

CHAPTER 1

Today is my first day of freedom. The thought brought with it a sense of both relief and fear. Liv Carter continued to second-guess her choice to quit her highly paid job. At times, her stomach lurched violently as though she jumped from a plane without a parachute and was hurtling toward earth to be splattered in an unknown location. Other times, she was peaceful and calm as though she sat quietly alone on the bank of a creek and listened to the water flow. Wavering between the two extremes was unsettling.

Liv took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. She waited for her suitcases at the baggage claim in the Tampa airport and surveyed her surroundings from behind a pair of large ultra-dark sunglasses. A crowd had slowly gathered around her. She recognized passengers from her flight. A few men gave her admiring glances and tried to catch her eyes, but she ignored them.

She had hoped to avoid male admiration and took care to wear jeans that weren't too tight and a top that did not accentuate her breasts to downplay her looks and figure. The last thing she wanted to do was draw attention to herself. A few people had already cast quizzical looks in her direction, as though, she looked familiar, but they could not place her. *Please don't let anyone recognize me.*

She acted nonchalant and plastered a smile on her face. Her shoulder started to ache from carrying her huge black Michael Kors bag containing her laptop and purse. An itch underneath the black, pageboy wig she wore to cover her bronze-red hair tickled her scalp. She transferred the light jean jacket to the other arm and scratched her head as best she could without disturbing the wig.

The buzzer sounded, and luggage began to move around the carousel. *It feels weird not to have somewhere to be or a million things to do!* She looked forward to peace and quiet. *The good Lord only knows how much I need it!*

Her purple suitcase slowly snaked its way to where she stood. She lugged it off the conveyor. Her smaller duffel bag was not far behind. She grabbed it and began to wheel them out to the curb. Her ride app indicated her driver was one minute out.

As she exited the airport, she was greeted by a furnace blast of hot, humid air. It felt good to escape the rainy, cold March weather in New York City to the warmth and sun of Florida. Her ride arrived just as she got to the curb, and the solicitous driver helped her put her suitcases in the back seat. She squeezed in beside them as she confirmed with him her destination to the Clearwater address. Liv relaxed back into the seat.

The driver was Hispanic and, despite his thick accent, spoke English well. His flowered Hawaiian shirt and khaki cargo shorts mirrored the vacation atmosphere the advertisements in the airport conveyed. Once they were underway, he glanced in the rearview mirror and asked, “Are you here on vacation?”

“Yes.” She answered a bit tersely, not wanting to encourage small talk.

“Where do you live?”

“New York City.”

“I’d like to go there someday. What do you do there?”

“This and that,” she said vaguely as she lifted her sunglasses to the top of her head and looked down at her cell phone.

“Do you like living there?”

“Yes.” She kept her eyes downcast as she began to go through her email inbox on her phone. The numerous texts and calls she had received from her colleagues when the word of her departure had leaked had surprised her. She had ignored them all, and now, she would ignore the emails. She really did not want to talk to anyone about her decision. It was nobody’s business.

The driver was quiet for a few moments. Liv hoped he had gotten the message that she did not want conversation. She was concerned that if she talked long enough, he might recognize her voice. So far, she had been lucky that nobody had figured out who she was. She had been treated this trip like a regular, ordinary woman. It had been wonderful.

“Have you visited here before?” he asked.

“Yes.” She stared out of the window.

“I guess you don’t need to know the best places to visit or eat.”

“No, but thanks.” She noticed he kept glancing at her in the rearview mirror. *I look familiar to him.* She slid her sunglasses back down to cover her eyes.

For the rest of the ride, the sound of music from the radio filled the car. It was from a station that played a mix of oldies and current songs. Liv was relieved the chatty driver had stopped talking.

The car pulled up to her mother’s condo complex. She accepted the driver’s offer of help with her luggage. He got out of the car and set her suitcases on the ground.

“Thanks.” She picked up her duffle bag and put it on top of her large suitcase.

“My pleasure. Hey, don’t I know you from somewhere?” he asked.

She forced a smile. “I don’t think so.”

He gave her a disbelieving look. “But you look familiar...”

“Thanks again for your help. You have a good day,” she said pleasantly.

He studied her one last time as if trying to place her. She quickly turned away from him and walked toward the condo. She tensed as she felt his eyes on her and relaxed when she heard the car door shut and the sound of the engine fade away. “Whew, that was close,” she murmured under her breath.

The public knew Liv as Kay Palmer (a combination of her mother’s maiden name and her middle name) who played Andrea Carpenter, a popular character on the long-running soap opera, *Tomorrow’s Promise*. The soap opera was still successful due to its streaming with one of the media services providers. Liv had been a regular cast member for the past eleven years, joining the soap opera when she was eighteen and just out of high school. Her character was the privileged, spoiled daughter of a widower, oil tycoon and had been dubbed “Queen Bitch” by the press and public.

On the show, Andrea had endured an abortion, attempted murder, three disastrous affairs and two marriages. In the current storyline, Andrea was having an affair with a doctor, and in the last episode she filmed, Andrea was in a plane crash with one of her ex-husbands - with whom she had just had a one-night stand. Her character’s life would hang in the balance for the next few weeks while the executive producer and writers figured out next steps for the soap opera.

When her contract had expired earlier in the week, she announced her resignation to the cast and crew. However, the executive producer would not accept her resignation and had offered her a more lucrative contract and flexible schedule, so she could pursue other projects. While Liv was still adamant about leaving the soap, her agent, Larry, insisted that she had to give more thought to staying before severing ties to such a popular character as Andrea Carpenter.

But for as wildly popular as Andrea Carpenter was, she was also so vehemently disliked. Sometimes Liv was stopped on the street by people who wanted to give her an earful about how awful they thought her character (and by association, Liv herself) was. It was almost a daily occurrence. She had been subject to more lectures on her brazen behavior onscreen and insulting assumptions about her personal life offscreen than she could count. She had reached her limit on peoples' negative comments. There was also the near-daily barrage of hate mail, email, and tweets. The personal attacks were ironic given that Liv's true personality and morals were completely opposite those of her character. Enough was enough.

Nonetheless, Liv had reluctantly agreed to consider the executive producer's offer, which was a complication she could live without. She had so many other things to think about already.

It had been two years since she had last visited Clearwater. In the past, if her mother had wanted to see her, it had been necessary for her to come to New York. Liv had never been able to get away for more than a day or two because of her jam-packed schedule.

For the next few weeks, Liv was house-sitting for her mother at her beachfront condo while her mother was on an Alaskan cruise with a group of friends which included her neighbor and best friend, Mona Roberts. Then the group was off to visit Seattle for a few days. It was fortuitous that her mother's trip had coincided with her need to be alone and think about things.

The buildings in the condo complex were made of white stucco and concrete block. There was a private beach for residents. Her mother's condo was on the first floor. She pulled her luggage up two steps to the front door. The heat caused beads of sweat on her forehead. *It's going to be a stinker today.*

Cold air swirled around her as she entered the condo. *What a relief!* The curtains were drawn, and it was a little dark inside. Once she parked her suitcases in the guest room, she would check the house and open the drapes to let in some light.

The condo was small, roughly 1,250 square feet. It was a one floor-two bedroom-two-bathroom plan with a great room, dining area and decent-sized kitchen. The open floor plan allowed the light from the windows to make the place cheery. The living area and kitchen were decorated in neutral colors with a medium shade of blue as an accent.

As she entered the guest room, she was greeted by the fragrance of roses from the wallflower in a plug in the bedroom. It was her favorite scent. She set her suitcases on the pink lace bedspread her mother had made for her on her sixteenth birthday. The room was decorated in various shades of pink, her favorite color, and was furnished with the furniture from her bedroom in the house where she had grown up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The room was a shrine to Olivia. There were various pictures of her that hung on the wall that commemorated her various life stages. Her high school trophies and ribbons adorned the top of the dresser. As she looked at them, she was reminded of the Emmy, the three Golden Globes, and the two People's Choice Awards that were on her fireplace mantle at her apartment in New York.

After she unpacked, she went to her mother's bedroom and was greeted by the faint scent of lavender which came from the sachet her mother used in her drawers. Nancy Lawson kept the bedroom the way it had been when Liv's father, Ralph, had been living.

The pale green and purple colors in the room contrasted nicely with the dark wood furniture which was a little large for the room. Her father had jokingly referred to the queen size bed as their “marriage bed”. Her parents had slept in it from the first day of their marriage and wanted to keep it until death separated them. Sadly, it had.

Her parents’ wedding picture was on the night stand. Her father wore a dark tuxedo and her mother a white lace wedding dress and veil. Ralph had been tall at six feet three inches and had been a handsome man. His full head of copper-colored curly hair was unruly. Liv knew she got her hair and height from him.

Janet and Ralph Lawson had met at the University of Pittsburgh and had married when they had been in their mid-twenties. They both had had family in Pittsburgh and had decided to settle there. Ralph had worked for a health insurance company. Over time, he had been promoted to an executive position. Her mother had been an elementary school teacher in the public-school system.

After five years of marriage, they had decided to start a family. After a year of trying, they had not become pregnant. They had sought out medical advice and had found there was no reason why they could not medically have a child. Finally, Nancy had become pregnant, but had miscarried twice. It had devastated them both.

To assuage the hurt, they both had lost themselves in their careers. They had given up on having a child because another miscarriage would have been too hard to bear. When they had reached their mid-thirties, a surprised Nancy had discovered she was pregnant. They both had prayed hard during her pregnancy that the baby would survive. There had not been words adequate to describe the joy they had felt when Liv had been born. They often referred to her as their walking miracle.

Despite becoming parents at an older age, they had a goal to retire at age 55. They had sacrificed and saved. Once they had achieved it, they had bought the condo and moved from Pittsburgh to Clearwater, Florida.

Her parents had loved living in Florida. Then two years ago, her father had become gravely ill. The doctors had discovered stage 4 cancer, and he had not lived long after the diagnosis.

How Liv missed him. Her grief caused her to regret her career choice. She missed time with her father that she could not buy back. At this moment, she could use her father's advice and wished she could talk to him. He had been her sounding board. *I miss Cole, too.*

Liv sighed as she thought of Cole. When she had turned twenty-one, she had met Cole at a charity/publicity function. Twenty-five-year-old Cole Carter had been a wide receiver for the New York Jets. She was bowled over by his white-blond hair, sparkling blue eyes and handsome face. She loved football and knew enough about it to be able to converse with him intelligently. She was a Steelers fan, but he said he would not hold it against her. They instantly bonded. She believed their instant bond was due to their shared faith and similar interests.

They had dated for six months, and then, had been married. During their marriage, she had gone to almost every football game and had hated it when he had been hit hard or injured. He had promised her he would retire in another year and had planned to pursue a career as sports announcer/reporter. In the meantime, he had wanted to honor his contract with the Jets.

There had been some interest in Cole outside of the playing field. He had been hired as a commentator during the play-offs and the Super Bowl. His good looks and smooth, deep voice had gotten him parts in commercials and guest appearances on television in various venues.

The last year of his contract to play football, Liv had had a day off from filming the soap opera and had gone to training camp to watch him practice. It had been hot on the field - over one hundred degrees. About an hour into practice, Cole had collapsed on the field. Liv had jumped off the bleachers and onto the field almost as quickly as the doctor had done. There had been nothing the doctor could do, Cole was already gone. Later they had discovered he had died from a heart attack caused by an undetected defect in his heart. The heat had been too much for both him and his heart.

They had been married a little over two years when Cole died. It had been a dark time in her life. Larry had encouraged her to take a leave of absence from the soap opera and mourn. She had balked at first because she had thought her work would take her mind off her loss, but it had not.

After a week of trying to continue in her role, she had had to take the leave. Her parents had encouraged her to visit them for a few months. They had been such a wonderful support. Then she had gone back to New York and had eased back into her work.

It seemed like a lifetime ago, and yet, like yesterday. It was hard to believe Cole had been gone almost five years now. A tear trickled down her cheek. She did not want to relive his loss.

She left her mother's room and went to freshen up. As she pulled off the wig, her thick, red hair fell into a disheveled curtain at her shoulders. Her face in the bathroom mirror reflected the ravages of the sleepless nights over the past few days. Fatigue displaced what little

energy she had. There were worry lines on her face and fine crow's feet by her hazel eyes. Dark shadows under her eyes and her paler than normal face gave her a sickly appearance. *I look awful.*

She hoped a shower and cooler clothing would revive her. As she stood in the shower, she let the hot water run down her body. Between the energizing body wash and the steam, she felt tiredness ease out of her and imagined it swirling down the drain.

After putting on a pair of shorts and a tank top, she brushed the knots out of her hair. After the good brushing, she glanced in the mirror. Her hair curled up at the ends every which way. *What an unruly mess!* She regretted her new, shorter haircut. It had been easier to care for her longer locks.

Cutting her hair had been an act of both defiance and emancipation. Her contract prohibited her from doing anything to her hair without permission from the executive staff of the soap opera. Her naturally red, waist-length tresses had been her trademark. When her contract had expired, she had had it cut at a salon that would save her hair to make a wig for women who were undergoing chemotherapy. It had made her feel good to do a nice thing for someone who was going through a hard time. The salon had promised to keep her act of kindness quiet.

Thirst drew her to her mother's refrigerator. As she entered the kitchen, she was surprised to find her mother had lined up all her house plants on the breakfast bar along with a watering can, so Liv would not forget to water them. Liv smiled. Her mother referred to her as "the grim reaper" because the survival rate of houseplants in her care was very low. Liv put her fingers in the soil of the pots to see if they needed watered. The soil was dry. She filled the watering can and watered the plants.

The fridge was fully stocked with various kinds of drinks. She grabbed a sparkling flavored water and breezed back into the living room. Her eyes fell on the picture of her and her mother on the book shelves. She picked it up. It had been taken a year ago on top of the Empire State Building. They looked like sisters.

Nancy was a vivacious, pretty sixty-six-year old. She dyed her blonde hair to hide the gray, kept herself up with exercise and ate healthy. Her mother was content and never lonely. There was always volunteer work for the church. She also had a busy social life that included both male and female friends both at church and in the condo community. She put Liv to shame. *When have I had time for friends?*

She walked over to the picture window in the living room and opened the drapes. The view was breathtaking. The back of her mother's condo faced the ocean.

As she sipped the water, she stared out of the window and watched the waves roll onto the white sands of the shore. The scene had a calming, hypnotic effect on her, and she stood transfixed. Her thoughts turned to the reason for her visit.

Liv had less than three weeks to end or renegotiate her contract with *Tomorrow's Promise*. She was told her character would be difficult to recast. There was a fear the public would not accept another woman in that role. Larry felt with the contract changes and salary raise it might be worth it for her to stay in the role for another year or so while she established herself elsewhere.

However, Larry was not suffering from burnout like she was. The merry-go-round she had been on went from the soap opera, to filming commercials or other shows, modeling, publicity appearances, her charity work, and then back to the soap opera to start it all again.

Sometimes, she regretted that she did not go to college and learn a different profession. Of course, it was never too late to go to college and was one of the options she was considering.

Lately, she was haunted by the feeling that there had to be more to life than this. She was born with beauty, height and a good figure. It was a blessing she could use those assets to make money outside of the world's oldest profession. She was not sure she wanted to continue acting, but what else could she do? Being an actress was all she knew. A few weeks did not seem like enough time to sort out her life. But it was what it was.

Liv sighed and noticed a man who sat alone on the beach in a lawn chair. She wondered in which condo he lived. His back was to her. His dark brown hair was ruffled by the ocean breeze. His shoulders were broad, and his muscular upper arms strained against the sleeves of his white polo shirt.

Out in the distance, there were some people enjoying the beach. A few sat in chairs in the ocean itself, and the others walked along the shoreline. She wanted to be out there with them and enjoy the sunset. She kicked off her sandals and went out the door.

The sand was warm beneath her feet. The sound of the seagulls' cries could be heard amid the crashing of the waves. The wind had picked up, and the rough waves were causing white foam to form on the sand. She observed the seagulls as they dived for food.

Not wanting to disturb the man's enjoyment of the scenery, she kept her distance. She glanced over at him. He stared straight ahead. His body was bigger than a linebacker's but solid looking - not overweight and dwarfed the lawn chair. He was not a handsome man. His square jaw was punctuated by thin lips that formed an unsmiling mouth. Grumpy would be a good word to describe his expression. His dark brown hair

came to a widow's peak on his forehead and was thin and short. His eyes were hidden by a pair of mirrored sunglasses. Why did men wear those things? They always gave her a creepy feeling when they turned in her direction.

She passed him as she made her way to the ocean and noticed that his left leg was in a cast that went from his foot to under his shorts. One of his large, well-manicured hands clutched a pair of crutches, and his other arm rested on the lawn chair. She felt bad for the grumpy adjective she had given him. He might be in pain. She smiled at him and continued toward the ocean.

The sunset demanded her attention. She made sure she was not in his line of sight and dropped down in the sand, and then, watched enthralled as the sun sank slowly toward the ocean. The sky was a kaleidoscope of orange, red, pink, purple, and yellow until the sun was finally swallowed by the vast waters. It was a reminder that God was still Creator and Almighty. He was bigger than anything life threw at her. A sense of peace filled her. *God is in control. Now if I could just stop worrying and turn my decision over to Him.*

She sat for a few minutes and gave thanks for the blessings in her life and prayed about the decision facing her. Then she got up, brushed the sand from her shorts and walked back toward the condo. She stopped and took one last look at the ocean and let out a deep sigh.

"Is that you, Alice?" The man nearly growled.

Liv jumped at the sound of his voice. Her condolences immediately went to Alice. "Wasn't the sunset just beautiful?" she asked cheerfully and ignored his nasty tone. *Can't he see I'm not Alice?*

"Who are *you*?" he asked, his tone surly, and his voice was deep and raspy. "This is a private beach you know. I can have you hauled off."

What a jerk! “I know this is a private beach, and I’ve just as much right to be here as you do. For your information, I’m in condo 132,” she said defensively. Normally, she would never give out her condo number, but he made her feel like she had breached national security.

The man turned his sunglasses in her direction and stared at her.

She became increasingly irritated with him. She clenched her fists. “You know it’s not polite to stare, especially with those sunglasses on. The sun is down. You can take them off.”

“Indeed!” His tone was one of sardonic amusement. He took off the sunglasses “Is this better?”

She was shocked by how his brown eyes seemed to look straight through her. There was a jagged scar by his left eye. His facial features were too rugged to be considered handsome. He had an angular face and a slightly crooked nose. The lines around his eyes and mouth made him appear to be older than her - anywhere from his late thirties to early forties. His skin was olive-toned.

His gaze unnerved her. He just kept staring. *I hope he doesn’t recognize me.* She finally had enough of it. “I hope you like what you see. Weren’t you taught it’s rude to stare?” Her annoyance overtook her good manners.

“Was I staring? I wouldn’t know. I happen to be blind,” he said, bitterness laced every word.

Liv audibly gasped. Then she felt horrible for being so rude. *What is wrong with me?* She wished she had a script before her so that she would know what to say next.

She was not even able to ad-lib anything worthwhile. All she could manage was a lame, “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize.” She had softened her tone.

“I don’t need your pity,” he said gruffly.

Liv felt her blood pressure rise. *He sure makes it hard to be nice.* “I wasn’t giving you pity.”

“Really? What would you call it then?”

“An apology, but obviously, you’re too busy carrying that chip on your shoulder to notice.” She could not stop the flow of snarky words from her mouth. He jabbed his anger at her, as though it were a sword, and her reflex was to dodge and jab back. She wondered how long this fencing match would continue.

“You try being blind and see how you handle it.”

There was an uncomfortable silence. She opened her mouth to spill out another apology, but words would not come.

“What? No comeback?”

His mocking tone was a caustic substance that ate away her apology. *I’ve had enough. I don’t care if he is blind.* “That remark was uncalled for. You’re polluting a perfectly nice evening with your surly attitude.”

“Ah, there it is...she has a temper. You must be a red-head.”

“I am, but it has nothing to do with having a temper. Rudeness begets rudeness.”

He threw back his head and laughed. “Touché.”

“I’ll bid you a good evening and take my leave.” She turned to walk away from him.

“It’s amazing how uncomfortable a crippled, blind man can make people, especially women.”

Liv took a deep breath and tried to speak in a calm tone. It surprised her at how easily he had gotten under her skin. However, she had taken enough from rude and mean people these past eleven years and was done sucking it up. Her need to defend herself welled up in her like a geyser and spewed out of her mouth. “If you really want to know the truth, your abhorrent attitude is by far worse than any physical ailment you have. I think conversing with a werewolf would be more pleasant. For future reference, if you don’t want to turn women away, you can attract them with sugar more than vinegar.” She turned on her heels and walked away and left him staring sightlessly after her.

The patio door shook violently as she slammed it shut. Her fists were clenched, and she gritted her teeth. *Of all the nerve!* He certainly was an unfriendly jerk. Then, she felt bad for him. After all, he was right, she had never been blind or injured. Still, it did not give him the license to be rude to people. Hopefully, after her tirade, he would be nicer to poor Alice, whoever she was to him. She planned to avoid him the rest of her visit.

Her stomach growled. She had not eaten since breakfast. In the refrigerator, she found makings for a salad. She would have to go to the grocery store and stock up. Until she made a firm decision about her future, she would have to watch what she ate. If she did decide to go back to the soap, television did add pounds, and that she did not need. She would also have to deal with the executive staff who would be upset about the haircut. But emergency brain surgery on Andrea could be written in for that.

The ringing of her cell phone interrupted her culinary chores. She saw it was her agent and debated whether to answer it or not but did.

“Liv, darling, I’m so glad you let me know you arrived safely,” the male voice scolded her.

Not another male with an attitude! “Larry, cut the sarcasm. You know I don’t want to be bothered.”

“I’d say you got out on the wrong side of the bed if it weren’t evening. I was truly worried. I’m not only your agent - I’m also your friend,” he said in a hurt tone.

“I’m sorry, Larry, I could’ve texted you.” Her tart tone had sweetened.

“Yes, you could’ve. Since you’ve had a little time to ponder, what are your thoughts about the soap and their offer?” he asked.

“I’m still undecided. I will say I don’t want to be type cast and worry I’ve stayed too long as Andrea.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that. That’s my job. If you decline the new contract, I’ll find work for you. For now, you have your modeling and commercials to fall back on. In a few weeks, you begin shooting Christmas commercials for *Lynn’s Diamonds* and *Anne Dunn Clothing*. I’m sure I can scare up a few more gigs for you, if needed, to keep you employed until another role pops up.”

“I wonder if those sponsors will back out of the commercials once they know I quit the soap. It’s Andrea they want not me.”

“They have a contract with you – you’ll get paid either way. I know *Oil of Beauty* and *Redmon Cosmetics* have approached me to have you do magazine advertising and television commercials. I put them off until you decide for sure about the soap – in case you’re right, that it’s the Andrea persona they want. I’ve also put feelers out for you to act on a series or do a movie for one of the streaming companies.”

“You shouldn’t have done that. I’m considering not acting or modeling anymore.”

“What! Liv, that’s plain crazy. You’re too beautiful a model and too good an actress to quit,” he said in a cajoling tone. “I know I can find you a role that’ll make everyone take notice of your diversity as an actress.”

“I yearn to do more with my life besides play pretend.”

“Like what?”

“I’m not sure, but I plan to research some things. There are other careers besides acting.”

“There are, but I say stick with what you know and are good at.”

“Acting and the appearances that go with it are so time consuming. If I find a new career, I like the thought of finally having time to do things.”

“Such as...”

Liv was quiet for a moment. “Well...I can adopt a dog.”

“Adopt a dog?” he asked incredulously.

“I’ve never been home enough to have one. I had one as a girl and would love to have one now.”

“That’s what dog walkers and pet sitters are for. You could have had a dog anytime you wanted.”

“That’s not how you bond with a dog. I’ve also given thought to working full time on Cole’s foundation and the after-school centers for children.”

“You’re still considering that?”

“Yes, you know, Cole and I...” she stopped talking.

“I know,” Larry said softly. “It’s a wonderful cause.”

“I submitted the non-profit paperwork for the *Cole Carter Foundation* last week.”

“You can always hire someone to run it for you.”

“We’ll see. I know I’ve some serious thinking to do about the next steps in my life.”

“Be practical – you must pay the light bill. Acting is extremely lucrative. When compared to taking the position as the head of your foundation, your new salary could be like going on unemployment, especially if there’s not a steady stream of income flowing into the charity. You’re still young and need to put money away for your old age which in acting is sooner rather than later.”

“I’m aware of that. I want to do what will bring me gratification. I may decide to not do either.”

“I understand you’ve got a big decision to make. After all, I was an actor before I was an agent and faced the same dilemma,” he said in an encouraging tone. “You do what’s right for you. Don’t allow anyone to strong arm you into doing what you don’t want – not even me.”

Liv chuckled. “You can be a force to be reckoned with.”

“True. You’ll figure it out. I have faith in you. Just rest and ponder. I’ve got to run. Call me if you need me, okay? I’ll check on you again soon.”

After they ended the call, she sat at the table with her salad. As she ate, her mind wandered to the time she had first met Larry.

~~~~~

Larry Grant had first set eyes on Liv during her senior play in high school. He had come to watch his godson who had played the romantic lead. Earlier that week, *Tomorrow’s Promise* had contacted him to ask if he had any sixteen to nineteen-year-old female clients who

would be a good fit for their show. He was known in the business for having a keen eye for young talent. He had sent several clients to audition, but they either had the wrong look or not the right personality. They had wanted someone who looked innocent but who could play the vixen.

When he saw Liv in the play, he knew she was the right person for the part. Her beauty and ability to act made her his diamond in the rough. He believed she could be another Grace Kelly. He was so excited that he approached her right after the play.

Larry was about ten years younger than her parents. He was a pleasant-looking man who had a medium built and was about 5 feet 10 inches tall. Liv could almost look straight into his brown eyes. His mousy brown hair had flecks of gray at the temples and was thinning at the top of his head.

Her parents had not been too keen on the idea. Larry had been persuasive and had promised to look out for her. They had been reluctantly supportive and had hoped Larry could keep his promise. They had prayed that after a year or two on the soap opera, she would have had enough, quit and go to college. But it never happened. Early on in her career, Liv loved the soap opera and all the attention that came with it.

Larry was a good agent, and once her character became popular, he got her parts in commercials and in night time shows. He found all the work she could handle. She knew she would have to do as much as she could while she was young. Aging actresses did not always have thriving careers. She also knew she would have to put money away for her future and did.

Lately, she found her career had lost its luster. There was never time to be plain Olivia Carter or to explore who that might really be. The past year she dreaded going to work. Her personal life was a bust.

She had decided two years ago to start dating again and had had several disastrous relationships with an actor, a newscaster and a supporting actor in a night time police drama. Men loved being seen with her. However, they mistook her character for her real-life persona. Because she was a widow, they felt she missed the physical part of marriage and needed a man in her bed. After she refused to have sex with them, the relationships never lasted very long. None of those men had stirred up the embers of desire in her anyway. It had been easy to refuse them.

She knew that she was looking for Cole in all the men she dated. He had been a shooting star in her life that burned brightly, and then, was gone too quickly. If he had lived, they would have already started their family, and she would have been working on the afterschool centers. Cole would have been anchoring on ESPN or Sports NBC.

*I can't keep looking back. I'll turn to salt and blow away just like Lot's wife. All I can do is look forward, and hopefully, God will drop breadcrumbs for me to follow, so I'll know what I'm supposed to be doing with my life now.*

She was exhausted from the trip and her confrontation with the werewolf. Perhaps, she would relax with a book and turn in early. Tomorrow she would consider what she would do with the rest of her life.

