

(Static fades in. Then cuts. Suddenly appears. Then cuts again.)

(stunned and almost breathless) Something... something happened at the practice. Something I... (breathing)

I--I knew very little about what Dad did. The procedures, as they were. I couldn't know too much. You know I couldn't handle knowing too much. I'm not allowed to know. The procedures are noninvasive though, I know that much. I've been told that much because that's what I have to tell families. That and only that. They. never expected the receptionist to know any better or any more. It doesn't matter that I am the genius's daughter. Beyond my genes, I'm... pretty much useless. Or that's what they want to say.

(Sigh) Of course, that's... That derision was normal for me. That was my normal. And in many ways, I thought it was inevitable. But now, I'm not sure. I found chemistry books amongst my belongings. I don't remember studying chemistry. And I don't remember studying chemistry as diligently as my notes would suggest. I mean, sure everybody in public education gets a science class or two, but not like this. I don't remember a class or the work or anything of the sort, but I know my handwriting. And that's what I was looking at. I was looking at my handwriting on chemistry worksheets. I know the way I'm woefully inconsistent with my numbers. How some lean left and others right. I remember once that there was an office administrator who told me on her first day that it looked like my numbers were dancing. I wrote out some phone numbers for her, and she made that comment. And it made me smile. Because yes, it was kind of a dumb thought, but it was a thought I liked. She lasted a week at that office.

But no, that's... That's not the point. That's not what I need to think about because I can pack up those books and bring them with me. And maybe--Maybe I shouldn't because it's just added weight to travel with, but I can make do by force of will alone. Not that I consistently have that anymore.

(Sigh) A patient died last week. And I... I didn't realize how much I had changed because of this. I didn't realize that I used to be this... Not strong but... Patient deaths didn't affect me. No matter who they were or how it happened. It didn't matter if they were young enough to have children still living with them. It didn't matter how clear-headed they seemed, meaning how much time with them we were still expecting to have. Nothing mattered. No detail was important. I accepted every death with a coldness that... That didn't look like a coldness. It wasn't a pragmatism like I always tried to say it was. Maybe it looked like it, but honestly, I was numb. Completely numb.

No, not numb. Sorry but it's... It's more like I felt frozen, stuck in place but not just tethered to the ground. Nothing about me could function. Not like it was supposed to.

I thought that's what it meant to be strong. To be unwavering. But that's not necessarily strength. That's being trapped. Trapped by some other name.

I felt this death. I felt it more than I could have ever imagined. In some ways, I felt it more than... that Dr. Alexson's. And that didn't make any sense, right? Dr. Alexson was like my dad. He looked out for me, and he took care of me. He loved me, even.

(Sigh) Why is that so hard to say?

It was Rebecca's mom. Let's not bury the lead any further. It was the mother of the young woman who... Who was essentially a pawn in my plan to figure out what was happening with the dreams. That older woman had the same nightmares I was getting. And she died. She died, and this is the first time I've ever properly cared about something like that.

Maybe that's not a big deal. Cold as it is to say. (inhale) There's never been a good prognosis tied to that diagnosis. But she died in the practice. (inhale) She was just about to be brought back to one of the treatment rooms by a nurse when she just... She just hit the ground. No grand fanfare. No attempt to communicate that something was wrong. One second upright and the next gone. The nurse standing beside her could not even react. I raced over to her and felt for a pulse. And I swear it didn't take me more than a second to get to her. I leapt over the counter even. Sure, I knocked over a bunch of stuff, but what did that matter? (inhale) What did any of it matter? This was someone's life we were talking about, but that--that someone was gone.

I couldn't pronounce the time of death. That's not my responsibility. That's not my duty. That's not my right. But that moment she was gone. And I could have said it. (Music fades out and new music fades in)

Someone ran to get the nearest doctor. Not for the time of death call. They couldn't have known about it. It all happened too quickly. They were getting a doctor still believing that a doctor could help.

And of course with my luck being as bad as it is, they grabbed my dad of all people. Of course it had to be him. I half-heartedly started chest compressions at that

point. I don't know why. I'm sure the pragmatic person that I used to be would say that Rebecca would want to at least know we tried to save her mom, even if that attempt was only performative on our end. We didn't have to mention that part.

Dad saw what I was doing or not doing, and his stern face silently screamed that a chastisement was coming, but then he felt her neck and... And well, there was no pulse. He looked at me, and he could tell that there had not been one for a while. The shock of the moment was setting in, and he kept asking everyone what was happening and what had happened, and we told him. Then he asked again not because he didn't believe us but because he could not believe us. For his sake, he couldn't accept this was true.

(Music fades out)

I don't know how many patients Dad has lost. I don't know how many were genuinely casualties of something he did whether that thing he did be right or wrong. I don't know most of the side-effects people experience. And given how sick some of them are, given how many of their faculties have faded away, I don't think he knows either. I don't think he's ever truly had to face the unintended consequences of his actions. The applause has never died down long enough for him to face it.

(New music fades in)

He looked at me like he never had looked at me before. He looked in a way that he had never looked before. His eyes were blank and glassy. His face had lost all color, meaning, and life. Something in him broke right then. I saw it snap. And I didn't want to be the one to fix it.

I wanted to hide from him, but I couldn't. I didn't know what that would mean for the kids.

For Roslyn especially. She has always been the one I was closest to out of the littles, and maybe I should have never had favorites in any way, not just avoid playing them, but I definitely did. And Roslyn was my favorite. She is just goodness incarnate. She's sweet and kind. She's a bit timid and fearful you know but in the same way that a crystal sculpture is delicate or a piece of handcrafted lace needs to be handled in a very certain way. All of this comes from the very traits that draw you in. This urge to protect her is awakened in you from the first time you see. It's a hard thing to fight off. It's a hard thing to refuse.

(Pause) Those aren't my words. I wish they were. That's the most beautiful and poetic way that anyone could explain it. Without being needlessly sweet or dramatic. I wish I could say something like that. But I can't. One of her teachers said that during a guardian-teacher conference, and it just stuck with me. Because she was right.

I remember... Or I think I remember... No, I... I can't know what I do or don't remember. But as of late, I've always thought of myself as her protector. As her guardian. Hers especially, though there were other kids, yes. It was just easier to conceptualize a sense of purpose and meaning with her. Because of her nature. Because she always wanted promises. Because she always... Because I could protect her like I was never protected. Maybe a part of me wants to rewrite my history. Then again, I can't remember my history at all.

She still wears that necklace I gave her. The one I used to seal a promise I had no business making. Even if I had never seen your painting, I was tired and overworked. Something was going to go give, and it might have been my heart.

(Music fades back and new music fades in)

And it might still be. Even with the nanny.

My blood work did come back. And whether or not Dad meant it as a diversion in the beginning, as a justification for his actions,, that doesn't matter anymore. Something is wrong. Something he didn't anticipate. I have an extremely elevated level of a certain C-reactive protein, which means something is wrong with my heart and/or that I am at a much higher risk of a stroke. And at some point, it just feels like splitting hairs to say which one it is.

The autopsy on Rebecca's mother hasn't come back yet, but the only things that could have done something like that, something that quick, would have been a profound failure of the heart or a prolific stroke of some kind. And now, what once was a comforting resemblance is far from it. (inhale)

For Dad especially, I guess. Even if it doesn't want to admit that he did some sort of experiment on me, he must know that... That there's a chance I could meet that fate. That this has probably happened to other patients of his. Just not in the office. Just not in front of him. And before it could be ignored. It could be ignored for the sake of his ego but not anymore. Not anymore.

I never thought of him as a human being, but there he was: breaking down like any other human might. It was... Well, I couldn't be anymore shocked, but if I could have managed it, there you go.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

As you can imagine, everything in the office came to a screeching halt after that. Patients that could be rescheduled were. Staff were sent home. The whole nine yards or further, really.

Dad couldn't get me alone quickly enough. It didn't even matter to him how suspicious this might have been. Well, okay, he already had my... They weren't even bad blood results. They were inexplicably bad. We both knew there was no good reason for those results. No condition or explanation for them, not one he was ready to admit to anyway.

Dad pulled me into an examination room and immediately listened to my heart. Checked my blood pressure. Both weren't exactly what they needed to be, but they were somewhat close. He... He kept saying this was about my blood work, but that had come two days before. Why didn't he have this reaction then? Why--

(Knocking. Music cuts. Long pause. Static fades in and out)

That was Roslyn. She came in to say goodbye. Dad's...

(Inhale and exhale) This is getting so out of hand.

(Music fades in) (While almost crying) The poor woman's death. The blood work. Am... (inhale) Am I dying? Am I going to die here? Soon?

I couldn't help myself. I asked Dad that, and... And he hugged me. He hugged me like a father should hug his daughter. And like that was going to change everything. Like that made everything okay. And maybe it could have. I...

(Inhale) Let's say that my childhood memories are accurate. Let's say that for my own fucking sake because if I don't have that then I don't have anything. And it makes sense because of Dr. Alexson. And how close we were. And.. And things do come back in flashes. Nothing about my childhood is inconsistent. So that just means... that just means that this hug was supposed to mean something, right? It was supposed to be him giving me the thing I had always wanted. A taste of it again. A taste of it that he could later rip away because that's how his manipulation has always worked. He would dangle something in front of me and then rip it away when I stepped out of line.

So what's the line? What's the line? Dad wants to send me away. For treatment. To a specialist. And that's why Roslyn came in. To say goodbye. Because she believes him.

(Still almost crying) And it felt like a knife in my chest (inhale) after everything I've done for her (inhale) and--that she could just... That she could just say, 'yes sir' and let him ship me off. I thought I mattered to her. I thought I had to stay for her and the kids. (inhale) But kids are adaptable. No, resilient. That's the word everybody uses. They are also so easily manipulated.

(inhale) I guess she assumes that if Dad sends me away I'm going to come back because he told her I would and (inhale) the nanny said I would. And she believes them. She believes them because she doesn't know any better. Maybe he sold her the same



line he sold to the physicians assistant that I'm dying, that I'm dying, but I don't have to die.

(gradually gaining her resolve and strength) Maybe the part about me dying isn't a lie. (inhale) There's no good reason for those blood results. There's no reason and without a reason there's no treatment. And so... So maybe I am going to die.

But maybe a part of me has been dead for a while technically. I still think about that girl in the painting every day: this version of me that I don't remember. She's gone now. She was taken away. And I want to be her. (inhale) I don't want to die, but if I have to, I don't want to die like this. Like me. Like... Like, I'm... I don't want to die trapped in this life, trapped in his choices.

It's his choice that's going to kill me.

I know this is a violation, but I was looking at patient records, but I was looking at patient records. I was looking at this poor woman's records because I convinced myself that Rebecca would give me permission to. And that was her mother. That was the mother she cared for. As next of kin, those records are her property now. Maybe none of that was accurate, but I didn't have a choice.

And yes, it hurt. It hurt so badly. Like my head was going to explode, but I didn't care anymore. If I'm going to die without checking, then why not die while checking?

(Back at her normal cadence and volume) And I know how the procedure works now.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

Patients are strapped down to a table. Like in my nightmares. They are held down, their arms bound tightly. Their hands in particular have to be restrained a certain way because if not, the patient's grip might turn vice-like, and if it does, that creates complications for the IV and serious injury or damage to the hand. Like in my nightmares.

There are different ways of doing this. Different attempts Dad has tried, this isn't an exact science yet, no terrible and inexcusable pun intended. And there's different types and levels of mental decline. Hers started with her memories. She was largely still able to take care of herself, but she didn't know who her daughter was. And she didn't... She didn't care for her daughter like a mother should is how the file read.

Of all Dad's patients, her case has the strongest resemblance to mine. And she died. She died, and I stole her medical records, so really, nobody's having that great of a time.

Yes, my transgression is indefensible, and yes, there were things I could have done instead, but as for Ms. Clark, I don't know who could have saved her. So I don't know where Dad can send me.

And all of that is to say, Lucent, that I really am leaving tomorrow. I don't have a choice. I'm leaving. I'm going back to that house, and I... I don't know when you'll hear from me next. While I have an idea, I certainly don't know how broadcasting could ever work in practice once I'm moving, and I have to keep moving. I don't know if it can reach you. I don't know... (more emotional) I don't know if I can even live long enough to do it.

But I have to try, right? I literally can't live like this. (inhale) Live in fear of him and with no clue who I am. And I certainly can't die for this.

Wherever you are, Lucent, I'm coming.

(Static starts. Music cuts. Static fades out).

This has been a production of Miscellany Media Studios with music licensed from the Sounds like an Earful music supply. This episode concludes Season 1 of Temporal Light. Also, yes, there will be a season two. It was written, performed, edited, and produced by MJ Bailey. And when you have a one woman production, well, things can guarantee themselves. I mean there's Chris from Sounds like an Earful making the music, but he's got it down, so don't worry about him. Just support him. And get your music there if you too want to make a podcast.

For now, if you like the show, please consider leaving a review and/or telling many friends about it. Thanks.