in life, Dave, with having any past regrets. You’re here now and hopefully, you or my son is going to help me feel better.”

Tilly smiles and turns as they both hear a knock on the door.

It’s Dr. Oswald. “I had to look at the results twice and we re-checked the blood samples twice and unbelievably, both Dave and your son Jake are identical matches. Both are O negative.”

“Oh my gosh, that’s great news,” says Hope.

“It is. I have seen a rare blood type like this matched by one donor, but to have two people match in a matter of minutes is really quite extraordinary.”

“Can we start giving blood now, doctor?” asks Tilly.

“Yes, and if it’s okay with Hope, we’d really like to have both Jake and you donate because we are always so low with O negative.”

“Yes, I’m sure Jake will want to give blood. By the way, what was Debra’s type?”

“She is B positive.”

Hope and Tilly both chuckle. “That figures,” says Hope.

“Let me get a nurse to get things going for you both. There’ll be a short questionnaire for you to fill out and a medical history check and all, but the whole process shouldn’t take more than forty-five minutes or so. And Hope, while they’re giving blood, we’ll get you in for the MRI.”

“Okay, thank you very much, Dr. Oswald.”

Tilly turns back towards Hope and thinks he should send Jake's contract to the Dodgers front office to get the process started. "I should fax over Jake's contract now. I'll see if I can borrow the hospital's fax machine for a few minutes." As Tilly begins to get up from his chair Hope asks him to sit back down.

"Dave, hearing the news about Jake and your blood type, there is something that I think I need to tell you, and the thought has been on my mind ever since we saw each other at Seaside Park." Tilly looks puzzled and sits on the edge of his chair, just mere feet from the side of Hope's bed. "After we spent that night together at the Marriott, I was waiting to hear from you for the next month or so, but your call never came. I never dated anyone else for nearly a year after we met. I was somewhat depressed. Well anyway, I'm usually very regular with my periods and my next one skipped. I waited a week or so thinking I was just late that month, but I wasn't late. I went to my OB-GYN and she confirmed I was pregnant. Dave, I..."

"Hope, Jake is my son?"

"Yes, Dave, I'm almost positive he is your son. I'd like to have a DNA test done to be a hundred percent sure, but I have no doubt he is."

Tilly stands up and begins to pace around the room. He is stunned and can't believe what Hope has just told him.

"Are you okay, Dave? I couldn't wait to tell you and after hearing the news about your blood types matching, I couldn't hold the news back any longer."

Dave stops walking around the room and sits back down. "I'm, ah, fine. I'm okay, Hope. I just need some time to take all this in." He takes a few deep breaths and strokes his fingers through his thinning hair. "Man, this has been quite a trip. I drive up here thinking it might be a

waste of time and now I sign a top prospect who just also happens to be my son.” For the first time since hearing the news, Tilly smiles.

Hope is comforted by that slight sign of acceptance. “Look on the bright side, Dave. He’s already potty-trained and is out of the house. You have the easy part now. Just watching him play baseball.”

“I love the way you think, Hope. Wow, this is unreal. Do we tell Jake now?”

“No, I want to wait a bit. I’d really like to have a DNA test done, but I know what the results are going to be. I think I’d like to if that’s okay with you, just to remove any doubt at all,” says Hope.

“Okay, I agree. But he needs to know pretty soon after that, don’t you think?”

“Yes, but I want to get out of here first, back home, and get back to some sense of normalcy. When were you thinking of driving back to LA?”

“I was thinking of leaving in the morning, but I can stay up here for a few days. My boss, I think, will be all right with that. I’d like to fax the contract now though so we can get the wheels in motion for Jake.”

With that thought, Hope’s eyes begin welling up.

“What’s wrong?”

“We haven’t seen each other in over twenty years. You turn out to be the one man that signs my son to a pro baseball contract, something he’s dreamed of since he was a little kid. You are also the man that stole my heart for one brief night and you are also my son’s father. That’s a lot to comprehend in one day. And now I’m celebrating with all this news lying on my back in the emergency room at our local hospital. It’s just too much for me right now.”

Tilly leans in from his chair and holds Hope's hand. "Listen, Hope. All of this will work out just great for all of us. Jake is a tremendous talent. He can make it in the pros. I know it. And as far as us, you had my heart that night as well. I'm not going anywhere. I'd like to see how we can make all of this work out."

"So you want to be a part of our lives?"

"You're damn right I do. I want to do the right thing."

Hope wipes away her tears with the corner of her bedsheet. "Well then, after giving blood, let's see what we need to do about getting a DNA test done. Let's ask Dr. Oswald about that. Ya know, if he was shocked about our matching blood types, he's going to be floored about this latest request." Both Hope and Tilly laugh and for the first time they tenderly kiss, something both of them wanted to do since first seeing each other.

"Everything will be fine, Hope."

"I know, Dave. Let's just wait and discuss when the best time to tell Jake is, okay?"

"Okay, sure. We'll both know when that time is."

"What do you think your mom is talking to Dave about?" Debra asks Jake.

"Probably just about my contract. She likes to make sure she understands everything, which is good because she's real smart and comes up with questions that I would never think of."

Tilly leaves Hope's room and walks back into the ER's waiting area. "Hey, Dave, isn't that something that both you and I are O negative?"

"Yeah, I know. It's unbelievable, and so good for your mom." Tilly realizes those are the first words he's spoken to another human being that he is responsible for bringing into the world. The feeling quickly overwhelms him. He looks at Jake, studying his features, and then

awkwardly fumbles around, trying to grab his car keys from his pocket. "I'm going to go out and get your contract. I want to see if I can fax it down to the Dodgers office. No use in delaying it."

"That sounds great, Dave."

Trying to provide some levity and humor and to offset his newfound anxiety of the moment, Tilly looks over at Debra and says, "B positive, huh Deb?"

"Yeah, that would have been something if I matched too."

"That's the perfect blood type for you. Be positive. That's your mantra!"

Debra smiles.

As Tilly goes to grab his bag, Jake walks back into his mom's room. "Everything okay with Dave and you?"

"Everything's fine, Jake honey. I'm just so happy that you both can give blood. I think I'll feel so much better once that's done."

"The nurses and the doctor said it's pretty unbelievable that we both have the same blood type, ya know?"

"Yes, it is remarkable."

"Jake, we're ready to have you fill out some paperwork before you donate your blood," states a nurse who pops her head into the doorway. "Is Mr. Gentile around? We need him to fill out some paperwork too."

"He just went out to his car. He'll be right back." Jake gives his mom a kiss on the cheek and tells her he'll be back as he follows the nurse into another nearby room.

"Excuse me, but may I borrow a fax machine to send this to my office in Los Angeles?"

A nurse looks up from her desk and says tersely, “We don’t normally allow that, but I understand you’re giving a rare type of blood for a patient, so I guess it will be okay. The fax machine is on the table right behind me.”

Tilly says, “Thanks,” and then thinks to himself, “You’re damn right it’s okay. This kid’s going to be a star and better yet, he’s my son.” He checks his phone for the text that has the Dodger’s front-office fax number on it and proceeds to watch the pages go through. After a few brief minutes, a confirmation page prints out and Tilly puts the contract and this piece of paper back into his bag. He sends Brooke a quick message that he has faxed over the contract for Jake Summers and to make sure that she puts it on Gold’s desk.

“Mr. Gentile, we’re ready for you now. Please follow me,” says the same nurse who led Jake into his room.

As both men complete their questionnaires and medical history analysis, they lean back in their chairs in their respective rooms and stare at a TV talk show where people are fighting each other and debating who the real father is of an eight-month-old baby. Tilly smiles, totally aware of the irony of the program with his current situation. Jake, on the other hand, says, “This is crap. Hey, nurse, are there any ballgames you can put on?” They both try to relax as the nurses insert needles to begin drawing blood that will collect in sizable bags hanging on an IV pole. They both decide to close their eyes instead of watching TV. Jake thinks of his newfound status as a pro baseball player for the Los Angeles Dodgers organization while Tilly contemplates his new status. That of being a father.

“Ms. Summers, we’re going to take you down the hallway for an MRI,” says Dr. Oswald. “I want to get an idea of what your liver looks like. We have your records from your oncologist’s office. Your tumor is small, less than .25 centimeters. That was noted about three weeks ago, but

I'm concerned about your pain there. The results from the MRI will paint a clearer picture for me and we can determine what a proper course of action will be. And I understand you're on a transplant list. Do you know how long you've been on that list?"

"I'm not sure, Dr. Oswald. I know my oncologist was always concerned about my liver after my first cancer episode. It just never recovered as well as he had hoped and he was always taking blood work every six months to see how I was doing."

"Your rare blood type has caused the delay in getting that done. Okay, we'll take a look. After that, we'll prepare you for a transfusion."

As Dr. Oswald prepares to leave, Hope gets his attention. "Doctor, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, what is it?"

"Well, I don't know how to start, so I'm just going to ask you. The man, Dave Gentile, well, uh, I think, actually I'm pretty confident that he's the father of my son, Jake, and I was wondering if it would be at all possible to have a DNA test done to make sure. We've talked and he's absolutely fine with it."

"Ms. Summers, you really don't need a DNA test. For him and your son and you to all have the same blood type of O negative, any doctor in his right mind will tell you he's the father. For it to be anyone else, it would have to be another man with the same blood type. Did that happen, you think?"

"No, that's impossible. I wasn't with anyone else for a pretty long time."

"Well, there's your answer. I can order one to be done. It's fairly expensive and the results will take a few hours. We have all your blood samples so I can order it and then you'll

know for sure. But I'd bet my twenty-plus years of medical practice that you three are a family. Would you like me to order it for you?"

"Yes, please. I'd like to know."

"Will do. I'll let you know as soon as the results are in."

"And oh, doctor. Please don't say anything to my son Jake. He doesn't know yet. We want to tell him when I'm out of the woods here."

"Totally understand. I'll tell you in private and won't mention anything to Jake. They're both giving blood right now and should be done fairly soon. A nurse will come get you very soon for the MRI."

Hope smiles and feels a bit relieved that a highly trained medical doctor confirms her intuition.

"Hi, Hope. How are you feeling?" asks Debra.

"Hi Debra. I'm okay. They're going to give me an MRI to check out my liver and then the guys will be done giving blood and I'll get a transfusion after that. Thanks for hanging out and keeping Jake company."

"That's the least I can do. I just wish I could give blood for you too, but I guess three of us being O negative wasn't in the cards."

"You're B positive, huh?"

"That's perfect for you. You're always upbeat and positive!"

"That's exactly what Dave said. He said it was my mantra." They both laugh as the nurse comes in to wheel Hope down to get an MRI. "I'll wait for you and sit with Jake and Dave, okay?"

"Thanks, Debra. I'll see you soon, hopefully."

As his bag of blood is almost filled to its maximum level, Tilly begins to feel light-headed and asks the nurse for the cookies and orange juice that were placed across the room from him.

“Sure. I’m sorry, I should have given them to you a while ago. Here you go.”

“Thank you.”

“Are you feeling dizzy?”

“Yes, quite a bit.”

“Don’t worry. That’s perfectly normal. Just relax and let me know if you want some more juice.”

Tilly devours three chocolate-chip cookies and drinks the small cup of orange juice.

“May I have another cup of juice and a few more cookies? I’m feeling a little bit better.”

The nurse goes to check on Jake, who was completely asleep in his chair. His bag has a few more minutes to go. She places some cookies and two cups of juice on a table beside his chair. She returns to Tilly’s room with two more cookies and another cup of orange juice. “Here you go.” Tilly smiles and thanks her for the second helping.

With the nurse’s assistance, Hope is positioned on the examining table before entering the catacomb-like structure of the MRI.

“Are you claustrophobic at all?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Okay, well, just let us know if you feel uncomfortable at all. There’s a button we’ll give you to stop the process and the table will slide back out. Don’t be worried if you have to use it.”

“Okay, thank you very much.”

Jake is awakened by a nurse, who offers him juice and cookies. “Wow, I must have dozed off for a while.”

“Yes, you did. We couldn’t find any games on the TV, so I guess you slept.” The nurse wipes the needle mark from Jake’s arm with rubbing alcohol and places a bandage over the spot. “You played a baseball game today, huh?”

“Yes, I pitched for the Gulls today.”

“The Gulls, really? My dad is the scoreboard operator at Seaside Park. Do you know Walter?”

“Yeah, Walter is a great guy. We all love Walter!”

“Well, he’s my dad and he loves those games. That’s all he lives for, I think.”

Jake stretches and wipes his eyes in an attempt to hurry back out to the waiting area and sit with Debra. “Am I all done here?”

“Yes, you are. If you feel dizzy at all, please have the juice and cookies, okay?”

“Sounds good. All right, chocolate chip! Do you have a few more? Hey, did your dad really play with Joe DiMaggio?”

“Yes he did. But Marilyn Monroe thought he was too pushy!”

Jake laughs.

Jake takes the extra cookies out to Debra in the waiting room. “Here you go. You must be hungry.”

“Thanks Jake. Mmm...chocolate chip, my favorite. These things are huge!” says Debra as she takes a bite. “And they’re really good too.”

Tilly, still feeling the effects of giving blood, walks gingerly out with his cookies and orange juice and sits down.

“You okay, Dave?” asks Jake.

“Not really. I’m feeling really light-headed. How are you doing?”

“I’m pretty good. The cookies and orange juice help.”

“I hope so. I’m having some more now hoping it will help. You don’t feel light-headed at all, Jake?”

“No, I’m good.”

“Ah, the joys of being young again,” says Tilly.

“My mom is getting an MRI now. The nurse said she should be done pretty soon and they’ll see how her liver is doing.”

Tilly, feeling a bit uneasy around Jake after his conversation with Hope, nods and leans back in his chair after finishing his orange juice and cookies and slowly closes his eyes.

“Just a few more minutes, Ms. Summers, and we’ll all be done here,” says a nurse standing beside an enclosed separate room where the images from the MRI are appearing on a computer screen. Dr. Oswald, along with a hospital oncologist, is viewing the results.

“Okay, I’m doing fine. This isn’t as bad as I thought it would be. As long as I keep my eyes closed, I’m fine.”

“That’s good. Just another minute or so and we’ll get you back to your room. I know Dr. Oswald wants for you to spend the night after your transfusion.”

Hope draws a heavy breath, knowing a hospital stay means more worries for her son. “If I’m feeling better after the transfusion, do you think I could go home?”

“That’s up to the doctor, Ms. Summers. I know he has already put in a request for you to be checked in to the hospital. We can discuss that with him after your transfusion. But it’s in your best interests for the hospital to monitor you throughout the night and early morning.”

“I know, I know. I just have seen too many medical facilities in my lifetime and I like to limit those experiences as much as I can.”

“I know how you feel. But you don’t want to go home and then have to come back here if there are any complications, would you?”

“No, I guess you’re right. Let’s take this one step at a time.”

“That sounds like a plan. Okay, you’re all done. Give me a second and I’ll get you moved back on to your bed and then we can wheel you into your room and start the transfusion. Dr. Oswald will be in shortly to discuss the results.”

“Okay. Thank you very much.”

Tilly begins to ease the tension in his neck by moving his head side to side and sits up in his chair.

“Dave, you feeling any better?” asks Jake.

After hearing a few vertebrae crack, Tilly turns toward him and says, “Yeah, a bit better. My head is not spinning around anymore.”

“Eeeww, was that your neck making those sounds?” asks Debra.

“Yeah, I’ve been cracking my neck for a lot of years now. It really helps, believe it or not.”

“It sounds like someone cracking their knuckles, only worse,” she says with a look of disgust on her face.

Down the hallway, they see Hope being wheeled back into her room.

“Hey, Mom’s MRI is done. Let’s go see how she’s doing.”

After straightening himself up, Tilly follows the pair to Hope’s room.

“Hey Mom, how’s it going?”

“Oh, Jake, not bad. The MRI was fine. I’m going to get a transfusion now and then Dr. Oswald will come in and let me know what’s going on with my liver.”

Two nurses start to bring in the necessary equipment to start the transfusion. Jake, feeling a bit more comfortable seeing some color return to his mom’s face, asks one of the nurses, “Whose blood are you going to use, mine or Dave’s?”

“I’m not sure. We’re still checking them both and getting them prepped for service. As soon as we know, we’ll let you know.”

Jake smiles. “Hey Dave. Ten bucks it’s my blood. What do you think?”

“Probably, Jake. You’ve got youth on your side and your mom could probably use a little bit of that about now, don’t you think, Hope?”

“You got that right, Dave. Maybe I’ll need two bags and receive both of your blood. That would be the fairest way to do it, and no money needs to exchange hands then,” says Hope with a smile and a wink to Dave.

Dr. Oswald enters Hope’s room and introduces his associate and colleague, Dr. Tannenbaum. “We’re still evaluating your MRI results and should know a lot more very soon. In the meantime, we’d like for you to relax and get your transfusions going. Your blood counts are very low and Dr. Tannenbaum and I are recommending that we give the two bags of O negative blood to you. Your body will adequately handle it. That will take a few hours, so I would suggest that everyone else make themselves comfortable in either our waiting room or even the hospital’s main waiting room. Or you can go home and come back in a few hours. We should know how everything’s looking by then.”

Jake looks at Debra, who immediately says, “I’ll wait here with you, Jake. I’d like to stay and be with your mom, if that’s okay?”

“That’s better than okay. That’s great.”

Hope chimes in too. “Thanks so much, Debra, for staying with Jake. That’s really sweet of you. But if you have stuff to do, you can go ahead and do it, then come back. I’m probably going to sleep during my transfusions.”

Both doctors leave the room while the nurses finish up prepping Hope. “We’ll be right back, Ms. Summers, with your first bag of blood.”

“Okay, thank you. Hey Jake, I need to speak with Dave for a second.”

“What, more of this one-on-one stuff, Mom? I don’t know, but I would think something’s going on with you two,” says Jake sarcastically.

Debra tugs at Jake’s shirt and directs him out into the hallway. “I’ll make sure he leaves you guys alone,” she says.

“Thanks, Debra. Keep him in line, will you please,” she says with a big smile. “Dave, I wanted to let you know that I spoke with Dr. Oswald about the DNA test.”

Tilly moves closer to Hope’s bed. “And what did he say?”

“Well, he honestly thinks that we don’t need a DNA test to prove that you’re Jake’s dad. He said that there’s no way anyone else could be the father with all three of us with the same rare blood type of O negative. Plus, the fact, like I told you, that I was not with anyone else for nearly a year after we slept together.”

Tilly takes a very long and deep breath and turns his head toward the IV pole next to her bed.

“But Dave, I told Dr. Oswald to go ahead and do the test just so everyone is sure. It costs a bit of money and since they already have all of our blood samples, it should only take a few hours. I hope you’re okay with that?”

Tilly turns back to Hope and a smile gradually appears on his face. “Sure, Hope. I’m fine with that.”

“You’ve had some time now, Dave, to think about what I’ve told you. What are you thinking?”

Tilly rubs the back of his neck now and tries to find the right words to comfort Hope. “Hope, Jake is my son and at first I was feeling a bit overwhelmed and uneasy about it. But to be honest, I’m as happy as I can be. I told you I want us to work it out and for the three of us to talk through everything and become a family. I know it will be a major adjustment for everyone, especially Jake, but I’m willing to do whatever it takes.”

Hope grabs Dave’s hand and squeezes it tightly. “That means the world to me, Dave. When do you think we should tell Jake?”

Tilly ponders the all-important question for a brief moment, then says, “Let’s wait till you’re out of the hospital and back home. More comfortable surroundings should help him with the shock of it all,” he says smiling.

“Okay, I like that idea. Let’s hope I can leave the hospital soon. Dr. Oswald wants me to stay the night.”

“Let’s get you well, Hope. That’s the number-one priority right now, and let’s see what he wants to do about your liver.” Dave moves toward Hope and leans over and gives her a hug.

As they’re embracing, Jake walks by the room and sees his mom in the arms of the man she met just hours earlier. His initial hunch proves correct. There is something going on with these two. Rather than experience anger or resentment toward Dave, Jake feels a sense of contentment that through all of today’s twists and turns, maybe his mom has found someone she can trust and maybe develop a strong and lasting relationship with. Stranger beginnings happen

all the time between two people. God knows his mom deserves someone good, and so far from all that he has seen and heard from Dave, Jake thinks he fits the bill. He quickly backpedals to the waiting area and sits with Debra.

“What is it, Jake? Why didn’t you stay in your mom’s room?”

Jake coughs and leans in to Debra and says, “I saw Dave and my mom hugging in her bed. I knew there was something going on with them. I just knew it.”

Debra smiles broadly. “I think that’s great, Jake. Ever since they saw each other, they felt like they’ve met before. Who knows, maybe they’re kindred spirits or soulmates from another life. No one knows. Your mom deserves a great guy and he appears to be just that. I’m happy for them and you should be too.”

“Yeah, I guess so. I’ve just never seen my mom with many guys and it’s a little shocking to my system.”

“Well, get used to it. I have a feeling they’re going to be a couple very soon. And now with both your blood in your mom, you guys have a special bond with each other.”

“Wow, you know something, I think you’re right.”

Tilly kisses Hope on the cheek. “I’m going to go back to the hotel and clean up a bit. I’d like to shower and come back down here in a few hours, if that’s okay?”

“Sure Dave, that’s great. Please reassure Jake on your way out that everything is going to be okay with my liver and all. He worries so much.”

Tilly grabs his bag and begins to leave Hope’s room. He glances back at her and says, “Hey, Hope, I wanted you to know that everyone calls me by my nickname, Tilly.”

“Tilly, huh? I like that. The last part of your last name.”

“Yeah, but I’d like it if you would keep calling me Dave. The only other woman who ever called me that was my mom and you remind me a lot of her. I miss her every day, but knowing that you’re in my life now makes those thoughts that much sweeter.”

Hope’s heart swells and she is unable to respond right away. Visibly moved by Dave’s comments, she barely gets out, “Okay. Dave it is.”

A quick text back from Brooke makes Tilly’s phone vibrate in his pocket. He reads her message, smiles, and sends a quick thank-you back. She’s received Jake’s contract and has put it on her boss’s desk.

Jake sees Tilly walking toward him and Debra and is unsure how to act around him now. Hugging his mother initially sent shock waves through his being, but Debra assuaged his insecurity, making him realize that his mom appears happy around him. An emotion she rarely displayed for many years.

“Jake, your mom looks a lot better. I really think that after the transfusions, she’ll be up and moving around again. She may have to stay overnight, but she should be able to go home early tomorrow afternoon. It will be good for her to stay here so they can check her out. Plus, you guys play a night game tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah, we do. I sure hope she’s home by game time.”

Tilly extends his right hand and gives Jake a firm handshake. “I’m going back to my hotel for a quick shower and clean up and then I’ll be back.”

“Okay. Hey, Dave.”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks for giving blood and looking after my mom with me. She means the world to me and I can’t let anything happen to her.”

“I know how you feel, Jake. Your mom is going to be fine. You’re a good son. Debra, take good care of this guy while I’m gone, okay?”

“You got it, Dave. See ya soon.”

Tilly starts to walk through the ER doors when Jake yells after him. “Dave, do you know how to get back to your hotel?”

“Yeah, I think so. I should be all right.”

Jake nods his head, waves his hand, and heads back into the waiting room.