

## Prologue

There's a saying that bigger and better things come in small packages; that was true. Staring at the MD degree in my hand from Harvard School of Medicine felt surreal. However, despite being the youngest doctor to ever graduate, I felt empty. That had nothing to do with the killing, the gruesome, tear-lled degree I held in my hand. It had all to do with the fact that the person I did this for, who I wanted to make proud, was gone: my amazing dad.

They say gone but not forgotten was total, all utter facts spewed, and the degree would always remind me of him.

I wanted to become a doctor because he had a weak heart since birth. So he was always under crucial medical attention.

I remember being little and promising him, 'Daddy, I'll operate on you one day, and I'll make all the boo-boo's go bye-bye.

But, where are you now, daddy?

So, I can nally fulll my promise, but you left me.

Why daddy, why?

I composed myself before I could break down in front of the whole graduating class.

Breath in and breath out, Aurora!

You got this!

Remember what you promised, that you would never let a sad-tear run down his princess's face.

I had already planned to sneak away after the ceremony nished. But, being the valedictorian and top of the Dean's honour roll,

I was expected to give a speech. Even though I didn't want to go up that stage and deliver that speech, just looking down at the countless happy family members around but having none of mine was gut-wrenching.

However, I knew how much daddy loved the speech I wrote when I ran it by him, and I was going to dedicate it to him.

After all, he put his sweat and blood to raise me to be that amazing woman I am when my mom walked out on us, saying she found her fated soulmate. Which was a load of bullcrap.

She and her new husband, Shawn Hendrick, a buff, muscled guy that towered at least six foot two, was pretty gorgeous, and that meant a lot coming from a ve-year-old me at the time. Wanted to take me along, but my dad fought tooth and nail to keep me.

He always said I was his star in the dark.

That I was his source of magic.

My mother had to relent and agreed on the occasional visits. I had resented her initially since her leaving had a signicant impact on my dad.

But over the years, I got over that animosity. Finally, daddy forgave her and said he saw it coming and would always love her because she gave him me.

That she was my mother and she really loved me.

Even though I crave a relationship with her now, I feel we're estranged. Not her, but more me.

Despite my rocky relationship with my mom, her parents, Nana and papa, have always been close to my heart. Even my little half-brother Malakai. Though he was six years younger, he looked more like my older brother, with a towering height and features that mimicked more Shawn than my mom. But we got along great whenever he visited.

What I wouldn't do right now, for her, my step-dad and step-brother, Malakai, nana and papa to be here between the crowd cheering me on.

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I only wish!

I sighed and went up to the podium when I was called.

You could hear the cheers and hollers for me throughout the crowd. So I wouldn't say I was super popular. Still, I was pretty social, and being record-breaking also helped in socialization, since everyone knew me.

As soon as I took my place and looked into the crowd, I couldn't believe my eyes!

I actually had to double-take.

Was that mom, Malakai, Shawn with naana and paapa?

Holy hell!

They were there, all ve of them. Giving me beaming smiles and waving at me from the far end.

I couldn't help the moisture that lled my eyes.

It was perfect if only dad was here too.

I sniffed and took a deep breath, and started my speech.

Good morning! I welcome all parents, professors, faculty, distinguished guests and the Havard School of Medicine of 2022!

I'd like to begin with a question: Does a 65 constitute mediocrity, while a 100 perfection? While our education system may have ingrained this notion in our minds, remember that there may not be report cards, USMLEs, clinical rotation to measure our achievement after today. Because life is something that we experience, not complete, we are no longer cloistered by a "core curriculum" or daily routine. Instead, parting with the asylum of our Medical School years, we are governed only by our instinct and our judgment.

Without progress reports and standardized testing, how can we measure if we are successful? Some may perceive wealth as an indicator of accomplishment, but must we equate poverty with failure? Others may see their position as evidence of their success such an assessment is easy but supercial. Finally, it may be tempting to measure our success by the knowledge we have attained through our education; as graduates today, we have all succeeded. However, our task now is to apply what we have learned.

The philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson dened success as the following: "To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to nd the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded!"

Success is a relative term; we may apply it to measure the quality of the change we engender, the lives we transform, and the relationships we build. With titles such as doctor or president, it is what we do with our inuence that imbues our titles with value. With what we have learned, knowledge prepares us to face the challenges of our generation, equips us to ght inequity in health, wealth, and opportunity, and guides us in our future endeavours. With dedication and ambition, we can defeat ignorance and accomplish the extraordinary.

The accurate measure of success may not be manifest at rst sight. However, the gifts we have received from Harvard School of Medicine and this community have provided us with our rst steps toward its eventual discovery. With this in mind, I challenge you to dene your success and live up to your own measures with passion and commitment. Then, if you see yourself as having succeeded, others will follow suit.

So here I stand one last time on this prestigious institution's stage, not as Aurora Black but as Dr. Aurora Black, to thank the faculty, doctors, friends, and for me especially, my father, that thanks to you. We are who we are because of you.

So, class of 2022, Good luck and congratulations to you all!

As soon as I nished my speech, I saw all the crowd stand to applause, and the graduating class threw their caps in the success of the gurgling four years we spent together.