

Chapter Three

Silas sighed as he took his seat in his reserve booth. At least here he no longer had to worry about people bothering him. No matter where he went people accosted him hoping to win a powerful ally or patron. It was even worse among this crowd.

Tonight was the All Boroughs Music Competition. It started out as a charity and friendly competition for public and private schools to show off their most talented musicians. There were trophies as well as a cash prize for the winning school in the form of a scholarship to the school's music program.

Over the years it had become more elite. Fewer schools participated now and the ones that did were mainly private and charter schools. The scholarship was still offered but now the main prize was bragging rights as well as automatic advancement to the All City Music Festival the following spring.

Like any businessman Silas was always careful to balance his charitable donations and activities with his business interests. That was one of the reasons he agreed to Director Weston's request for a sponsor to new wing for the hospital. It was also the reason why he was here. He never missed any notable musical competition or recital that took place throughout the year. His continued presence to such events naturally brought him plenty of attention.

Not surprisingly many people encouraged their children to participate hoping to impress him and garner favoritism before approaching him with business proposals. Silas certainly couldn't criticize their ingenuity but that wasn't why he was here. He came to these events to relax, to remember, and maybe, just maybe, to find someone.

"Something the matter?" Thomas asked standing at the ready should he need anything. Despite the fact they were friends they were also employer and employee. "That kid from the other day must have really thrown you for a loop."

Silas grunted his mind returning to the strange, brave girl from the children's hospital. There was no denying she often came to mind at the oddest moments. She was brazen and without fear, full of pride and not afraid to speak her mind even to a complete stranger.

But it was her green eyes that simply wouldn't let him rest. They drew him in practically demanding him to remember something important. If only the Director hadn't come back when he did Silas felt if he had been given a little more time his mind would have finally deciphered the uncanny feeling that made his hair stand on end. Even now his thoughts hovered over a precipice it didn't dare cross.

"It's nothing," Silas finally said. "Let's just enjoy the night."

"Fine with me," Thomas agreed but couldn't help giving his friend a concerned look.

At almost thirty, Silas Prescott enjoyed more success and privilege than most people twice his age could hope for. But this didn't bring him joy. Money and power were not the things Silas treasured or coveted. What Silas wanted, what he needed, what he never voiced aloud was a family: wife and children.

Ever since high school Silas had been pursued by a number of girls and women. Some he soundly rejected others he entertained but never took seriously. None succeeded in touching his heart, a heart that was reserved for one woman and one woman only.

Her name was permanently etched in Silas's soul and one he never voiced aloud. Thomas was afraid to even mention it himself. Despite his obsession the object of his desire remained hidden and out of his reach.

Mercifully the lights dimmed freeing them from further conversation as the host appeared on stage to welcome the audience, "Hello ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the forty-eighth annual All Boroughs Music Competition. We have over a hundred participants from thirty schools competing this year, our biggest yet. So let's sit back and enjoy! To start things off we have Birch Wathen's String Quartet."

The crowd clapped politely as three young boys and one girl walked on stage to take their places. It took a few minutes for them to prepare their instruments and sheet music. Then they finally began to play.

Once they finished the crowd politely clapped again and they exited to join their family and friends in the audience. Stage hands moved chairs and music stands preparing for the next act before it was announced. And so the night progressed. Some schools were represented by a single musician others by a whole band. This particular competition did not put limits on participation as a result schools with more resources sent larger groups for a more impressive presentation.

Silas watched impassively. Despite his record of attendance he was no lover of the arts or of music in particular. The musicians on stage were a far cry from professionals so he didn't expect much from their performances either. He came because a single vision drove him too, a vision and a belief he would eventually find what he was looking for.

Not surprisingly Riverdale had sent an entire orchestra to deliver the crowning moment of the night. Despite being his alma mater Silas was not impressed. He sensed nothing special in these children who were undoubtedly the sons and daughters of his own classmates.

"Well, I suppose that's it," Thomas sighed. After the last competitor there would be a brief intermission before the winners were announced but Silas never stayed that long. He always left early to avoid overeager parents hoping their children's performances impressed him.

"And now for the final competitor of the night, Anna Silver Public School, Miss Alexis Carter."

"Seriously?" Thomas scoffed. "Why would they make anyone follow that?"

The crowd seemed to agree some had already headed for the doors in anticipation of the break when the announcement was made. Their surprise only deepened as a young girl in a simple black dress with pin-striped sleeves emerged from off stage. In her hand she carried a long exible cane she swept back and forth in front of her as she made her way across the stage.

"All right, Lexi!"

"Go, Lexi! Go!"

Cheers erupted somewhere in the crowd as the blind but proud young lady made it center stage where the piano waited. Her cane bumped the bench and she bowed slightly touching the bench before she sat. With practiced ease she closed her cane and set it on the piano where sheet music would normally be but of course there was none.

Under the audience's scrutiny she ran her fingers across the keys tapping one as she adjusted her seat and made herself comfortable. She took a breath then began to play.

The moment the girl appeared on stage Silas and Thomas immediately recognized her. Thomas looked to his friend but Silas was fully focused on the girl. Why was she here? Was it a sign? What did it mean? Then she began to play.

The piece was instantly recognizable, Beethoven's Für Elise, even if one didn't know it by name. In fact some of the other competitors had also played the piece but this was different. She had no sheet music so she played by memory alone and more than that she didn't just play the piece as it had originally been composed.

The melody was there but she added her own flourishes comprising new and different octaves making the piece more complex, personal and alive. She swayed with the rhythm of her music eyes half-closed with a serene expression of pure love and joy for the music. The melody built up to an amazing crescendo sweeping over her listeners entranced with her playing.

Silas himself was on the edge of his seat captivated. Once, only once, he had heard such masterful playing. It too was played by a young lady on the verge of womanhood. Her hair was a bountiful mane of rich chestnut hair and her eyes were a clear sparkling green. Vision of her playing etched in his mind overlapping with the one in front of him now. The vision t like mirror images. Aside from the fact the girl in front of him had straight hair it was a perfect match...but that was impossible, unless...

He twitched as a sudden pain enveloped his chest. No. It couldn't be. Not that...anything but that.

Her playing naturally tapered off after its climax. Slowly the girl straightened, relaxing as the melody slowed. Removing her left hand she finished with her right gently tapping out the same signature notes she started with letting them hang in the air like a question.

Satisfied she picked up her cane and scooted to the end of the bench. Standing she bowed once to the audience before extending the cane and turned leaving the same way she had entered.

For several moments the crowd watched in stunned awe until a sharp whistle and cheer erupted from a dark corner, "Yeah Lexi!"

"Whoop! Whoop! Whoop!"

The crowd stirred rising to their feet and applauding in the first and only standing ovation of the night. Quietly exiting the stage the girl did not pause but she smiled broadly.

"Umm...Boss? Silas?"

"The girl. Find her. Bring her here."

"H-how? I mean, it's not like she'll recognize me."

"I don't care how. Bring her!" Silas snapped.

"Right." Thomas turned and promptly left their private box.

By the time he reached the entry hall at least half of the competitors and their parents were mingling over the refreshments provided. Thomas was not as recognizable as Silas and the gathered crowd ignored him as he threaded his way through. He scanned the gathering but finding a single girl among so many was impossible and he still didn't know what he would say to her.

"Hey Lexi!"

"Over here, sis!"

Thomas paused, his eyes drawn toward the voices. In a relatively quiet corner he saw a pair of young boys identical down to their shoes. Both had black hair and blue eyes, a rare combination. Both wore a plain white dress shirt, black slacks and tennis shoes even though it was supposed to be a black-tie affair. Their short hair was a bit shaggy and fell into their eyes but that didn't seem to bother them.

Thomas stood transfixed as the boys looked so much like someone else he thought he was caught in a time warp. As stunned as he was he still brought out his phone snapping quick pictures of the pair as a tall blonde beside them tried to keep them quiet.

"You two are so stupid!" a new voice declared as the girl Thomas had been sent to retrieve reached the trio.

"Did you hear us cheering?" one of the boys asked.

"Of course I did. All of Brooklyn heard you." Alexis laughed as the pair enveloped her in a hug. "What did you think Auntie Tracy? Was I good?"

"Sweetie, you played just like your mother," the blonde said. "She would be so proud! It's a shame she had to work late tonight."

"It's me. I don't think she'd like this crowd and you know what she says about music...It doesn't put food on the table," Alexis sighed.

Her aunt grimaced replying, "She didn't used to be that way, you know...Is that why you swore me to secrecy about where we were going tonight?"

"This was Miss Johnson's idea to try to get money for the school's music program," Alexis explained. "Mom would never agree to it so that's why Sean forged her signature on the permission slip."

"Which is also secret," one of the boys declared.

"I swear on my oath as a lawyer not to reveal anything my client tells me in confidence," Tracy said, "but if your mother finds out she's going to kill me."

"So let's make sure she doesn't find out," Alexis held out her pinkie. Both boys and their aunt hooked their pinkies around hers. "We never speak of this night...ever."

"Pinkie promise," the others declared.

"Are you hungry?" Tracy asked.

"Not for anything here," Alexis shook her head. "We should get back before everyone else. It's hard enough navigating this place without the crowd."

"All right, let's go," Tracy agreed.

Each boy hooked one of their sister's arms. Since before they could remember they had always done this and always in the same order: Sean on her left and Theo on her right. In the middle Alexis couldn't use her cane but she also didn't need to. She knew her brothers wouldn't let anything happen to her. With their aunt trailing them they returned to the auditorium unaware of the observer taking pictures.

Thomas returned to his anxiously waiting friend. Silas nearly leapt out of his seat demanding, "Where is she?"

Shaking his head Thomas answered, "There were people waiting for her. I couldn't sneak her away."

"People waiting...who?"

"Her brothers and aunt, I think."

"Aunt? Not her mother?"

"No. I took pictures."

Thomas took out his phone and cued up the first image before handing it over. Seeing the two boys Silas sucked in a breath. Black hair, blue eyes, even the slope of their noses and angle of their jaws matched his own. The resemblance was more than uncanny. There could be no denying their parentage. He didn't need a DNA test to prove it, no one would.

"Director did say they were triplets, and the girl said she was ten," Thomas said. He was no expert but certainly triplets were not an everyday event especially with identical twin boys and a fraternal sister.

Silas flipped through the photos watching as the boys greeted their sister enveloping her in a double hug that was more like a huddle. It was obvious there were strong bonds between them. His gaze eventually settled on the blonde in close attendance.

"Who is this?"

"Their aunt," Thomas said. "At least, they called her Aunt Tracy."

"Tracy," Silas repeated. He wracked his mind trying to recall his classmates. Was there a Tracy?

"I think she's a lawyer."

"Lawyer?"

"Yeah, I think she said, about her oath never to reveal her clients secrets," Thomas said, "I know she was actually telling the truth."

"Lawyer...Tracy..." Silas muttered. Something about that sounded familiar but his mind had suffered too many shocks to connect the dots.

The lights dimmed and the night's host appeared on stage as the last stragglers returned to their seats. Tapping his microphone the announcer said, "And now we have come to the moment you have all been waiting for. Third place goes to..."

Silas wasn't listening. His focus was on the pictures Thomas had taken. He couldn't stop looking at them. How? How could this be? Unless...no...that was impossible.

"And tonight's grand prize goes to the Riverdale Pep Band!"

Silas looked up at the mention of his alma mater. His mind was numb but even he knew the wrongness in the announcement. How could they have won against Alexis's superb playing? He wasn't the only one confused if the sporadic applause was anything to go by.

"How does bringing the most people constitute a win?" Thomas muttered. They weren't the only ones unsatisfied.

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"Boo! Boo!"

"I demand a recount!"

"Yeah! Someone shoot the judges!"

"Are they deaf or just dumb?"

"Yo! The judges have been paid off!"

"Boo!"

"Sean, Theo," Tracy tried to shush them. "Come on you two."

"But auntie, this is a crock!" Theo insisted. "Lexi was clearly the best. Right sis?"

"It's me. We knew it was a long shot," Alexis shook his head. "Come on. Let's beat the crowd out of here."

Still unsatisfied the boys nonetheless acquiesced to their sister helping her out of the seat and down the row. Luckily they had chosen seats on the end and close to the door. They left the auditorium as it erupted with murmurs and gossip. No one could deny they had witnessed something magical as well as a crime of favoritism. Whether they knew it or not the trio had made a lasting impression and started an inquiry that would overturn the competition's directorship.

None of this meant anything to the trio but another inquiry certainly would as Silas turned to his friend, "I want to know everything about those three and I want it yesterday."