

LOVING DR. MARTIN



CHRISTIANA JONES



Copyright © 2018 by Christiana Jones
Title: Loving Dr. Martin / Christiana Jones
Cover design by amber_85 www.99designs.com
Developmental editing by Cate Hogan www.catehogan.com
Copyediting by Michelle Hope www.reedsy.com

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems—except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles or reviews—without written permission from its publisher, Jones Publishing House.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, brands, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, is coincidental.

Published by Jones Publishing House
P.O. Box 80061, Keller, TX 76248
JonesPublishingHouse.com

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

PROLOGUE



Serena almost felt bad for womankind as she stood near the mike on the side of the stage and watched her boyfriend, Michael, perform his guitar solo in front of the crowd. The screaming female fans were pressed against the edge of the stage, reaching for him. Their band, It's Complicated, was playing at the Paradise Rock Club near Fenway, a stone's throw from Boston's world-renowned baseball park and a short subway ride to Boston University where they went to school. Consumed by the sounds coming from his guitar, the boisterous crowd of mainly college students shrieked as Michael crouched at the edge of the stage.

"I love you, Michael!" a fan yelled.

As always, while he played the riffs for which their band was quickly becoming famous for, Michael was lost to the outside world. At over six feet tall with a lean, muscular frame, he had presence. He cradled his sleek John Petrucci and let his fingers fly over the strings. His wavy light-brown hair fell frequently over his forehead as he played, and every time he flicked it out of his eyes, he sent the women in the audience

into hysterics. His muscular thighs strained against his jeans and his sweat-soaked black T-shirt was plastered to his chest. Serena's attention was caught by a young woman who had lifted her shirt and was wiggling her large, unrestrained breasts while waving her arms and hollering for Michael's attention. In short order, she was escorted away by a bouncer.

Too soon, Michael concluded his guitar solo. He looked up, caught Serena's eye, and winked. She blew him a kiss full of promise and turned to face the audience. They'd given up trying to explain what kind of band they were. Their music was mostly rock, a little hip-hop, some jazz and folk, and a whole lot of fun. Hence, the band's name.

Of all the band members, Michael might have been the most popular with the ladies, but Serena had been told her powerful, soulful voice, combined with his melodious panty-melting baritone, was a magical combination. An hour later, they were finally allowed offstage after performing several encores.

"That was awesome, guys. We rocked it!" Michael said as he high-fived the drummer, Devin, in the greenroom backstage. Patrick, who'd been on keyboard, approached and gave Devin multiple hand slaps. "Yo, Devin, that was sick what you did tonight. Are you high on something? 'Cause you were out of this world on those drums, man!" Playing drums was a full body experience for Devin. He delighted their audiences with the acrobatics he performed with his drumsticks—though his handsome looks, muscular frame, and tattoo sleeves didn't hurt his popularity either.

"Thanks, man," Devin said. "Hope you don't mind that I went off script." Patrick was enrolled in the music engineering program at Berklee College of Music and worked closely with Michael on the songwriting.

"If you're going to play like that, I say you can go off

script anytime,” Kiera, the final member of the band, told Devin. She was their bass guitarist, with bone-straight blonde hair that fell past her shoulders but came short of obscuring the tattoos on her upper arms of her music heroes—Paul McCartney on the left and Marcus Miller on the right. She wore artfully ripped jeans and a black vest over her tank top. Spotting her girlfriend off to a corner, she left them to walk over and chat.

Half an hour later, Serena waved as Devin, Patrick, and Kiera collected their equipment and left the club. Alone at last, Michael sank gratefully into a chair and pulled Serena onto his lap to straddle him, kissing her full lips greedily.

“You’re like a goddess when you sing,” he said against her lips in that British accent that made her want to behave in very improper ways.

“You’ve said that before, but I don’t see you worshipping me,” Serena replied with a coy smile.

“Believe me, darling, I worship you.” He leaned back to gaze at her. “I worship your earlobes”—he kissed each slowly—“and your beautiful hair.” He ran his hands through the silky black waves cascading down her back and kissed her on the temples. “Mmm, definitely your lips.” He placed his soft lips on hers and worshipped her until she was forced to pull away, breathless.

She sucked in air and looked at him tenderly. “That was an awesome show tonight. Your guitar solo had the crowd screaming and all the women begging to marry you.”

“Just the women?” he asked with a naughty grin.

“The women *and* the men. You are irresistible.”

He placed kisses all over her warm brown face. “There’s only one woman I want to marry.”

Serena wasn’t ready yet to have that conversation. After all, they were still young. She’d just turned twenty the

previous month. Instead, she said, "I've told you time and time again that you can't marry Professor Rosales."

Michael allowed her the sidestep. "Why not? She's gorgeous."

"That's not enough to marry someone."

"Her body is..." He brought his fingers to mouth as he smacked his lips.

"*What* body?" Serena pretended to be incensed.

"What body indeed? Yours is the one that I can't get enough of. This arse that I can barely cup." He proceeded to demonstrate. "These sexy hips... I want at least three boys from those hips." Serena slapped one hand away. "Oh, and a girl too." She slapped the other. With a laugh, Michael drew her close once again. "But your spirit is what I love most about you. You are an incredible woman. You're beautiful, smart, and people love you. I don't know what you're doing with a mere mortal like me."

"I was just asking myself the same question this morning."

Michael grinned.

Reluctantly, Serena pulled away. "We need to get back to campus. I've gotta put in a full day of studying tomorrow for my organic chemistry exam. It's my last final before winter break."

"You know you're going to ace it."

"Acing comes from studying. Speaking of acing, let me see if Dr. Lee has posted our biochemistry results yet. I asked my classmate Amy to send me a text when he did." Serena got off Michael's lap and went to search her bag for her cell phone. Not finding it, she glanced around the room, puzzled. "I was on my phone just before the show. I must have left it somewhere by the stage." Before she could take off, Michael pulled her back in for a lingering kiss. Serena sighed. Being held and kissed by Michael felt so right; perhaps studying could wait. But she did need to go find her phone.

"I'll be right back," she promised and hurried away.

She found her phone where she'd hastily tossed it behind the amplifier when she'd realized it was still in her hand as she was walking onto stage for the performance. She retrieved it and walked back to the greenroom as she checked her messages. In addition to being a biochemistry professor, Dr. Lee was also the premed advisor, and Serena needed to do well in his class if she wanted a strong letter of recommendation when it came time to apply to medical school. She found the message from her friend and quickly skimmed it.

A big smile broke out across her face and she took off at a near run to share this success with Michael. He'd likely roll his eyes affectionately at yet another exam she had aced. But as she approached the greenroom, she heard voices and slowed down. Just through the doorway, she could see Michael listening intently to a smartly dressed man with a British accent. His style was sharp but still casual—jeans with a gray jacket over a black shirt.

"You have a small but devoted fan base in the UK," the stranger said. "They feel a connection with you because you're British. I've been following your band for a while, and I think it's time to step up to the big stage. I can open some doors for *It's Complicated* in London. What do you say?"

Serena scoffed. They were college students for crying out loud. It was wonderful that they had fans that far away, but they weren't about to move to a different continent.

"I'll think about it," came Michael's response.

At Serena's gasp, the man looked up and caught sight of her. He gave her a warm smile, which she didn't return, and then returned his attention to Michael. "Give me a call." He gave Michael his card and shook his hand. As he approached Serena, he said, "You were incredible tonight. I hope to see

more of you.” She stared at his retreating back and then walked slowly into the room.

“Who was that?” she asked.

Michael rubbed the back of his neck. “That was Oliver Ross. He’s the manager for Tornado, The Beats, and several other bands based in the UK who’ve become quite successful.”

“A manager?”

Michael came to stand in front of Serena and took her hands. He took a deep breath, and then his words rushed out in undisguised excitement. “He wants to sign our band and help us break into the music scene in London and from there, who knows how far we’ll go! This is our big break. I’ll talk to the others tomorrow and then give him a call. This is incredible.”

Serena pulled her hands out of his. “What about school?” she asked. “I’ve still got the rest of junior year and senior year to do, and you’ve only got six months left until graduation.”

“We can finish later. Let’s see where the music thing goes. This is the chance of a lifetime. This is our opportunity to take It’s Complicated to the international stage. Don’t you want that?”

“I want to be a doctor.”

“But, baby, you sing like an angel.”

“That’s no guarantee. You’re talking about taking a huge risk. Interrupting my studies and leaving my mom to move to a country where I don’t know anyone.”

“We’ll be together.”

“It’s not enough.”

Michael stumbled back as if she’d punched him in the chest. “I thought you loved me.”

Serena softened her voice and stepped back in close. “I do love you, Michael, but I can’t do what you’re asking. It may be a great opportunity, but it’s a risk I’m not willing to take.

After the upheaval of Dad cheating on Mom and leaving us, I need stability in my life. Great bands fail all the time. That's the nature of the music business. But all doctors who finish school get jobs. I need that."

Michael looked at her as if she were speaking an ancient language long extinct. "You can't be serious. How can you possibly turn your back on this opportunity?" His expression suddenly changed. "You don't believe we can do this. You don't believe in me."

"It's not that at all. This band is amazing."

Michael's voice became pleading. "I promise I'll take care of you, Serena. You can transfer your studies to a university in the UK. Even if I have to get a job as a waiter or janitor to make ends meet, I promise I'll take care of you."

After her father's betrayal, Serena knew she couldn't count on that. "I need to be able to take care of myself. I've had a clear plan for my life since I was eleven years old. I'm going to finish college, go to medical school, become a doctor, buy a house, and take care of my family. Moving to London to sing with the band—not part of the plan." She took a deep breath. "This has been fun, Michael, but it was never meant to be the main path I was going to walk in life."

Michael bristled. "I can't believe you're turning this amazing opportunity down. What's wrong with you?"

"There's nothing wrong with me. There are just things more important to me than music."

"More important than me."

Serena said nothing. Michael stalked away and grabbed his guitar, then spun back toward Serena.

"You're a coward. You've got all this talent and you're just going to let it go to waste because you're scared."

"Michael—"

"You think I'm going to fail? Watch me."

CHAPTER 1



TWELVE YEARS LATER

“Can you bend your wrist back for me? Good, now forward. And now make a tight fist,” Dr. Serena Martin instructed Ashanti, a sixteen-year old girl who’d badly broken her wrist while skateboarding two months ago. Now that the bones had healed, she needed lots of therapy to get her wrist mobility back.

Ashanti appraised Serena critically. “You’re wearing one of those nun shirts again.” She shook her head and tsked. Serena glanced down at her shirt. It was actually one of her favorites: a long-sleeved ivory silk blouse with small ruffles on either side of the column of tiny buttons. Sure, it went up a little high on her neck, but it felt like heaven against her skin.

“At least undo the top few buttons,” Ashanti continued.

Serena raised an eyebrow and began to take notes on her clipboard. “I’m director of the Department of Physical Medi-

cine and Rehabilitation. I can't walk around flashing cleavage."

"I didn't say dress like a ho. But a little bit of cleavage might remind people you're a woman." Serena looked up sharply at that. "A beautiful and intelligent woman," Ashanti hastened to add. She sighed. "Instead of just a very impressive and sometimes intimidating therapy-wielding doctor machine. Have I not taught you anything since we've been working together?"

Serena grinned and extended a leg to show off sexy red heels. Ashanti squealed and clapped her hands. "That's more like it, Doc. Now, how about taking out the hairpins and losing the nerdy bun?"

Serena patted her hair to ensure her strands were in place. "I don't like my hair in my face when I'm working." She pushed back on the rolling stool she'd been sitting on and stood. "We're all done. Brianna will get you some ice packs for your cooldown, and I'll see you in a couple of days." She turned away.

"Do you even wear it down at home?"

Ashanti's question stopped Serena in her tracks. She turned to face her as she pondered the question. "It gets in my way when I'm cooking, or exercising, or—"

"Or brushing your teeth, or sleeping, or—"

"There's nothing wrong with ponytails and buns."

"No, but there's something wrong with never letting your hair down."

* * *

SERENA GLANCED at her watch as she hurried towards the sixth floor conference room at Boston General Hospital for an ethics meeting, preferring to be annoyed at the overly loud clicking of her heels on the tile floors rather than at

herself. She hated being late, but she'd gotten caught up with defending her fashion choices to Ashanti and had uncharacteristically lost track of time.

In addition to being director of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, or PM&R, Serena was also chair of the hospital ethics committee. She walked to her customary seat, took off her white coat, and draped it over the back of her chair. Before she sat, she took a few minutes to greet the other committee members, which included a general surgeon, a hospital chaplain, a social worker, a nurse, a member of the hospital legal team, and a community representative unaffiliated with the hospital. The secretary, a nonvoting member of the committee, completed their numbers.

The light-brown carpeting and accent wood paneling made the room feel cozy—a good thing as the committee members sometimes settled in for hours to discuss difficult cases, as ethics cases were wont to be. A state-of-the-art audiovisual system was artfully hidden behind warm walnut cabinetry. Serena returned to her seat and called the meeting to order.

“Let’s get started.” After the business of approving the previous month’s meeting minutes, they tackled the agenda items. On today’s agenda was an amendment to the Boston General Hospital code regarding the acceptance of gifts, free lunches, and other such gratuities. They reviewed a nurse practitioner’s candidacy for the ethics committee to replace one of their members who was stepping down. Finally, they discussed ways to ethically manage sick patients who couldn’t afford to pay for their care.

Serena enjoyed immensely her work on the ethics committee. She loved consulting with physicians and patients to help determine the appropriate course of action in difficult cases, like those involving end-of-life decisions,

organ donations, improving access to care, and balancing care quality and efficiency.

Before long, they got to the final item on the agenda. The hospital's chief of staff had requested a hearing to address accusations of a physician's sexual misconduct. Serena addressed the committee members.

"A complaint against Dr. Elena Ruiz has been filed and a request for a hearing submitted to the committee." Serena read the letter out loud.

JUNE 25, 2018

Dear Dr. Martin and ethics committee members,

I wish to file a complaint against Dr. Elena Ruiz for violation of the Boston General Hospital code of conduct as it pertains to the doctor-patient relationship. Dr. Ruiz is a psychiatrist on staff and has been treating Mr. Daniel Washington for depression for the last four months. I have received reports alleging a personal (read: sexual) relationship between Dr. Ruiz and Mr. Washington. I respectfully request the ethics committee look into these allegations and propose appropriate action.

Regards,

Dr. Richard Kelly

Chief of Staff

SERENA LOOKED UP. "At the risk of stating the obvious, these are clearly very serious accusations, and I move that we schedule a hearing."

"I'll second," said Jennifer Young, the social worker.

Serena nodded. "All in favor, say *aye*."

There was a chorus of *ayes*.

"All against?"

Silence.

“The motion to schedule a hearing in the case of Dr. Ruiz’s alleged misconduct passes. Margie will schedule the hearing once we’ve received and had the chance to review supporting documents.” As she spoke, she glanced at the secretary, who nodded her acknowledgement. The meeting was adjourned.

* * *

AS SERENA WALKED down the hall on her way back to her office, she inhaled deeply, exhaled, and then forced herself to let go of the disturbing thoughts of a doctor’s inappropriate relationship with a patient. This situation uncomfortably echoed her dad’s affair with a client in his law practice, which had destroyed her family. She forcibly switched her focus to the warm sun filtering through the large glass windows to tease her skin. As she walked, she glanced at the familiar portraits and stone busts of great scientists and doctors that lined the hallway and, as always, was awed at the thought of all the great people who’d walked these very corridors before her.

Despite her own achievements, she still felt like an imposter in this ivory tower of clinical excellence. When she wasn’t working directly with patients or guiding her team of therapists, she was engaged in research, continually pushing the envelope to find better, more effective therapies. She’d patented and written about new practice-changing methods of taking care of patients with severe hand and wrist injuries and was widely seen as the best in the country, if not the world, for rehabilitating such injuries. Her department was one of the largest in the state, and she’d worked hard to make sure it was also one of the most esteemed.

She oversaw more than twenty physicians, all experts in their own specialty areas, a residency and a fellowship

program, and was a principal or co-investigator in several clinical trials. She was also a guest lecturer at Harvard Medical School and precepted medical students once a week. Her own area of focus was musculoskeletal disorders—specifically, traumatic injuries of the upper extremity. Her research centered around optimization of electrical stimulation to help with neogenesis of injured nerves. In other words, she gave measured electric shocks to help nerves grow back, and thus help the arm or hand function better.

She reached her office but before she could step in, she heard someone call out.

“Dr. Martin, a word, please.”

She looked down the hall to see Dr. Todd Smith hurrying toward her. She suppressed a groan and put a smile on her face.

“Dr. Smith, lovely to see you,” she lied. She waited while he caught his breath. The brisk walk down the hall to catch her had exhausted his store of energy, and he leaned against the wall for support. He was only in his early fifties, she believed, but woefully out of shape. He had the potential to be attractive, but the extra sixty pounds he carried on his five-ten frame, as well as his tendency to strong-arm colleagues and sometimes even backstab, made attractiveness an impossible feat for him, despite the full head of hair and expensive shoes. She tried to keep a wide berth but wasn’t always able to do so; he was chief of medicine, and her PM&R department fell under his purview.

He pulled out an inhaler from his coat pocket and took two puffs while Serena waited patiently.

“Damn asthma,” he finally managed. Serena gave him the most sympathetic look she could muster. Mostly recovered, he asked, “How is the new crop of residents shaping up?”

“They’re a fine group. I look forward to getting to know them.”

"I don't know how you find the time to do everything you do. I just finished reading your article in the June first issue of the *International Journal of PM&R* on electrical stimulation protocols to help injured nerves regenerate. The results were stunning. Absolutely fascinating."

He was buttering her up. Serena waited to find out why.

"I have a patient in my private practice"—*there we go*, she thought—"who had his hand nearly amputated in an industrial accident a year ago. He was the sole breadwinner, and the injury totally changed his life. It broke up his marriage, and he sunk into a depression and tried to commit suicide." After being presented with this thinly veiled attempt to take on a new patient, Serena knew what was coming next. "I told him not to give up. I would get him the best hand rehab doctor in the country." He stared at her. When she remained silent, he added, "You're not going to make me out to be a liar, are you?"

"Dr. Smith, as you noted, I'm very busy. I've been closed to new patients for months. You know this."

His attempt to butter up and pull at her heartstrings came to a screeching halt. He took two steps toward her, invading her personal space. Serena did not allow herself to step back and looked up at him, pretending to be unaffected, but the overwhelming rancid odor of sweaty, unwashed male made her unsure if she succeeded in masking her distaste.

His mouth twitched. *Perhaps not*, she thought. "It's come to my attention that you are on the short list of final-round candidates for the American Medical Association Leadership in Medical Ethics and Professionalism Award." Serena was aware of that. "I can make your name disappear," he leaned forward to whisper. She didn't doubt that. The top leaders in medicine formed one big boy's club that thrived on traded favors and threats.

"I'll be in touch with your office to get the patient's information," she said tightly before walking away.

Serena opened the door to her office and walked in, pulling it shut behind her. To her chagrin, her eyes watered. She hated that feeling of powerlessness. Despite everything she'd worked hard to accomplish in her life, someone always had the power to take it all away. She went to sit at her desk and stared out the window. At thirty-two, she'd accomplished almost everything she'd set out to achieve and knew it was because of discipline born of loss and pain. She avoided risky behaviors like restaurants on Valentine's Day—behaviors such as inappropriate relationships, any potentially addictive substance use, other than the occasional glass of wine, even travel to foreign countries.

Her work on the ethics committee helped her stay focused on avoiding any dicey situations that could jeopardize her job and well-being. She had a job she loved and was respected as a leader among her peers, but it still didn't feel like enough. Something was missing. Some days she wanted to throw off her white coat, let her hair down like Ashanti had suggested, grab a microphone, and belt out the songs of her heart, as she had done in college. But that was a long time ago, when she was young and stupid and had allowed her heart to be broken.

She was distracted from her morbid thoughts by her cell phone ringing. Her mood lifted as she answered.

"Hello, Bryce."

"Hi, babe," her boyfriend of two years answered. Bryce Adams was a talented and handsome hand surgeon who also worked at Boston General Hospital.

"What's up?" she asked.

"Not too much. I just got out of the operating room. I had two routine carpal tunnel releases followed by a hand that

was badly mauled by a dog.” Serena grimaced. “How about you?” Bryce asked.

“I worked with Ashanti again. Sassy girl,” Serena said fondly. “And I had an ethics committee meeting.”

“Anything interesting?” Bryce asked.

“A doctor allegedly having a sexual relationship with a patient.”

Bryce thought about it. “If the patient looked like you, I might be tempted.”

“Bryce!”

“I’m just saying, we’re only human.”

“We’re humans with a big responsibility that came along with the oath we took.”

“Doctors are allowed to fall in love.”

“I’m not arguing against that,” Serena clarified. “We just can’t fall in love or have sex with patients. It goes against every code in the book.”

“Dr. Martin, always living by the rules,” Bryce mocked gently.

Hurt, Serena remained silent.

“I’m sorry, honey,” Bryce said. “I admire your strength of character and convictions.” He added, “Just don’t let what your father did make you too rigid. Life’s not that black and white.”

Serena sighed and changed the subject. “Are you free for lunch?”

“Sorry, I need to do a bit of reading to prepare for a procedure this afternoon. I’m doing a finger replantation on a construction worker. He’s got a complicated medical history, including previous injury to that hand, so I need to think about the best way to approach it.”

“Do make time to eat. It’s going to be a long procedure.”

“Yes, Mom,” Bryce teased.

Serena smiled. "Send me a text when you're done. Remember you drove us in this morning."

"How could I forget I spent the night at your place last night? It's such a rare privilege."

"I like my space."

"Would a ring on your finger decrease the need for space?"

Serena pretended to ponder the question. "I might be willing to make some adjustments under that scenario."

"Well, then."

"I'll see you later." She hung up.

She looked out the great windows, west toward Boston University, her alma mater. Talking to Bryce had stirred up memories of when she wasn't always so rigid. She closed her eyes and allowed herself a rare moment to indulge in her favorite memories. Her first two and a half years of university had been filled with music and fun and a handsome guitarist. He'd taken all the music out of her life when he'd left.

Just as well, she reminded herself, as her medical studies then and her work now left no time for musical pursuits. After her dad's betrayal and failure to show up for her middle school performance as Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* and then Michael leaving her to pursue his dreams of a musical career, she'd locked away the part of her heart that came alive when she sang and put the key in the farthest reaches of a drawer she never opened.

With her professional life solidly established, she was ready to attend to her personal life. Bryce had asked her out shortly after she'd started working at BGH. She'd been attracted to the handsome and self-assured surgeon, but she'd turned him down. Workplace romances were not her thing. Giving up was not his. He persisted in asking her out every few months. BGH was filled with smart men, but

Bryce's combination of smarts, charm, and physical attributes made him irresistible to many women, a fact Serena was aware of. But, to tell the truth, Serena wasn't sure why she had persisted in resisting him. She told herself it wasn't because she was waiting for someone to come into her life and miraculously make her heart sing again.

Eventually, she gave in to Bryce's advances. They enjoyed a satisfying relationship, if one lacking in passion. She told herself passion was for hopeless romantics and led people to make bad decisions. She was a serious doctor with serious doctor things to attend to. Sighing, she picked up the phone to call Dr. Smith's office.

* * *

THE AFTERNOON FLEW by in a blur of patient consults and therapy sessions. Serena was startled when Bryce appeared at her office door to take her home. He held her hand on his thigh as he drove them back to her condo in his sleek new Mercedes sports car. Bryce liked nice things—showy things—with cars topping that list. He wore fine clothes and expensive watches. Unlike many other health professionals who loved the comfort of scrubs and wore them everywhere they could get away with it, he only wore his surgeon's scrubs when he was in the operating room. The majority of the time, he was dressed à la GQ. He also liked Serena to dress up to the nines when they went out.

Serena had wondered if he'd lacked material comforts in his childhood, but that wasn't it. He had no rags-to-riches tale. One night while lying in bed after a particularly stressful day at work, he'd confided that the expensive accessories helped him feel like he belonged in this city and this hospital, meccas of intellectual pursuits, where African Americans were grossly underrepresented. Looking at him now as he

drove with the confident bearing of a surgeon who could cut into a Russian monarch, surrounded by heavily armed guards, and not break a sweat, Serena wondered how such a man could experience an ounce of insecurity. Truth was, she could relate.

Before long, they pulled into the underground parking lot of Serena's apartment building and took the elevator to her tenth-floor luxury condominium. Her little poodle-shih tzu mutt, Bella, was ecstatic to see Serena. She greeted her the same way she did every day when Serena returned from work—as if she hadn't seen her in two weeks. Serena was careful as she picked her up. Too much excitement, and the little dog was likely to lose control of her bladder. She kissed the soft curly black fur on Bella's head and walked to her bedroom. After she and Bryce changed into comfortable clothes, they settled into their evening routine.

Serena made dinner as Bryce set the table and selected music on his cell phone, which he had connected to her speakers. Serena was tossing a salad when she heard it. A haunting guitar solo. Even before she heard the smooth, sexy British voice, she knew it was Michael. For a moment, she forgot where she was. She was transported to the days of screaming fans and long sets that left her sweaty and hoarse, but not too tired to celebrate with her boyfriend. She'd never felt as invigorated as when she sang with Michael. That euphoric feeling was a distant memory, and this was torture.

"Can you put something else on, please?" She called out to Bryce.

"This is *It's Complicated*. Their sound is amazing. How can you not like this?"

Serena shrugged. "Just not a fan. I'm in the mood for some jazz tonight. Can you find something?"

Bryce good-naturedly obliged while Bella supervised from her dog bed in the living room.

“Oh, how did your finger replantation go?” Serena asked as Bryce poured some wine and then handed her a glass.

“Very well, actually. Now we wait and see if it takes and the finger gets back to working like before. The patient is going to need a lot of therapy. You’ll probably be seeing him in a couple of weeks.”

“Send him to Dr. Feinstein, my hand guy. I’ve got too much on my plate. Dr. Smith just foisted another patient on me, even though he knows I’m fully booked.”

“He knows you’re the best.”

Serena rolled her eyes. “There are several extremely qualified hand rehab docs at BGH.” She brought the salad bowl to the table. “Anyway, well done you. I know that was not an easy procedure.”

Bryce winked. “I’m not just a pretty face,” he said as he struck a GQ pose.

He looked so boyish and cute just then that Serena couldn’t help laughing. “Are you off this weekend?” she asked. “We could do the 5K Run for Hunger. It’ll be a beautiful day to run along the river.”

The Charles River was one of Serena’s favorite places to spend her free time. She found the endless stretch of water soothing. She liked to fantasize that she was a mermaid in a previous life. She loved to swim in the river or run or bike the adjacent miles of trail. Occasionally, she went kayaking with Bryce or sailing with friends. Sometimes she just sat on a bench and gazed at the water thinking of anything and everything. Or nothing at all. This weekend’s forecast called for clear skies.

“This weekend is the annual meeting of the American Association for Hand Surgery. I’m presenting, remember?” Bryce said.

“That’s right, I forgot.”

“You sure you don’t wanna come? Two whole days of

discussing statistics and advances in surgical methods are guaranteed to make me frisky.”

Serena laughed. “It’s the pissing contest in a conference room full of surgeons that puts you in the mood.” She made a show of thinking. “Tempting, but no. I could use a low-key weekend. Maybe go see my mom and have dinner with her and Paul.” Her mother, Nicole, had remarried five years ago and was singularly focused on helping Serena find the marital bliss she enjoyed.

Serena served up some jerk chicken, stewed kale, and sweet potatoes onto two plates and they moved to sit at the table. Their conversation flowed with the ease of a long-standing relationship. With both Bryce and Serena involved in the repair and rehab of hand conditions, they understood each other’s worlds. After they’d put their dinner dishes away, they sat in companionable silence, reading their medical journals and working, with Bella a comfortable weight on Serena’s lap.

At one point, Bryce looked up. “This is nice, right?” he asked, smiling. Serena nodded. This *was* nice. And comfortable. If maybe a little boring. The evenings they spent together unfolded the same way. Dinner at seven, reading and working afterward until nine, getting ready for bed, then, more likely than not, sex before falling asleep. This may not have been the most exciting life she might have envisioned for herself, but it was nice. There was that word again. “Nice.” Rhymes with “Bryce.”

She looked over at him. He noticed her watching him and smiled. Bryce was a great companion and would someday make a fine husband. He was meticulous in his work, well-respected by his peers, and he treated Serena with consideration. His looks were quite easy on the eyes too. He went to the barbershop without fail every two weeks and consequently had a clean close crop and a neatly trimmed

mustache. “Never trust a black man without a mustache,” he liked to joke. He was confident—some would call it arrogant, but Serena didn’t mind. After nearly two years of dating, they understood and appreciated each other. She suspected that he was preparing to ask her to marry him in the near future, and she looked forward to saying yes and cementing the final phase of her plan to ensure stability in her life.

“Are you ready for bed, babe?” Bryce asked at nine o’clock on the dot.

“Just let me finish this last paragraph.” After a minute, she put down the latest issue of the *American Journal of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation*, set Bella down in her bed, and took the hand Bryce extended. Together they walked toward her bedroom. When she finished washing up and came out of the bathroom, Bryce was waiting for her. He turned off the lamp on his nightstand as she climbed into bed and then rolled toward her.

“Are you tired?” he asked softly.

“No,” she answered. He took her in his arms and kissed her. As he moved over her and began his routine for getting her aroused, she thought about the man she always thought about in this situation. When Bryce was done, he kissed her neck and rolled off her.

“Thanks, hon.” He promptly went to sleep.

Well, that was...nice, Serena thought. In the haze before sleep took over, she heard a phone go off. It came from Bryce’s side, so she ignored it. The ringing stopped. She adjusted her pillow and settled back in. The phone began to ring again. Annoyed, she reached across Bryce to silence it. As she picked it up, she saw a photo of a pretty woman above the name “Chandra.”

CHAPTER 2



*M*ichael scrolled back to the top of the document on his laptop to reread the eulogy he'd written.

One of life's greatest tragedies is that we often don't realize when we've got something—or someone—great in our lives until we lose it or them. Dad was the best man I knew. He worked hard every day of his life to make the family contracting business a success and provide for my mum, Will, Sophie and me. We never wanted for anything. He taught us the value of hard work, an honest dollar, taking pride in your work, and loving your family.

We moved from the UK to Boston nearly twenty years ago when Dad received a massive promotion. He was a brilliant engineer. I'm sure it wasn't easy for him to uproot his family and move us across an ocean to a new country, but he wasn't afraid to do what he felt was best for the family. Unfortunately, six months later, the company folded. Rather than giving up and returning to Essex like a beaten man, Dad put his head down and did what he had to do to take care of his family. He was a man of few words, but the words

he spoke had impact. I didn't always appreciate what he had to say, but I'm the man I am today because of Dad. There are no words to express his influence in my life.

It was his strength that became his undoing. The heart attack that took his life may have put a stop to his efforts, but his impact will be felt a very long time by all of you who have come here today to honor his life, but mostly by my mum, Elizabeth, whom he loved with a passion; my brother, Will; my sister, Sophie; and me.

Rest now, Dad. You've earned it.

Your son,

Michael

"That's a beautiful eulogy."

Michael looked over to the man sitting next to him on the cramped transatlantic flight from London to Boston. The man smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry, I couldn't help seeing what you were typing."

"No worries, mate." Michael smiled tightly before shutting down his laptop. He closed his eyes and laid his head against the headrest. He hadn't been back to Boston in nearly five years, and likely would have stayed away longer if not for the frantic call he'd received from his mom three days ago. He saw in his mind's eye the eulogy he'd written for the man he could barely stand since he'd turned thirteen.

"I'm sorry for your loss," his seat mate continued. Michael would throttle Oliver, his manager, for not getting him a first-class ticket. What was the point of being a rock star if you couldn't get a last-minute first-class ticket? "Your dad sounds like he was an incredible man."

Michael glanced briefly at his chatty neighbor. "Thank you. He was."

Incredibly *mean*, that is. Charles Dunn had been quick to physically discipline Will and Michael when they were younger, and sometimes Sophie too. He had never recovered from losing his job after the move to Boston, and he'd remained bitter to the very end, frequently taking it out on his eldest son. Michael had moved back to the UK twelve years ago without finishing university, not only to pursue his music dreams, but also to get as far away from the man as he could. He'd felt bad about leaving his mom and siblings, but Michael had borne the brunt of his father's ill humor.

Charles had voiced his opinion often and loudly regarding what he thought about Michael choosing a life in music rather than getting a real man's job or working in the family business, Dunn Contracting. He saw Michael's choice of career as his own failure to raise his son right. But writing about that aspect of his father's personality wouldn't have made for a good eulogy. Michael had a clear plan of action. He would play the role of the dutiful son, deliver a respectful eulogy, ensure his mom and siblings would be okay, and then get the hell on back to London and carry on with his life as guitarist and songwriter for the now very popular band, *It's Complicated*. He'd be back within a week.

* * *

BOSTON LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT had changed little since Michael had last been there. Since his initial move back to the UK, Michael had returned to Boston for brief visits every one to two years. Each visit was more unbearable than the last, and Charles Dunn's drunken rages had escalated steadily. The last time Michael was home, his dad had swung a fist at him. The physical damage had been insignificant, but the rift in his relationship with his father had reached the

point of no return. He'd sworn then and there that that was the last Charles Dunn would ever see of him.

As the years passed and he didn't return for a visit, his brother, Will, got more and more mad at him until he stopped taking his calls altogether. From his mom and occasional conversations with Sophie, Michael knew his father's health was deteriorating from a combination of excessive drinking, stress over contracting jobs, and a steadily weakening heart. Elizabeth had convinced Michael to return for his father's funeral, not for her, but because she feared that, one day, perhaps after he became a father himself, he would not forgive himself if he didn't do the right thing and see his father buried honorably.

As Michael entered the baggage claim area, he searched for his brother in the crowd. He did a double take when he caught sight of Will. He seemed so different from the last time Michael had seen him. He was still tall and lean, although a hair shorter than him, Michael remembered with brotherly satisfaction. And the slightly tousled light-brown hair was the same, but Will looked nothing like the carefree younger brother he'd left behind. He seemed... hardened. What on earth had happened while he'd been away? He'd find out soon enough. He was just happy to see his little brother.

Michael put on a big smile and hoisted the strap of his guitar case more securely onto his shoulder as his long strides swallowed the distance between him and his brother. He knew the instant Will saw him. He wasn't sure his brother would recognize him with the baseball cap pulled down low and the sunglasses, but Will knew his big brother immediately. He just didn't look like he cared one iota for the man walking toward him. He glanced at his watch as if he had more important things to do than pick up the brother he hadn't seen in five years who'd just flown in from London

for their dad's funeral. Michael walked right up to him and pulled him into a hug. Will's arms stayed at his sides. After a moment, Michael pulled away.

"You alright, mate?" Michael asked.

"Brilliant. Let's go."

Michael was surprised by the chilly reception, but he let it go for now. They retrieved his bag from the conveyor belt, then made the drive from Logan International Airport to their family home in Somerville, directly northwest of Boston.

"How have you been?" Michael asked.

"Fine," came the curt reply.

After a minute, Michael tried again. "How are Mum and Sophie?"

"Alright."

Michael gave up after a few more attempts at conversation were just met with grunts or one-word answers, and instead he focused on the passing scenery. He realized he'd missed Boston. As Will drove away from the airport, Michael wondered if he was taking the scenic route for his benefit. There were more direct ways to get to Somerville, but he didn't say anything. He focused on the various marine vessels moored or navigating the Boston Harbor. He and Serena had gone on a couple of dinner cruises on the harbor.

They crossed the Charles River and skirted East Cambridge as they drove along Somerville Avenue. To their left lay the great institutions: Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Tufts University, Boston General Hospital, Fenway Park and so many more. Michael regretted not taking more time to enjoy the city he'd grown up in. It truly was a magnificent place with incredible history—nothing like England, of course—but there was still so much to appreciate here. Perhaps he'd do some sightseeing and revisit old hangouts before returning to London.

After twenty minutes, Will pulled the battered red pickup truck into the driveway of their modest family home. Even though Michael had enjoyed significant success with his band, his father had refused to accept a dime from him. And now he was dead. As much as Michael had never much cared for the old buzzard, that was one of his greatest regrets—that he hadn't gotten the chance to make his family more financially comfortable. Hopefully that would change now.

He got out of the car and stood for a few moments just looking at his childhood home. The two-level bungalow with blue siding and white trim and a tiny front porch was smaller than he remembered. There was no front yard to speak of, but the bushes against the house were neatly trimmed. There was no garage. A black Volvo was parked in the small driveway to the side.

Michael walked up the steps and opened the front door.

"Mum?" he called out.

Elizabeth Dunn came out of the kitchen, her arms wide open, and took her eldest son into a tight embrace. She pulled back and held his face in her hands. "Dear God, Michael, how handsome you look. It's been much too long." She brushed his hair off his shoulders. "You need a haircut. Sophie can do it for you." She looked at him earnestly. "I hope you're not planning on waiting until I die before you come back to see your brother and sister again."

"Of course not, Mum." At her dubious look, he added, "I promise." Michael kissed her on the cheek and hugged her again. For a moment he felt overwhelmed by his love for this woman and his guilt that he had not been there to give her a hand. He could see how challenging the last few years must have been for her. She was still a good-looking woman but the additional grooves lining her face threatened to permanently erase all evidence of the stunning young woman she had once been. At fifty-eight, her hair was thick and gray and

currently pulled into a tight bun. She was already dressed for the funeral services that would take place in a few hours. She wore a simple black dress that fell to midcalf and a pearl necklace. Her girlish waistline and curves had thickened and softened over the years.

Michael put an arm around his mom's shoulders. "Where's Sophie?"

"In her room. Let's go get her." As she led Michael through the house, she looked up at him.

"I'm so glad you came home for your father's funeral, darling."

"Of course, I was going to come to say goodbye to Dad."

"You two didn't always see eye to eye."

"That's water under the bridge now. I should have come home and tried to bridge the gap. I'm sorry I didn't."

"It's alright, son. You're here now." Elizabeth stopped at the bottom of the stairs and called out, "Sophie! Your brother's here."

A door opened upstairs. "Michael!" Sophie screamed. She ran down the stairs and jumped into his arms, nearly squeezing the life out of him. After a while, Michael set her down and turned to where Will was standing in the kitchen doorway. "Now this is the reception I was expecting at the airport."

Will rolled his eyes, but one corner of his mouth twitched. Michael turned back to his little sister. He looked her over. "I, ah, like what you've done with your hair, Soph." His skeptical look said otherwise. Sophie's brown locks had multicolored streaks with scattered braids and was pulled up in a messy ponytail on top of her head. She was a pretty young woman despite the heavy black eyeliner. The nose piercing was new.

"Thanks," Sophie replied with a smile. "My friend at the salon colored it for me. I work there three days a week..."

She trailed off when she saw Michael's gaze move to the top of the stairs where a young man stood. Michael's eyes narrowed. The man was a pothead cliché. He wore messy dreadlocks that had been dyed blond at some point but now showed a thick, ungroomed undergrowth of dark hair. His heavy lids gave away his recent activities. He wore skinny black pants and a T-shirt that read: "I admit it, I'm a pothead." He started to come down the stairs.

"Yo, what's up, man? I love your tunes," he gushed. "The way you work that guitar is sick." Seeing Michael's glare, he halted his descent and his smile faltered.

"I'll wait for you in your room, Sophie," the man said and then turned to go back up the stairs.

"Nah, mate. It's time for you to leave," Michael corrected him. "We've got our dad's funeral to get ready for."

"Excuse me?" Sophie whirled to face Michael. "You don't get to forget your family exists for five years and then be rude to my boyfriend. You may be a hotshot music celebrity, but in this house, you're the asshole who was too busy living the rock star life to care about his family."

"Sophie!" Elizabeth admonished.

"Come on, Goose." Sophia took the pothead's hand, and they went back up to her room.

Michael looked over at Will, who didn't bother to hide his disgust over Michael's belated brotherly concerns. He turned on his heel and went into the living room.

Elizabeth took Michael by the arm. "Come on, let's get you a bite to eat. You'll have a bit of time to rest before we head out for the services. I'm looking forward to hearing the eulogy you wrote for Dad."

* * *

THE FUNERAL SERVICE at the Anglican church Elizabeth and

Charles Dunn had attended for many years went as well as such events generally go. A number of people had come to pay their respects, mainly people Charles Dunn had worked with, his drinking buddies, and a few parishioners. Michael looked at his father lying in the open casket and thought he had never seen him look this peaceful. His anger toward the man began to recede. He felt pity for the man who'd battled demons for so many years and had been robbed of the ability to enjoy his family and his life. He took his father's hand in the man-to-man handshake he'd never received and said quietly, "Go in peace, Dad."

As he turned away, he caught his mother looking at him. She smiled even as she dabbed her eyes. He returned to his seat in the front pew with Elizabeth on one side and Sophie and Will on the other. He took Elizabeth's hand and began to pull Sophie in to his side. She resisted at first but then gave in and tucked against Michael. Looking up at the minister where he stood behind the pulpit, Michael nodded at him to begin the service.

* * *

BACK AT THE house a couple of hours later, there were still a handful of guests left who had come to visit with the bereaved family. A few of Elizabeth's friends were stacking casserole dishes in the refrigerator and freezer. Some still remembered the energetic and ambitious man Charles Dunn had been when the family had first moved to Boston. Most were gawking openly at the rock star in their midst. After a while, Michael tapped Will on the shoulder.

"Come on. Let's go get a drink."

They went to Casey's Pub just two blocks away. The bar was located in an old brown brick building, not much to look at from the street. Yet, from the number of cars in the

parking lot along one side of the building, Michael figured this must be a popular joint. Will pulled up into a spot between a large green dumpster and a beat-up black pickup truck that looked to be at least twenty years old. They walked past a row of six or seven Harleys and entered the bar.

The place was crowded and buzzing with conversation and cue balls being hit on the pool tables off to the side. The bar was not exactly dingy, but it wasn't the sort of classy, hip spot Michael had hung out in during his college days at Boston University. The space above the bar featured the requisite display of bottles for every taste. The walls were dark and spotted with handwritten signs indicating the location of the restrooms and forbidding patrons from spitting their snuff inside the bar. Another sign invited guests to "Take it outside."

The patrons were an eclectic mix, as Somerville itself was. A large bald man sporting a beard down to his chest with arms and neck covered in tattoos drank from a vessel shaped like a skull. He was talking to a petite blonde who wore short-shorts and a small shirt knotted beneath her breasts to reveal a flat abdomen and generous cleavage. Other similarly bald, bearded, tattooed and large men sat close by. Michael assumed the Harleys belonged to them.

Out of habit, Michael chose seats in a dark corner where he was least likely to be noticed and recognized while Will went up to the bar and brought back a pitcher of beer and two glasses.

"To Dad," Will said simply. They clinked glasses and drank. Each man sat lost in his thoughts.

After a couple of minutes, Michael broke the silence. "So, tell me, Will, how've you been? Are you still at the same architecture firm you were working at when I last saw you?"

Will took a large swallow of his beer before answering. "No, I work for Dunn Contracting now."

"Really!" Michael was incredulous. "What made you do that?"

"Mum." Will looked like he wasn't going to say anymore.

"What do you mean, Mum?" Michael prodded. "You were at a great firm doing work that was right up your alley. What was it...sustainable architecture? Why would you choose to go work for our cranky old man after you'd gotten out from under his nose?"

"Mum asked me to," Will answered reluctantly. "Said the business had gotten too big for Dad to handle alone. He didn't trust anyone enough to get a partner, and he was too proud to ask me for help. She also hinted that the old ticker was giving him trouble and his doctor had warned him to slow down. You were thousands of miles away gyrating for shrieking females. What else was I supposed to do?"

Michael was stunned. He was ashamed of how little he'd known about what was going on with his family. Sure, he'd been busy with tours, interviews, rehearsals, and such, but he could have called his family more. Finally, he asked, "Why didn't you tell me what was going on? You used to tell me everything."

Will shrugged. "Yeah, well, you used to be around."

Michael winced. He couldn't blame his little brother for being angry at him. He'd been utterly focused on himself and his burgeoning career and had been so glad to move away from his dad, he'd thrown out the baby with the bath water; he'd lost close contact with the rest of the family. He cleared his throat. "How's Mum doing?"

"Well enough. She answers the phone, books clients, and does all the paperwork for the business. Always rock solid, Mum. But you should have seen her on Tuesday after Dad died. She sat in her chair without moving for hours. I don't

think she's had a proper cry yet." Will took a swig and wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

"What about Sophie? What's with the guy who was at the house today?"

"Goose? He's just the flavor of the week. He's not as bad as some guys she's brought by. Last month, the police came to the house and took her boyfriend away in handcuffs. We haven't seen him since. She wants me to mind my own business, so I leave her alone. I told her I would so long as she doesn't get pregnant by some stupid loser. She used to talk about opening her own beauty shop. I don't know what she's doing in that salon where she works. I see the same guys hanging out in front all the time when I go pick her up, probably selling drugs."

Michael ran his hands roughly through his hair.

"What about you?" Will asked. "What's up with you, besides your rankings on the charts?"

Michael shrugged. "At the risk of sounding obnoxious, it's gotten rather tiresome. I can't go anywhere without being accosted by fans, and life on the road is pretty exhausting."

Will scoffed. "You're right, you do sound obnoxious." After emptying his glass, he asked, "Seeing anyone in particular?"

"The lead singer, Mariana, and I are dating."

"Is it serious?"

"We're just having fun. It's hard to commit with so many women throwing themselves at me."

Will rolled his eyes. "Poor big brother."

Michael grinned and stood. "I'm going to get another pitcher."

As he made his way to the bar, he heard an excited woman's voice off to the side. "Oh my God, you're Michael Dunn!" The petite blonde who'd been talking to the biker guy when they first walked in rushed over to him and flung

her arms around his neck. Startled, yet unsurprised by the familiarity, Michael tried to gently extricate himself, but the woman held on firmly.

“I just love you. I’ve been to eight of your concerts.”

Michael took a closer look. She was cute. The curvy assets pressed against his body were right up his alley.

“Here, let’s take a picture.” She whipped out her mobile from the back pocket of her skimpy shorts and pulled Michael close for a selfie. At the last second, she turned her head, planted her lips on his, and took the picture. Her lips were eager and tasted of the fruity lip gloss she had on. Her enthusiasm was contagious. A part of his brain registered some commotion and he opened his eyes. He saw the massive bald dude come crashing toward him, upending tables and knocking chairs out of the way.

“Don’t touch my woman!” the man roared, flushed red with drink.

“Relax man,” Michael said, one arm still around the blonde. “I’m just thanking a fan for her support.”

Everything after that happened in a blur. The big dude smashed the beer bottle he was holding against a table and lunged toward Michael, who barely got his left arm up in time to avoid getting his face slashed. Something got sliced, though, because he felt the splatter of warm blood and tasted it on his lips. He saw people move in slow motion to stop the big man from jumping on him and pummeling him to mush. He watched Will run toward him, silently mouthing his name. Will took too long, however, and Michael fell asleep.

* * *

MICHAEL CAME TO WITH A JOLT. He cringed at the noise and attempted to cover his ears, but someone forcibly held his left arm down. He realized he was in an ambulance and the

noise was sirens in very close proximity. The paramedics called out incomprehensible instructions to each other as they worked on Michael in the back of the ambulance and raced him to the hospital. Michael only heard disjointed words.

“...lot of blood...”

“...IV line started in right antecubital vein...”

“What’s the BP?”

“102/60”

“Push the fluids. Bandage is soaked through. I’m going to add another pressure dressing.”

“ETA?”

“Five minutes to Boston General.”

“Step on it. Dave, have them get the hand surgeon. I hear this guy’s a guitarist. Let’s try to save his hand.”

* * *

THE NEXT TIME Michael woke up, he was lying on a stretcher in a small room wearing a hospital gown. He followed the wires and tubes from his body to the steadily beeping monitors. *Were those numbers okay?* he wondered. The drape to his cubicle was pulled back, and he could see a nurse bustling about a central station surrounded by other exam-room bays. He tried to sit up and winced at the pain in his left arm. The nurse noticed his activity and came over.

“Hi, Michael. My name’s Debra. I’ll be your nurse until you come out of surgery and they take you to your room.”

“Surgery?” Michael croaked. His throat felt like sandpaper and he had a pounding headache.

“You got a pretty bad laceration on your wrist.”

Michael looked down at his heavily bandaged left hand and wrist.

“Dr. Adams will be in shortly to speak with you. They’ll

probably take you to surgery within the next ten to fifteen minutes." She made sure he was comfortable and then left to attend to her other duties.

A few minutes later, Michael saw a tall African American man wearing a long white coat over green scrubs approach. He was finishing tying his surgical cap on as he came up to greet Michael.

"Hello, Mr. Dunn. I'm the surgeon, Dr. Adams. I'm going to do my darnedest to fix your hand."

"What happened?"

"I spoke with your brother, Will. He said someone came at you with a broken beer bottle. We could tell even before the MRI that the injury is severe. The MRI showed three severed flexor tendons and a partial laceration of the median nerve. Some veins were also injured, but the bleeding is not life-threatening. I'm not going to sugar coat it: bottom line, your injury is pretty bad."

"Can you fix it? I play guitar."

"I know, I'm a fan of It's Complicated. I'm confident I can reattach what's severed. Whether or not your arm is 'fixed' will depend on you and the rehab specialist I'm going to send you to, but it'll take several weeks, if not months, to see how complete your recovery will be."

Michael closed his eyes as the end of his music career flashed before him.

"I'll see you in the operating room," Dr. Adams said before he walked away.

Michael submitted to the rest of the preoperative preparations, numb to everything but the thought that his guitar-playing days might be over, all because a fan had kissed him and he'd kissed her back, to be perfectly honest, within sight of her jealous boyfriend. Before long, two nurses wheeled him into the operating room and he drifted off once more.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



It's hard to imagine a Harvard-trained physician penning stories about love and longing, but Dr. Christiana Jones has never been described as 'conventional.' Born in Nigeria, she spent every night pressed dangerously close to a kerosene lamp with a book in her hands, while her family bemoaned the lack of reliable electricity. As an adult, her colleagues would traipse off to yoga classes while Christiana, a.k.a. 'Dr. Doom,' donned her black belt and earned her fight name.

But for all her interests and passions, Christiana's heart inevitably returned to storytelling. To this day, her greatest joy is crafting moving stories with strong heroines that pay tribute to the courage and resilience of women working in medicine. Saving lives day after day might take a heavy toll on their personal lives, but that doesn't stop them from chasing their dreams and following their hearts.

Her first novel, *Dancing with the Enemy* was followed by *Loving Dr. Martin*. Her next novel will be released in Spring 2019.

Christiana loves to connect with her readers, so feel free to stop by and say hello.

Join her email list for updates and notice of new releases.

www.christianajones.com
christiana@christianajones.com