



Chapter 30

Lochlan - New Photographer

A teenage girl answered the door and stared at me. I smiled reassuringly. “Hey, I’m Lochlan.” Nothing. “Uh... Did Ms. Aubert tell you I was coming?” Her eyes blinked.

“Mr. Lochlan! Keeley, move please.” Jack came over to the door, pulling me into the room. Keeley snapped out of her trance, finding her voice.

“Oh, uh, hi. Sorry. Thought you were coming later,” she said haltingly.

“Nope. This is the usual time.” Turning my attention to Jack, I asked my usual question. “How’s it going, little man?” Keeley’s staring unnerved me. I decided to text Elise.

Lochlan- Okay if Keeley leaves early? I’m okay with Jack.

While I waited for a reply, Keeley showed me what Elise had left for me. It was a detailed note and a binder of Jack’s medical history.

Elise - Did she ask?

Lochlan - No. She's staring at me

Elise - That's fine but if you're going to be a famous rock star it might be good practice.

Lochlan - Funny. I'll have security and she's underage so that's the weirding me out. Also what's with War and Peace?

Elise - ??

Lochlan - The binder of Jack's life history. I needed a post-it with bedtime and the temp for the oven.

Elise - Ha, ha. 8pm and 350 degrees for 20 min. FYI Jack wanted to be sure you brought cash tonight. I've got to go. Thank you.

Smiling, I looked over at Keeley who was still staring. "Hey Keeley, Ms. Aubert said you can head out - all good."

"Are you sure? I can stay."

"Yeah, I'm sure. Enjoy an early night," I encouraged her.

"Bye Keeley." Jack hugged her. "Good luck in your match. Hope you win."

Keeley messed up his hair. "Thanks, Jack. Good night." She gathered up her things and I turned my focus to Jack.

"Alright, Jack. We've got a guitar lesson, dinner and cards. Have you been practicing?"

"Yup," he said walking to his guitar.

"Let's see what you've got."

We ate baked ziti casserole and played Rummy 500 but it wasn't the same with two people. I won the first game and he won the second. We added the coins to the bank in his room. This was the first time I had been upstairs in their house.

Jack's room was painted light green and his drawings were everywhere. The picture of him and Nate was on his bureau. On the wall was a framed print of him on the surfboard. She had captured the absolute joy on his face as he rode the wave. How she got that one second when the action was so fast was remarkable. There was a picture of Jack being hugged by Mackenna and Elise and another of Elise holding Jack as a baby. She looked really young.

"All brushed." Jack came in wearing pajamas with surfers on them. He put his dirty clothes in the hamper and went to his bookshelf. "Read this one." The grumpy blue bear was on the cover but different from the library one. He hopped on the bed and got under the covers holding Otis against his chest. For a brief moment I thought about Shep, Tucker and Brie and what our lives were like when I was Jack's age. I kicked off my shoes and sat beside him on the bed.

"This one's funny," he said as he leaned against me. He was right. When we finished, I returned the book to the shelf and turned back to Jack. His arms were out so I hugged him, and his little arms wrapped around my neck. "Night, Mr. Lochlan."

"Night, Jack."

"You're supposed to say, 'happy dreams' and kiss my head," he told me. So I did.

"Okay. I'm downstairs if you need me. Good night." I picked up my shoes as I left the room.

"Night."

I should've gone downstairs but my curiosity got the better of me. Elise's room was across the hall. She had a simple iron

bed frame with too many pillows. Why did girls always have too many pillows? Pillows got in the way of sleeping or sex. The bright-colored quilt had all mismatched fabrics. There were only three pictures in the room. One of her parents, one of Jack and one of her and Mackenna when they were younger. The walls had colorful landscape prints. I wondered if she had taken those. There was a sliding farm door that opened to a bathroom. In front of the window was a spin bike.

The final room upstairs was next to Jack's. It was an office/toy room lined with shelves. One side was Jack's with toys, books and games. The rest was Elise's, filled with math textbooks, photography books, photo albums, and storage boxes. There was an album on her desk, so I flipped it open. There were pictures of Jack going to school, others from the day we met again at the beach, close-ups of rocks, the ocean, Miles' surf shop and Owen's yoga studio finished the album. I took the album downstairs.

Grabbing a drink from the fridge, I sat on the couch to look at the album. Elise's pictures were amazing, but she kept them hidden. Owen's yoga studio looked so...cool. It was the only word that fit. I don't know how she did it, but the angle and the light made you want to check the place out. The album gave me an idea. Not sure if she'd go for it but it was worth asking.

I picked up my guitar and started playing a new song. No words yet, just a melody. Sometimes that's how it began.

I must have dozed off because I woke to a hand nudging my shoulder. I lay on the couch and Elise stood over me. Swinging my leg around, I checked my phone. "Wow,

late night for you. Not sure why I fell asleep," I said while I stretched.

"Life in the burbs can be exhausting." She smiled at me.

"How did everything go? I checked on him. He's sleeping."

"Fine. I had to pay him 42 cents tonight."

"He's a pint-sized card shark." I knew the minute she saw the album. "What's this doing down here?" She picked it up, holding it to her chest.

"I was looking at it. You're crazy talented."

Shaking her head, she dismissed me. "I get by."

"How can you say that?" I asked, reaching forward, taking the book from her arms. Flipping the pages, I found the picture of Owen and Maggie. "You've got them so perfectly. And their hands - it's so Owen and Maggie and you had just met them." I flipped to another picture. "These shovels and pails. They're kids' toys, but you want to start building a castle with them, and I'm a 23-year-old guy." Looking at her, I said, "No, don't do that, don't shake your head."

"They aren't that good. The picture of Maggie and Owen? There are so many things wrong with it." She sat down, flipping through each page, ripping apart different pictures, criticizing things I didn't understand and couldn't see.

"Is that what you see when you look at your work? You see what you think is wrong with it?"

"It's what any trained photographer would see. That sounds rude, but every professional looks at her specialty differently than someone who isn't. I mean it's got to be the same with music. You're a musician. When you hear music, you have to hear it differently than I do, right?"

“Well, yeah, but that doesn’t mean you can’t like it. You can’t always listen to the critics. You think the Beatles gave a shit? Let’s not even start with your love of 80s music, aside from Banshee, that is.” I was trying to bring a little humor back to the room.

“Wait, are you disrespecting Bono, The Edge, Larry and Adam?” she looked playfully horrified.

Smiling, I shook my head. “Never, U2 is classic and nice job knowing all their names. All I’m saying is that trained photographers aren’t the only people who matter. You’ve got all those albums upstairs that I’m going to bet are all filled with more kick-ass pictures. Why take them if you don’t enjoy them? Who are they for?” We sat on the couch, side by side. Elise stared at the opened album, but I didn’t think she saw it. The silence stretched on too long. The truth was I was being a dick. I mean, who the hell was I to lecture her? We were barely friends.

In a soft voice, as if talking to herself, she said, “Because I can be present but not seen.” That said so much about her.

“We’re so different,” I observed, “I’m fighting to be seen.” We stared at each other for a few moments. Seeing and not seeing.

“I see you. Jack sees you. You are larger than life for Jack,” she said. I looked down at my clasped hands, returning the conversation to her.

“I want you to take the pictures for the album. It’s not a favor. It’s totally professional.” I waited for the rejection. It started with a shaking head. “No, I don’t want to hear you say it’s not your thing because this says you do.” I pointed to the

album.

“I work full-time, Lochlan. Even if you scheduled it on the weekend, it’s still time away from Jack and I’d have to pay for a sitter or something. It doesn’t fit.”

“Okay. Yes, it’s time away from Jack, but you’ll be compensated. I’ll call Brendan. Nate has been here a bunch of times, so it’s only fair if Jack goes there. It won’t be an entire day AND I’ll treat to dinner. Please, Elise. I know it’s a big ask, I do.” Maybe it wasn’t fair asking when she was tired and worn down but fuck it. I was kind of a selfish guy.

“I don’t even know what I’d do for the shoot or where to do it.” That was a yes.

“I’m not worried because I’ve seen your work. I’ll send some details and talk to Brendan. Get some sleep.” I felt like I should hug her, but we didn’t touch like that, so I squeezed her knee as I stood up. At the door, I looked at her. She sat on the couch, her eyes on the photo album. “Good night, Elise.”

Absently, she said, “Good night, Lochlan.”