



Dorey checked out the schedule the following week. It had been so nice and pretty and full of patients. Now it had more holes than a victim in a gangster movie. “What happened to it?”

Mae replied, “They’re dropping like drunken mosquitoes at a beach party.”

“How come?”

“Don’t know.” She shrugged. “Might have something to do with Dr. MacKinley telling everybody off.” Her gray eyebrows, resembling furry caterpillars, rose over the top of her glasses.

No surprise Mae had heard all about it. Not only did she hear everything patients had to say when they left the office, she brazenly asked them pointed questions to get the scoop on things. The woman lived for gossip.

Dorey pointed at the phone. “I can try to call someone from my list.”

“I’ve already tried calling several to move them up from later in the month. No luck.”

With nothing else to occupy her, Dorey took it upon herself to do a deep, thorough cleaning of her room. The staff did a

good job of cleaning surfaces with disinfectant between patients, but things like corners and tiny crevices around the equipment that patients didn't come in contact with got overlooked sometimes.

When the schedule was busy, Dorey could barely run to the bathroom between appointments. That was especially bad if she'd consumed the super-large size of diet soda. Her weakness for those had gotten her in hot water more than once.

After snapping on disposable gloves, she dusted out the inside of her cabinets and drawers, the baseboard corners, and tiny cracks between the metal pieces of her equipment.

She eyed the chair. Sure, it had been reupholstered, but several patients had been there since then, and sometimes small items disappeared deep down between the seat and the back. One time she had extra fun cleaning out bright blue glitter a teenage girl had worn sprinkled all over her clothes.

Like a minuscule Marti Gras.

Dorey crammed her hand down into the tight space in the chair, barely able to move her fingers around. She pulled it back out. No glitter, thankfully, but she did find someone's toothpick. Gross. Grimacing, she threw that away and tried again.

Nothing... nothing...

Wait. What's that?

Something wedged in deep. Dorey couldn't see it. Could barely graze the edge with her fingertips. She yanked her hand out, removed her glove, and grabbed a pair of forceps from her drawer. With the glove back on, she eased the forceps carefully down, not wanting to scar the chair's new fabric. The item had slipped way far down.

Would she be able to get it? She hated leaving it down there. Mostly because, now that she knew the thing existed, it would bother her until she'd removed it. Did she have a little OCD?

Yeah, okay.

Something pinged against the forceps. Metal? Had someone

lost a hairpin? Loose change? Two more tries and she grabbed the very edge.

And pulled out her hand.

Held precariously between the tips of the forceps perched a ring. Very pretty. And turquoise—her favorite color.

Her grandmother had given her one several years ago, but Dorey had lost it one day at the beach. She'd been so stupid to take it off and leave it on her towel when she'd put suntan lotion on. When she'd come back from a dip in the water, someone else had helped themselves to her favorite ring.

Dorey had always wanted to replace it but never found one she liked well enough to buy.

This one, though, was perfect. A dainty stone set in a silver setting surrounded by what appeared to be tiny diamonds. When she turned it back and forth, it caught the light. It appeared old, tarnished, and valuable.

What should she do with it? Leave it with Mae for lost and found? Nope. Better ask Harry since it was found in his office. And the ring was more valuable than some little kid's left shoe kicked off during their cleaning.

After rinsing off the ring at the sink, she set it aside, removed the gloves, and washed her hands.

She knocked on the doorframe of Harry's office and stepped in, closing the door behind her. He sat behind his desk.

"I saw you cleaning in there when I walked by earlier." He leaned forward, elbows on his desktop. "Thanks. But you never were one to stand around and do nothing."

"If I don't stay busy, I feel like I'm cheating you since I'm getting paid anyway." She shrugged.

One side of his mouth rose.

Uh-oh. She knew that look. She crossed her arms, tapped her toe, and waited for his teasing.

As if reaching back in his mind for old memories, he peered up at the ceiling. "Yeah, I remember you playing with all those

stuffed animals of yours. Mostly cats. Lining them up on your parents' couch and telling them they had to clean their rooms, and do a good job at it, or you'd tell your mom."

Dorey smacked her hand over her eyes for a second. "Why do you have to drag out all those weird things I did when I was a kid?"

"Cause it's fun."

"Maybe for you."

He shook his head slowly. "Oh, come on, Dorey. You like the attention."

"Not when you refer to me like I'm nine years old. In case you hadn't noticed, I'm no longer the kid you used tease."

"Believe me. I've noticed."

"Oh." Panic set in when he pushed away from his desk and stood. What was he doing? Why did he stare at her like she was on the dessert menu and he had a yen for a chocolate sundae?

Slowly, he walked around the desk, then leaned back against it and crossed his arms. "Is there ... something you needed?"

"Um, needed?"

"You did come in here. So ..." He pointed to the door.

She blinked. Why did she ... "Oh." Dorey reached into her pocket and pulled out the ring, relieved to have something to break the tension. "I found this down in my chair."

"Wonder whose it is?"

"No clue. Not sure what I should do with it. Could we put a notice in the paper about it? Maybe the patient who lost it might see that and come to collect it."

"Hmm." He eyed the ring in Dorey's hand. "If we do, every crackpot out there will swear the ring is theirs and show up or call. Mae wouldn't be thrilled to have her phone line clogged up when she's scheduling patients." He glanced away.

Her eyes widened. "Wait."

"What?"

"Are you afraid of Mae?"

“You’ve met her. Aren’t you?”

She laughed. “Yeah, okay. Um, what about an ad saying someone left it in the office and the person has to identify it to claim it?”

“We could, but ...”

“What?”

“I don’t want to use my advertising budget for that. I need to place an ad for new patients.”

Dorey sighed. “Right. ’Cause I can’t seem to get anyone in to get their teeth cleaned.” All those years of training and she barely got to use her skills.

“No, I didn’t mean ... It’s not your fault. I don’t blame you. You know that, right?”

She nodded. But did she really know it? Guilt crept over her. She put the ring back in her pocket and gazed up at him. Hard to look him in the eye, so she spoke to his left ear instead. “You know ... if you don’t think it’s working out ... I mean, if you can’t afford a hygienist right now, I—”

“Stop.” He stepped forward and placed his hands lightly on her shoulders. “You’re staying, okay?”

She shrugged and turned her head.

Harry placed his finger beneath her chin and angled her head, so she had no choice but to make eye contact. “Okay?”

“Yeah.” She swallowed hard. Time to change the subject. “Maybe I can look through the schedule, see if there’s a likely candidate for the ring, in the recent patients we’ve had.”

“Good idea.” He squeezed her shoulder. “That way, not everyone would have to know about it. And ... let’s keep the ring between you and me for now.”

“Um, sure.” Her fingers fidgeted at her sides.

“Well ...” He tilted his head toward the door. “Somebody else might want it for themselves.”

“You think?”

“You’ve seen the jewelry those two wear.”

Both women did sport a ton of hardware. Dorey was surprised Luanne could get gloves on over her huge rings. When she did, her hands resembled one of those dinosaurs with the spikes on their backs.

A knock came at the door. She jumped back, like she'd been doing something wrong. She'd always considered Harry as a big brother. Why did it feel different now? Like some tide had shifted and they'd discovered new territory.

The door opened and Mae stuck her head in. She lifted one eyebrow when she spotted Dorey but shifted her attention back to Harry. "Dr. MacKinley, your next patient is here." She glanced at Dorey. "Sorry. No one for you yet." She turned away without closing the door. Had she left it open on purpose?

I feel like my mom just caught me with a boy in my bedroom.

"Well," Harry said, heading toward the doorway. "Gotta go."

She desperately wished she had someone waiting to see her too. "I'll get back on the phone. Surely, someone out there won't mind coming in this week."

He gave her a smile and left.

With nothing else to do for another hour until the next scheduled patient, she sat down at Mae's second computer out front and scrolled through the past few weeks. Maybe a name would pop out at her of someone who might have lost the ring. She could pretty much rule out blustery old men. Probably any men. Focusing on the women patients and teen girls, Dorey started making a list.

"What are you doing?"

Dorey jumped. "Uh ..."

"I already called to confirm the patients for tomorrow."

"Oh, I... wasn't doing that." She knew better. Mae acted like a territorial dog guarding its food dish.

Mae leaned over to see the computer screen. "If you're looking for someone to call in, it won't do you any good to look at people who've already been here."

“No, of course not.” Her face heated. *Mae must think I’m some kind of idiot.* Dorey stood and went back to her room. She’d have to try to use the computer when Mae wasn’t there. Though that wouldn’t be easy. The woman rarely left her post, afraid she might miss something.

What other way could Dorey get the names? She’d remember some of the patients she’d had over the last few weeks but not all.

Ah ... A slow smile formed on her lips. She could file patient charts for Mae. The receptionist would never turn that down. Filing was her least favorite thing to do.

Dorey was just being helpful, after all. When Mae looked away, she could jot down the names for later.

She hurried down the hall and ended up in the reception area again. Mae turned and eyed her suspiciously. “What’s up?” After questioning her for looking at past patients for future appointments, Mae was guarding her domain even closer than usual.

“Nothing. Just ... had some time on my hands—” She flipped her hand in the air for emphasis. “—and thought I’d file some charts for you.”

Mae blinked slowly. “Oh. Thanks.”

Why hadn’t Dorey thought of this before? She picked up a stack of charts that Mae hadn’t filed yet. The receptionist often whined about hating to file things, obvious by the large pile of charts stacked off to the side, close to tipping over.

The phone rang, taking the older woman’s attention and giving Dorey a chance to jot down some names. She’d already filed several for the male patients and had left out the women. Working quickly, she hoped to get all the names she could to figure out who might be the ring’s owner. If the ring had been hers and she’d lost it, she’d want it back.

After making note of the ones that might be candidates,

Dorey went back to her room. She took the paper out of her pocket and stared at the names.

Now what?

Did she just start calling people? Would that be weird? *Hello, I have a ring.* Did you lose a ring?

Lame, Dorey.

But she had to do something. It didn't feel right just hanging onto the ring.

"What'cha doin'?"

Dorey nearly leaped out of her skin and smacked her hand against her chest. "Harry!"

He stepped closer. "Startled, are we?"

"Maybe a little."

"More like a frightened cat."

She let out a breath, trying to calm down. "My cat hardly ever acts like that."

"Since when do you have a cat? Didn't think you'd had one since you moved out to go to college."

"Since he showed up a few weeks ago. He comes and goes. I'm never sure when to expect him. Weatherby isn't the most trustworthy."

"So, the name means something? You always used to name your stuffed animals—"

As she narrowed her eyes, she said, "Are we back to that again?"

He laughed. "Can't help it. Anyway, what's it mean?"

"Weatherby. Because he sits outside in all kinds of weather. Doesn't seem to care if he gets wet or not. I've never seen a cat like that. The weird thing is, he gets wet often, but his white paws always look grungy."

"So far, I haven't heard anything that makes me want to meet him."

"Oh, he's great. When he decides to show up. I love him, but

let's just say that if he were human, his occupation might be thief. I'm never sure what he'll drag home next."

"Like what?"

"The latest was a long black sock with a hole in the heel. Before that, he brought home someone's nearly empty toothpaste tube. Who knows where he gets this stuff. I think he's part retriever."

"You lead such an exciting life." Harry smirked.

"Don't I know it?"

Harry slid a glance to the counter and back. "So, what's goin' on?"

She held out the list. "These are the most likely ones who might own the ring. I thought maybe I should call them and ask. I'm sure the person would want it back."

"Good idea. Then if none of them is the owner, maybe you should wear it."

"But—"

"Maybe the owner will see it. And if no one claims it in say, a month, it's yours."

"Are you sure? That doesn't seem right." Although, she liked the idea of keeping it herself. It wasn't the one from her grandmother, but it might give her pleasant memories of the one she'd lost.

He tapped his finger against the paper. "No one's called about missing one, have they?"

"Well, no. And I'm sure Mae would have said if they had."

"Right. So, it might not be that important to whoever lost it."

"What about Mae and Luanne?"

He leaned close. "I think it would look better on you," he whispered.

Dorey sucked in a breath. When he'd moved toward her, she'd had the craziest idea he meant to kiss her. Are you serious? It would be like kissing your brother.

Except, she didn't have a brother.