

(Static fades in, peaks, and fades out)

I don't know what I was expecting.

(Music fades in)

To be honest and in so many ways, I don't know what I was expecting. There was a brief moment of triumph when I got my prize, but now it's gone. That thing that Dr. Alexson and your manager were so determined that I get: well, it's just a key... A filing cabinet key. Nothing more. I knew what it was the second the metal hit my hand. The shape is just so familiar to me. We have so many filing cabinets in the office. All patient files have to be locked away. All employee files. So many things. And I'm the one that does the locking.

Why am I even doing this? That's all I can think now. Stupid key. Why am I even doing this?

I keep asking myself that, but I haven't found the answer yet. Am I even talking to anyone? Who am I even talking to? I don't know. It's been so long since that first broadcast, and there's been... There's been no obvious response from you. All I have is this plan. If that's what that is. But you could have set it in motion and walked away. Walked away and (sigh) what would that leave me? At this stage, I wouldn't be able to tell the difference. It wouldn't make a difference to me (sigh). Just how I feel. I would be walking towards... Towards maybe nothing. Nothing might be at the other end of this, and maybe that's your point. If you have a point, I don't know.

Are you telling me I should just expect silence? Are you even listening? I have no way of knowing if you can hear me. This wasn't part of your plan. This was my idea.

After all, this broadcast was my work. Maybe I can't expect it to fit anywhere (exhale), but sometimes it does make me feel better.

All I know is that something is in motion and Dr. Alexson is... or was involved. Somehow. That's why I haven't fully given up yet, I guess. That's your saving grace, I should say to you. If you can hear me.

But Lucent, I still haven't seen Dr. Alexson. I don't even know if he's okay. Dad makes this big show of taking calls from the center that he's in. And by that, I mean, Dad always deliberately stands within earshot of me, and he talks very loudly on the phone. Without fail. Even if I'm in the storage room in the back getting sugar for the coffee. There he is, talking, and he doesn't need to be there. He never has any reason to be in that storage closet, but sure enough, if there's a call, there he is.

And he talks about Dr. Alexson still being bed bound. And weak. And that he really can't take visitors.

But then Dad steps away, and I swear I hear him whisper that, that no one wants to go see him anyway. That's not true. I want to go see him. I ask if I can. (sigh) But I don't know if I'm right. I don't even know if I actually hear him say that. I-- I feel like I can't be sure. (exhale) It just doesn't seem to fit that phone call, with how Dad's been lately. It's more like my expectations are kicking in and filling in the blanks. Because that is the sort of heartless thing Dad would have done to me. In the past. But a lot of things have happened since that last gala.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

After I took my prize, I couldn't even bring myself to glance at it. I just put it in my bag. The perception of risk in being caught was just too high. I couldn't do it. I couldn't risk getting caught doing something I wasn't supposed to do with something I wasn't supposed to have. And sure enough, for once, my fear was validated. I heard my name as Dad, suddenly the dashing gentleman, excused himself from his current conversation and moved towards me with a smile on his face.

It was the rare sort of moment when I saw what my mother still unknown to me might have seen in him. He was handsome and charming, well put together with a reputation for being intelligent. He wasn't his cold, overly stoic and emotionless self. No, in fact there was a warmth on his face that looked... surprisingly natural. Or natural enough. But I would have never thought that such a thing could have ever suited him, and yet, in that moment, that warm glow seemed interwoven with his flesh. It really was him, even if I couldn't believe it. His features have always somewhat distinct in how chiseled and stupidly perfect they are, but all the same, there was a moment when I... (sigh) I didn't recognize him. It looked like he was a different person than I had always known.

And I guessed that was by design. I was already sure the smile was more of a performance than anything. We were in a room full of people, after all. And he couldn't be the one who broke the facade. And neither could I.

My heart stopped. I was trapped. I was trapped in his line of sight while I was most vulnerable, while I was trying to plan some sort of other escape, while I was doing something that I likely should not have been doing.

I had to smile back at him. What else could I do? I couldn't run. I couldn't draw any attention to myself. People would take his side. They would always take his side. If there were even sides.

He called my name gently and brought me off to the side, out of sight. I couldn't breathe; I was so scared of what he was going to do, but he brought me to his chest, gently, like Dr. Alexson used to hold me when I was a child. While I normally could be so quick tongued, I was quiet then. I was scared then. I didn't know what he was going to do next. This was such a break from his normal.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

Honestly, Lucent, I don't know if I can or should believe what he told me, but actions speak louder than words, and his actions have been surprisingly consistent.

(softly) He said that he was sorry. (a couple breathes then in a louder voice) He said that he was sorry. And then I was like, "Sorry for what" because there's a long list of things he should be sorry for. And he said he was sorry for putting so much responsibility on me. With the practice and the kids and aspects of his life.

I was his daughter, he said, for the first time. And that... Well, he hadn't been acting like it. He hadn't really been a good father to me at all. He left me alone, he said. Before Mom died and especially after. He left me alone with all the kids, and because of that, I had to give up my whole life, and he was sorry.

"This has been going on for years," I said. "Why the sudden change of heart?"

He lowered his eyes, and I saw what I thought was a flicker of shame fluttered across his face. At the very least, it was nothing I had ever seen before on him. “You think of my old boss as your dad. Not me.”

I was only slightly taken aback. Because, yes, my preference had always been known to him. Ever since I was a child who did not know what discretion was, I would run to Dr. Alexson, sit on his knee, listen to his tales and dote on him like he was my father. When I grew up and knew how to keep a secret, there was no longer a need to. It was known, even at work.

For a while, I tried to fight it and say that Dr. Alexson was more like my grandfather, which is a similar relationship but with slight modifications. But that wasn't the sort of lie worth holding onto. Not when the truth was so obvious.

“I'm sorry,” he said. “I want to do better,” he said.

“You can't fix this.”

“With your siblings? With the kids, maybe I can...”

It was the first time I had ever heard any sort of uncertainty or indecision in his voice. And I just don't think it was an act. It couldn't be. He would never act. It's just so... illogical and emotional. And not... (breathless) It's not him. But now of it has been him.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

He said he wanted to do better. And that's why he's been home so much. That's why he was keeping such a close eye on me. He wanted to be able to take on some of

the responsibilities. He wanted to actually be a parent. Or at least, he wanted to be able to hire a nanny who could do what we needed her to do.

You have to understand, we've been fighting for years about getting a nanny. Or... Or I thought we were. I know the night of your other gala we had that fight about it. And he always tells me to call the sitter as if that means something. And I would try to get resumes together, but he'd just turn his nose up at them. On a good day. You don't want to know what he does otherwise.

"Go home," he said. "Get some rest. I'll start making the appearances." He chuckled. "I know how much you don't like them."

At first, I practically knew he was lying. I'd never known him to directly lie. He was always so blunt, but (sigh) as time goes on, I'm finding harder to not believe him. I don't if... what he said, if any of what he said was a lie. At first, I was ready to swear up and down that he was lying, that this was a scheme, and that it was anything but the truth. But he's started ordering food for our dinner. Delivery from nice places, and he gets all sorts of different things because kids can be picky. Not ours, weirdly enough. They could never be choosy with me. I was just too tired to deal with that.

This is... (inhale) It's... t's more than he's ever done before. And each night... Each night, it makes me think... It makes me want to give him a chance. What's the alternative? This weird goose chase you have me on.

(Phone vibrates twice. Pause.)

W--What? You have to be kidding me. You have to be kidding me. Dr. Alexson texted me. (Deep breath then sigh) He's okay. Oh my word, he's okay. Or he's okay

enough. But they don't usually let you have phones in medical facilities. I mean, even if our practice, you have to turn them off. So, is this... Is this him? Is this someone pretending to be him?

I... I should call him. If I hear his voice, then I'll know it's him. No. What if he can't answer? Or it's just a greater risk of being caught. I should... I should text him back. Yes, that's what I need to do. I need to text him. It's so late though. (heavy breathing). Okay but I have to try. I have to try. Okay.

I'll ask him... Oh what can I ask him? I don't know what's real. How can he prove what's real? Got it!

(Phone typing.)

I told him I had the thing for him.

(Pause. Phone vibrates)

"It's for you... The ribbon is for you." (Breathless) It's him. It's him. Oh my word. It's him.

Okay. (Phone typing. Pause. Phone vibrates.)

He's weak. But he's okay. He's going to be okay. I... I need to... I need to ask him what happened, right? Because for a while, I thought... I thought Dad did something.

(Phone typing. Pause. Phone vibrates).

Dr Alexson says he got dizzy suddenly and fell. He doesn't know what happened beyond that. The doctors don't know. Not a priority, he says.

And... And I'm sure part of that's right. I mean, keeping him alive should be the priority. (inhale) But no, what if someone was trying to kill him, right? That's the sort of thing that needs to be investigated. (sigh) There's a chance, right? There's a chance-- Why leave this out? Why not look into it? Why...?

(Phone vibration)

Okay, he'll be back soon. He'll be back soon. Don't give up. I can't give up.

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

There's a tree branch outside of Raymond's window that gives him nightmares. Of a beast that might break in and eat him and his siblings alive. Whereas, I know that there's a strong chance that a branch that thick and hefty could break through the glass of his window. Which is a different set of issues.

I kept telling Dad I needed to hire someone to saw that branch off. But he wouldn't give me the money for it or approve the expense. But today, he went out there with the chainsaw himself... Or he started to, and then we all collectively realized the neighbors would not be happy about him doing that this late at night.

So he's taking a day off work to do it. He's taking time off work. Okay, it's just a day, but that's a day more than he's ever taken.

And he told Raymond that everything was going to be okay. I've never heard him say that before. At all.

All in all, lately, he's... He's actually done a halfway decent job at being a parent. From all that watching and studying, he's fallen into our routines almost perfectly. So maybe he was telling the truth. Maybe he was studying to understand this family... Not



me. Maybe there's no reason to be concerned. I mean... Okay, let's say hypothetically that he messed with my memory once. Why wouldn't he do it again? Why not just reset now? Why go to all this trouble?

Maybe all this time, he just genuinely wasn't good at being a dad.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

There's another junior doctor in the practice whose... (nervous laughter) She's kind of nice and pretty. And I liked her a bit more than I should have liked her, all things considered. She has bright red hair that flows down her back when it's not tied up in a medically approved fashion. (sigh) And she has these... these eyes that sparkle. Her teeth are more than a bit crooked. And I really liked her. She'sss clever and loves poetry. But often times, she's not great with the patients. Maybe she cared too much and just didn't know how to show properly.

To be frank, she doesn't know what to say or how to say it. I mean, most doctors would know not to bring up the phrase "it could be worse" when degenerative diseases are being discussed. But not her. I had to tell her not to do that.

I've had to go in after her more than once to clear the air. She's always super apologetic when I have to save her, but she's also awkward about that too. And then I have to comfort her on top of everything else. And while I want to visibly cringe, which I don't mean offensively, I can't. It's so hard to not react when things go that wrong, but I have to be the one to fix it.

One day, I found her crying in the supply closet when I went to go get more printer paper. Another appointment had gone poorly that morning, and she felt absolutely terrible about it.

My heart ached for her. I put my hand on her shoulder, and by the way, that's the moment I realized I did not like her that way anymore. In the way I should have liked her when it comes to romance. Sorry but I just don't need someone else to take care of. I--I can't. I can't take care of another person. I put my hand on her shoulder, and I told her that sometimes... Well, well, generally speaking, no one can be good at everything. And sometimes really smart people, people who are really experts in one field aren't good at the impersonal stuff.

That's all her problem was, I told her. Really, she was a great doctor, a great expert in the field. A rising star, in fact. It's just the interpersonal aspect of it that she struggles with.

Honestly, I don't know how much of that was true. It was just the sort of random thing I had remembered hearing about once, and she genuinely means well, so why can't I just comfort her? What was it really going to hurt?

On one hand, I did essentially commit to addressing this issue with her. Maybe not objectively so. Maybe a lot of people wouldn't have called that a commitment, but she thought I was going to help, and I did not have the heart to tell her I wouldn't after... after that meltdown. I helped her work out various scripts of things she could say and when she could say them. A sort of if-this-then-that model to human interactions. And that might seem cold, but honestly, having worked with doctors for so long, I'm sure a

bunch of doctors have this sort of thing. I mean, maybe they don't have to write it out with the help of an assistant type figure, but you know, to each their own.

And what if... And what if Dad was like that and he just hid it better by not crying in the supply closet? What if he just can't handle doing the interpersonal stuff? And what about that old cliché that kids don't come with an instruction manual? I know I didn't. I mean... Okay memory issue aside, I don't even know how I came to be at all.

Mom never talked about it. Did she? I mean, don't moms tell their kids about that? (breathe)

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

What's going on? Why can't I remember my mother? I mean, I remember once. I think our mom was a signer of some kind. I have this faint memory of a woman's voice, her humming. It came to me shortly after she started being gone. There was a clear melody to the memory. Or so I thought.

I wanted to look the song up because I wanted some sort of connection to my mother. And a song, while it might be a little clichéd, is as good as anything as anything I could hope for. So I asked Dad what Mom liked to sing. It was just before he left to work one morning. He was sitting at the kitchen peninsula and sippin at his coffee.

And I asked him, "What songs did Mom sing?"

And he said. "She didn't sing. She hated music."

I tried to push back. I just to hum the tune. I tried everything. And Dad just kept staring at me. He told me it was a song I heard in the car and asked me why I was being ridiculous.

Calmly, he insisted. Matter of factly, he pushed.

Until I gave up. And I accepted his word as law. For years I thought my mother hated music. But I don't know anything about her at all. (very softly) I would have been a teenager. (louder) I would have been a teenager. Why can't I remember?

No. No, that's... That can't be ignored. The picture, Dad, whatever I don't care. This can't be ignored.

The key. The key. That's what I need to focus on. I can't have any doubt. Or I can't let that persuade me. I have to use the key, but-- But where?

(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. It was written, performed, edited, and produced by MJ Bailey. If you like the show, please consider leaving a review and-or telling many friends about it. Thanks.