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“I know you worry about me, Mom, but you don’t have to. And I know you’d love my new apartment. Elizabeth is renting it to me, for a while at least, till I figure things out.”

Lucky sighed. “I know what you’re going to say, but the shop is a big responsibility. And I’m really struggling — struggling with everything right now.” Shivering in her down jacket, she blew on her hands to keep them warm. Lingering rays of winter light cast long shadows over the snow.

“The apartment’s small, but the back windows overlook a garden. It’s not in bloom now, of course, but it will be in the spring. It feels peaceful, and I think I’ll be able to sleep well there. I haven’t slept very much since . . . since I got the call about you and Dad.”

Lucky looked down at the freshly turned earth, large, dark scars against the snow, covered now with only a light dusting. In a short time, the earth would sink, snow would cover the mounds and eventually grass would grow. Her parents would rest in peace.

“I wish I could tell you how sorry I am that I haven’t been here — that I stayed away all these years and didn’t come home after college. I wanted to do something special — live for something other than tourist season, but I never accomplished very much at all. If I could do over the last few years, I’d have come back and hugged you and Dad every single day of your lives.”

Lucky didn’t know how she would ever recover from the guilt that washed over her every day. She remembered how hard her parents had worked and how she had rejected that life for herself. Now she was completely alone. Alone even at the gravesite. No one could hear the one-sided conversation she was having with her parents, the only conversation she could have with

them now. Death was so final, and there was nothing in her life that had prepared her for the shock of her parents' fatal car crash.

"I've brought these for you. They're just evergreens and two roses, one for you and one for Dad." Lucky knelt and, dividing her bouquet in two, placed the greens and a rose in each of the containers at the headstone. She stepped back and stood for a few more moments, remembering her mother's smile and the scent of her cologne, until she shivered again in the icy wind, her tears already frozen on her cheeks.

By the time she reached Snowflake's main street, Lucky's face was numb with cold. She pulled her woolen scarf up to her nose, hoping to reach By the Spoonful, her parents' soup shop, without running into any more old friends and acquaintances. Everyone had been so kind, but whenever condolences were offered, she felt as if she would burst into sobs. She missed her parents terribly. They had always been there for her. She had never considered the day when that would not be true.

The streetlights had already blinked on in the darkening evening, and lights in the shape of large snowflakes hung at each pole all the way down Broadway. Local shops had closed, but the windows of By the Spoonful Soup Shop were brightly lit and fogged from the warmth inside. Lucky stood across the street as if seeing the restaurant for the first time. The old blue and yellow neon sign her Dad had been so proud of still hung in the front window. For a moment, she imagined her parents, Martha and Louis Jamieson, would be inside. She could rush into the warmth and throw her arms around them, as she did when she was very young.

Her grandfather Jack stood at the cash register now. It was dinnertime, and the simple restaurant was filled to capacity with tourists and locals alike. The menu was a rotating variety

of soups, stews and sandwiches, depending on the time of year. Hearty meat-filled soups or thick lentils for winter, lighter ones for the summer. Each soup was served with a generous hunk of crusty bakery bread or ladled into a bread bowl. Tonight's special was an original created by Sage, the Spoonful's talented chef.

Her parents had hired Sage DuBois while Lucky was at college, and his expertise kept the menu delicious and unique. His special tonight was a soup based on yams, potatoes, carrots and red peppers in a creamy broth with white pepper. Lucky had worked up an appetite walking all the way from the cemetery and looked forward to a large bowl of the new soup as soon as she could take a break. She hadn't intended to stay away from the restaurant so long. Her grandfather was sometimes overwhelmed by the rush of customers and became confused. She couldn't imagine herself taking over the business her parents had left to her, but she also couldn't imagine the end of By the Spoonful either. Her grandfather Jack had made it clear he was only holding on, running the shop until she was ready to take over — if that was what she wanted to do. He had been very patient and hadn't pressured her, but Lucky knew he was waiting for a definite answer. She wondered how much longer she could delay.

Taking a deep breath, she crossed the street and pushed through the glass front door. A bell tinkled overhead, barely noticeable in the clatter and conversation of customers. Almost every table was full, and, as usual, Hank Northcross and Barry Sanders, two of the Spoonful's very regular regulars, sat at a corner table playing a game of Connect Four, large mugs of hot chocolate with whipped cream nearby.

Hank's bellow could be heard above the din of the restaurant as he lost another round of the game. Barry, smiling and victorious, leaned back in his chair clasping his hands over his protruding belly and took a sip of hot chocolate.

Jack looked up from counting bills. “Lucky, my girl. I’ve been worrying about you. It’s just gone three bells.” Jack was a World War II veteran who had served in the Navy. Lucky had listened to sea lingo her entire life and could even tell time Navy style.

Lucky grinned in response. “I’m fine.” She stepped behind the cash register and gave her grandfather a bear hug, even though he stood a good seven inches taller. She kissed him on the cheek. “I love you, Jack.” She had never called her grandfather by any other name. He had always insisted that to her, his only grandchild, he was Jack. He wanted no titles. Those were for old men, and he was never going to be one of those.

Jack held her at arm’s length and gave her a careful look. “Sure you’re all right?”

Lucky nodded. “I am. It’s just . . . every second with a loved one counts.”

A sadness passed over Jack’s lined face. “One of life’s tougher lessons, my girl. But your parents did a great job. You’ll be fine. I’m not really worried about you.”

The truth was, Lucky was starting to become a little worried about Jack. She had noticed a few things since she’d returned home— moments of confusion and gaps in reality. At first, she had taken some of his remarks as jokes or flights of fancy, but later she realized he had spoken seriously. She determined to keep a much closer eye on him from now on. He was the only family she had, and she was the only one who could really watch out for him.

Lucky pushed through the swinging door and headed down the hall, hanging her coat and winter gear in the closet. She kicked off her snow boots and slipped on a pair of loafers. She pulled a fresh apron off the shelf — her mother had designed these, bright yellow with an outline of a steaming bowl of soup. On her way back to the front, she peeked into the kitchen. Sage was stirring one of the large vats, a mound of chopped vegetables piled on his work table.

“Hey, Sage. How’s it going?”

He looked up and smiled, muscles bulging in his arms as he returned to chopping.

“Under control, boss.”

Lucky nodded. “Let me know if you need any help back here. We’ve got two waitresses out front tonight.”

“Keep them out of my kitchen. Please!” he called out in response.

Lucky smiled. Sage was a maestro in his domain. A highly trained and creative chef, her parents were thrilled to find him. They had been able to hire him at a salary he could have doubled at one of the ski resorts. Frankly, she wasn’t sure why he had stayed on as long as he had. His skills would have been welcomed anywhere. She just hoped he wasn’t thinking of looking elsewhere for work now that her parents were gone.

Lucky had once suggested a recipe for a new soup and asked his opinion about adding salad choices in the summertime. She had felt a definite resistance. Nothing overt, just a stiffening of his posture, but there was something unspoken there. Perhaps he thought she was criticizing his abilities, which was far from the truth. Or maybe he didn’t like having to take orders from a woman so close in age. Lucky had asked him a few times to call her by her name, but so far he avoided using it, preferring to address her as “boss.” Then again, maybe he was standoffish because he wasn’t sure if she would run the business as her parents had done. In all fairness to Sage, she hadn’t definitely decided if she would continue on with the restaurant.

If Sage chose greener pastures, Lucky didn’t know how she would ever find another chef as skilled. It wouldn’t be possible to maintain the same standard of food if Sage were to leave. She brushed the worry aside. *Time will tell, time will tell.* She repeated it to herself like a mantra as she headed back to the cash register to relieve Jack.

The next few hours flew by. At eight o'clock, Lucky sent Jack home, and an hour later, the last diners had gone. Janie and Meg, two local girls who waitressed for them, had cleared the tables and were slipping on their coats. Lucky could hear Sage banging around in the back as he cleaned up his work area. She grabbed the key under the cash register to lock up, but before she reached the door, it flew open, ushering in a frosty blast of air. Sophie Colgan stepped inside, slamming the door behind her.

Lucky's heart sank. Sophie was probably the last person in town she wanted to see.