

Chapter Ten

Three Years Later

Aubrey sat at her drafting table bent over the sketch pad as she shaded her drawing with colored pencils. The city had called for artists to draft sketches for a proposed mural at the Benjamin Franklin High School. This wasn't the first time Aubrey had entered one of these local competitions.

She had already done a mural for her alma mater though that one had been a specific commission from the school itself. This time the school was relying on a selection process since it was part of the school's remodeling. Aubrey didn't mind the competition and was determined to show her best work. The theme was diversity and brotherhood and she fully intended to get the kids and staff involved with the work.

While she was focused on her work a small form padded into the room. He approached the table and stood on the tips of his toes to peer over the edge as she worked. A smile slowly spread across her face.

Without looking up she asked, "What do you say, little man?"

"Ya-Ya says lunch is almost ready," Jamie said with all due seriousness.

"All right. I'm almost done," Aubrey chuckled. "Did you have fun in the backyard?"

"Laveau was scolding Booker for stalking her babies," Jamie said. "I told Booker if he wasn't careful King would get after him next."

Aubrey nodded. Ever since he could walk Jamie often disappeared into the garden only to come back with tales of cats and crows. Aubrey no longer questioned them as doing so only earned the boy's ire.

She used to worry about the effects growing up in an unconventional household would have on an impressionable little boy. Sometimes she still did. But he had plenty of friends around the neighborhood if the attendance at his magic-themed birthday party was any indication. They even had a magician present for entertainment as well as a crystal ball Ya-Ya used for fortune-telling. For party favors they gave away small charms and gifts not unlike those commonly thrown from Mardi Gras oaks.

Jamie had enjoyed the attention of the other kids but not nearly as much as he celebrated Sarah and Zoe's presence. Hardly a week went by that he didn't ask when his Auntie Sarah and Zoe would next visit. He hadn't even been a year old when Zoe was born and the two were raised together before Sarah decided it was time to stretch her own wings. Both Aubrey and Jamie hoped she would stay close but Sarah was a New England girl at heart. The pair settled in Vermont and from all indications Zoe loved living on their farm with all her animals although she did miss the crows.

"Are you sure it was Laveau?" Aubrey asked. "Maybe it was...what's the other one... Tupper?"

"Toups. She's a lot smaller than Laveau," Jamie rolled his eyes that anyone could possibly mistake one for the other.

"Oh, what about Daphne?"

"Delphine," Jamie corrected.

"Yeah, that one."

"Delphine barely helps with the chicks," Jamie shook his head. "She just stays because it's easy to find food."

"Right. Well she's not the only lazy one. What about Merlin? Or the other one?"

"You mean Miracle Max?" Jamie asked. "Merlin has been gone for months. You know he disappears after the egg hatches."

"Right."

"Mom, do you know anything about crows?"

"Clearly not as much as you," Aubrey said. "How do you keep them all separate?"

"It's not hard if you pay attention," Jamie shook his head. He couldn't believe his mother still had difficulty remembering the crows even after he pointed them out several times.

"All right. All right," Aubrey laughed. "Let's go eat!"

She scooped up the three and a half-year-old, tickling him until he laughed as she carried him to the kitchen. There she found Ya-Ya spooning up some jambalaya. As her aunt set the boy's plate in front of him she said, "You got something in the mail. Looks social."

Aubrey's eyes immediately landed on the beige envelope. She grabbed it and sat down. Perhaps there were new rules for the art competition. Opening it her eyes went wide and a smile spread across her face.

"Good news?" Ya-Ya asked.

"Rosemary's tenth book is coming out," Aubrey said. "The publisher is holding a masquerade ball to celebrate. At the end of the night Rosemary will reveal her true identity!"

"Is she now?" Ya-Ya smiled. "She's nally showing herself to the world?"

"Looks like it."

"Does this mean I won't have to pretend not to know who Rosemary is anymore?" Jamie asked.

"That's right," Aubrey smiled at him. "You can tell everyone Rosemary is your Auntie Sarah, well after the ball."

"That's nice," Ya-Ya said. "She's been hiding herself for too long. It's time to let herself shine bright. Does it say when?"

"At the end of the week, damn that doesn't give us very long," Aubrey softly cursed.

"Ohm," Jamie dropped his spoon and covered his mouth reminding her not to use bad words in his presence.

"Sorry, baby. This is actually an invitation," Aubrey said. "For me and a plus one. Says kids attend free."

"Are we going?" Jamie asked.

"Of course, as if we'd miss this. I hope we can still get a ight. How about it Ya-Ya?"

"If humans were meant to y we would have wings," Ya-Ya shook her head. "I'll wait until the good lord sends mine down. But you two go and give her all my love."

Aubrey rolled her eyes making Jamie giggle as she reached for the phone. Of all Ya-Ya's quirks that was one they never tired of making fun of. Still everyone was entitled to their idiosyncrasies.

"...Hi, I need a ight to New York. Two seats. No we need to sit together...Well, I'm not having my three-year-old son y without me...Thank you..."

Aubrey shook her head. Sometimes people asked the strangest questions but getting upset wouldn't help, especially over the phone. Once the ight was set she breathed a sigh of relief but there was still so much to do before then. She had to nish her admission for the mural, buy a dress for herself, a suit for Jamie, make hotel arrangements, pack...the list went on. Generally she wasn't good with lists but she had plenty of energy when the goals were important. Hopefully one would cancel out the other.

* * *

They arrived late which was the story of Aubrey's life if she was being honest. Jamie was exasperated by the whole ordeal of getting ready. She really couldn't blame him given the late hour of their ight. In truth she was more nervous about her car as they had left Ya-Ya to drive it back home rather than park it in the airport's long-term parking. Ya-Ya hadn't driven in years so her fear was applicable. Aubrey wasn't even sure Ya-Ya had a valid driver's license.

Despite the hiccups they had arrived. She handed their invitation to the doorman and they entered the venue. It was so much larger than she envisioned knowing how self-conscious Sarah was especially when it came to recognition and fame. They wandered the wide space looking for familiar gures among the sea of masks and fancy gowns. Aubrey had to give Ruth props, the ball felt Mardi Gras worthy and considering Rosemary's character was from Louisiana it was quite tting.

Not even a full lap around the space Aubrey was starting to feel the weight of being unique. The room was decidedly rich, privileged and pale but that didn't bother her overly much. She was used to making her own path anyway.

"Oh, of course I know Rosemary! We went to school together!"

Aubrey paused glancing at the woman in an embarrassingly short dress. She struggled not to laugh that anyone would think this woman was remotely connected to Rosemary and therefore Sarah. She couldn't wait for the big reveal.

Her gaze nally settled on the person she was looking for, or at least one of them. Aubrey spotted Zoe settled on an old woman's lap seemingly quite comfortable. She didn't see Sarah in the immediate vicinity so that could only mean the old lady was a trusted babysitter. Aubrey was at a loss to identify the woman in the motorized chair. She knew Sarah's mother had long since passed away so perhaps it was someone Ruth knew?

There were a number of older people at the same table along with several kids. She had never met Ava but knew of her and her children and of course the redheads naturally belonged to Macey. Her gaze eventually found Tailor in serious discussion with a tall, young man. Given his blonde hair Aubrey had to assume it was Sarah's brother. If he was here perhaps they were not as estranged as they used to be?

Aubrey's curiosity was piqued and her gaze nally settled on Sarah talking and laughing gaily with a small circle of women. She denitely looked happy and comfortable so Aubrey was glad. No doubt returning to New York had been massively stressful but she was thriving.

Aubrey was just about to make her way over when Ruth arrived to drag Sarah away. Her gaze followed the pair to see them disappear behind the stage. She knew immediately it was time for the reveal so she urged Jamie to a place near the stage for a good view.

The lights dimmed drawing people into the area. Aubrey watched the table where Zoe sat as Macey and the other women Sarah had been chatting with made their way over to join their corresponding spouse. Aubrey guessed their identities and hoped she was right. The only one she met before was Macey on their trip to Paris.

Zoe suddenly left the lap she had been using to rush to a man who immediately scooped her up kissing her cheek. Aubrey watched the interaction carefully. If Sarah had gotten into a relationship there was no way she wouldn't have told her which meant he had to be... Lucas. That was denitely a story Aubrey wanted to hear.

Ruth stepped out on stage rst drawing Aubrey's attention away from the mystery man. When Sarah emerged as Rosemary she nearly lost it. It was too perfect. She didn't think it could be better until Sarah whipped off her wig and let her hair down. Aubrey was bursting inside watching the sea of surprised looks.

When Sarah went all out...she really went all out.