

A LITTLE LIGHT *Music*

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To Heather, my friend, my writing partner-in-crime, and the one with whom I can truly be my most awful writer-self. I probably would have quit long ago without your help. As Paul said to the Phillipians, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." Thank you for being one of my best encouragers, and may I be on deck to do the same for you.

CHAPTER

One



"SERIOUSLY?"

Holly groaned, leaning against her office door. Her eyes burned as she squeezed them shut, fighting back the tears that were always close to the surface.

It didn't work.

The music annex at her old high school had been built during what the optimistic citizens of the area would call "better times." In a rural county this small, there weren't many.

The small, windowless—but private—space in the cinder-block addition was hers. At least she didn't have to share it with the band director anymore, a small blessing.

She didn't want her students to see her upset, so she'd waited until after the last bell rang to let go of the emotion that had threatened all day.

Coming in second and advancing to regionals had never crossed her mind. Her first choir, a ragtag group of teenagers driven by competition, was now headed to state. She'd agreed to extra rehearsals, hoping to prepare them as best she could.

When teenagers asked—no, make that begged—for extra rehearsal time, what's a choral director to do?

Fixing musical problems seemed important, but the weight of responsibility for the other aspects of her life pressed heavier.

At twenty-five, what did she know about raising Evie and Luke?

Sure, there were young women her age who already had children, but they got to ease into it, starting with a highly portable infant. She'd been thrown into the deep end of the pool when she insisted on staying and raising her ten-year-old twin siblings.

What was I thinking, Mom?

Praying would help, but she'd do that later. Mostly, she missed her parents.

To get the choir ready, she needed to figure out how to get Evie and Luke home after school, feed them, supervise their homework, and then return for evening rehearsals.

She had the weekend to figure it out.

The sharp rap on the door she was still leaning against got her attention.

She made quick work of the tears on her cheeks and took a deep breath.

Paste on a smile, girl.

The band director's hand paused in mid-knock when she opened the door.

"Hey, I understand congratulations are in order?"

Carl Reid had been helpful since she took the job at the last minute this past summer. He had started his teaching career as a student teacher under Dad's tutelage when she was in high school. Already, his track record of leading the band to excellence in both the marching and concert bands was impressive. He'd passed along to her the mentoring he'd received from Dad.

She tried to smile, but it wobbled when he narrowed his eyes at her.

"What's all this?"

Have. To. Be. A. Professional.

"Just surprised, that's all." She put on a brave face, but she knew he saw right through her. He'd known her since her elementary days, when he'd picked on her when she got off the bus at the high school.

Were his eyes filling with tears?

"Mr. Reid—"

"I've told you to call me Carl, remember? I'm your colleague, not your teacher." He eased into the chair stuffed in the corner and left the door cracked.

The tissue that landed in her hand increased the pressure in her chest. "I'm sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me."

Leaning forward, Carl clamped his lips together and clasped his hands in front of him. "Holly, it hasn't even been six months. It's amazing you've held it together this long."

Part of her wanted to give in to the crazy feelings that welled up daily, but she had to stay strong for the sake of Evie and Luke. There'd be no turning back if she let go now.