matching scars, mending hearts

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matching scars, mending hearts

by SaltyRedhead

Summary

Deep blue and at my lowest, you found me right when I needed you.

Chapter 1: my reputation's never been worse, so, you must like me for me

Chapter Notes

> Canon wise, the MerDer cheating at prom never happened but Derek wasn't the only one staring at Meredith… And Addison never cheated on Derek with Mark. Addison is a lesbian btw, and Meredith is bisexual.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Hey, Meredith," Derek smiled and beckoned her over. "I have a tumor if you're interested."

Meredith begrudgingly walked over, her steps heavy, she didn't want to talk to him. But being an intern meant you did what your attendings asked of you. Ever since Derek and Addison had broken up for good and their divorce papers signed, he'd been hounding her about surgeries and spending time together outside of work. It was exhausting, she needed a break from him. Brain surgery couldn't even charm her way back into his OR–at least not willingly.

"It's Grey or Dr. Grey, Dr. Shepherd." Meredith said, stuffing her hands in her pocket.

Derek frowned, not understanding, "What?" He reached out to tuck a hair behind her ear, but she neatly stepped back away from his touch.

"From now on, it's strictly professional between us." Meredith sighed, "And no more handing me surgeries, Alex and Izzie are on your service today. She's a great surgeon."

"I don't want Dr. Karev, I want you." He stepped closer into her space, "You're a better surgeon than he is, and Dr. Stevens is still on probation."

Meredith held her ground, she glanced up, staring him head on, and she said, "Then teach him to be better, and don't use me as an excuse." She bit her lip, feeling her palms start to sweat, "Is that all Dr. Shepherd?"

He sighed, crestfallen, "Yeah, that's all I was interested in, Dr. Grey. I will see you next time you're on my service."

Meredith nodded, "Yep." She walked away, her breathing picked up. *No, not now*—she thought. Her hearing became muffled, she slowly took the stairs to the fourth floor and to the OB-GYN wing. Meredith was on Addison's service today and she couldn't be late, but first she needed to calm down.

Meredith found the first unlocked on-call room, slipping inside, and she slid to the floor. She brought her legs to her chest and closed her eyes, concentrating on her breath—willing it to slow. *I'm okay, it's going to be okay*—she repeated over and over until her system returned to her normal.

Looking up, she noticed a pile of designer clothes on the floor, she reddened, "I didn't know there was someone in here." She got up, the *Jimmy Choo* heels were familiar, she knew of only one attending on this floor who wore those regularly. *Fuck my attending is going to kill me, two for two Meredith, great going.* She glanced around, the beds were empty and there wasn't anyone underneath.

Meredith frowned, "Why are there a pile of clothes on the floor?" She moved closer, lifting a top and smelling the perfume—it was Addison's signature scent, a spicy vanilla with a hint of amber. She breathed it in one more time, it soothed her frayed nerves. Wide-eyed realizing what she was doing and she dropped it on the ground.

The bundle of clothes moved, Meredith screamed, jumping back into the wall. "What the—"

Red locks popped out from under the pile, she wiggled out—freeing herself, she demanded, "What the hell is going on?"

Meredith gaped, "Uh, Dr. Montgomery, you're um—" She gestured, awkwardly.

Addison whipped around, her steely eyed glare only hit Meredith's shins. "Why are you a giant?" She glanced up, falling onto her back.

"You're so tiny." She breathed out.

"Why am I naked?" Addison covered her breasts, shifting uncomfortably under Meredith's gaze.

Meredith looked away to preserve whatever dignity she could give her attending, "I don't know, why are you so tiny?"

"I…" She trailed off, studying the clothes she had climbed out from under, she tugged the sleeve over and held it up above her chest. "These are *my* clothes."

"Yeah," Meredith stared at the ceiling, she asked, "Do you know what you were doing before?"

"I was looking over at the cases today, and then I felt weak and ran in here. I…I don't remember what happened next. I just woke up…smothered in clothes." She sighed, "You can look, I'm covered now."

Meredith kneeled down to her level, resting against the wall, "Look um, you want me to call someone?"

"Oh God no, I'd be experimented on." Addison suspiciously eyed her, "*You're* not going to experiment on me, right?" She glanced around for the nearest hiding spot, her curls whipping around.

“I promise.” Meredith quickly said, “No experimenting on you. I’ve already upset one attending today, I’m not going to upset another.”

Addison stopped searching, she curiously raised an eyebrow, “It’s,” She looked at the clock, “6:20. How could you already upset an attending?”

Meredith mumbled, “I managed, it was Derek.”

“Well, he’s not a big fan of me either. So, I don’t know what to tell you.” She ran her fingers through her hair, nervously playing with the ends. Her other hand had a death grip on the sleeve, covering her modesty.

Meredith nodded, and she changed the subject. “So what do you want to do?”

“I can’t work like this.”

Meredith nodded again, more than likely her attending would be stepped on.

“Not to mention, I’m naked.” Addison whispered. “Can you—can you help me?”

“Yeah, I’ll help.” Meredith said instinctively without thinking about it, but she meant it. She’d do whatever she could to help.

Addison smiled, a rare full smile Meredith had never seen before. Not that the redhead had had much to smile about lately. Life had kicked her down, Derek refused to work with her, let alone be in the same room. Everyone in the hospital had picked a side on the Shepherd divorce, and, unfortunately, only a handful were on Addison’s side.

“How are we going to do this?” Meredith asked.

Addison sighed, “We need to get out of this room without anyone seeing me.” She scrutinized the blonde’s form, “You’re in your labcoat.”

“Yeah…” She looked down, the ends of her coat spilled onto the floor around her.

“Clear out your right pocket.”

Meredith did so without a word, she took out her stethoscope, a notepad, several pens, a penlight, and a reference sheet. “Aright.” She placed them in her other pocket, it was now bulging.

“Good, Dr. Grey. Now close your eyes,” Addison waited until Meredith had closed her eyes. “No peeking.”

“Hey,” Meredith protested, “I’m a gentlewoman, I’m not going to look.” She put her hand over her eyes for good measure, giving Addison the extra layer of security she was looking for.

The pitter patter of tiny feet reached her ears, Addison tugged the pocket down and climbed inside. She squirmed around, trying to find a comfortable spot and settled after a minute.

“Okay, you can look now.”

Meredith opened her eyes, and found Addison poking her head out, shoulders bare but she didn’t look further down. She was tiny, like a living, *breathing*, barbie. Addison’s trust in her —of all people—felt enormous.

Shaking herself out of those thoughts. It was something to examine later. She carefully stood up, mindful of her precious cargo. Meredith gathered her attending’s clothes, making sure to fold them under her watchful gaze and then took the pillowcase off the pillow, stuffing her clothes inside. She placed the heels sideways on top of the pile.

“Isn’t that going to look suspicious?” Addison finally spoke up.

“Not as suspicious as leaving it here. You’d be reported as *missing*.”

“Oh, well it’s not like people are going to miss me. No one likes me here.” She sunk down, hiding her face in her hands.

Meredith sighed, her heart breaking for her. “Addison, I know it doesn’t mean much coming from me, dirty mistress and all, but I’d look for you. I do like you.”

Addison sniffled, “It means a lot actually.”

Meredith picked up the bundle, “I’m going to find Bailey and request today and tomorrow off.” She cut off Addison’s protests. “I can make up my hours later. It’ll be fine. It’s more important getting you settled. If you’re still stuck like this, then we can figure something out.”

“Okay.”

“I’m going to take a detour to my locker to drop off the pillowcase. I’ll find Bailey after.” Meredith said, the elevator had emptied, they had a moment alone where they could talk freely.

Addison rubbed her chest, the impact of the bag had left her reeling. “Okay, just don’t swing that bag on me again.” She stood up to poke her head out to glare at Meredith.

Meredith sighed, “I said, I was sorry.”

“Well it hurts.” She complained. “Once was enough.”

The elevator dinged, Addison sat down as the doors opened.

It was jarring to be pocket-sized when she’d gotten so used to towering over most people. Her height had been a sore point with any man she’d dated, their tiny egos so fragile when she’d be taller than them while barefoot. Her marriage hadn’t been any better, she had to

settle for lower heels anytime she was on Derek's arm. Ever since her divorce, she'd worn her tallest heels to work everyday—delighting in looking down at men, especially Derek.

Now, she was not only like a doll, but she was at the complete mercy of someone other than herself. She didn't like this at all. She shuddered at the ghosts of others who crossed her boundaries and lines—refusing to listen when she told them no. But now wasn't the time to panic, she'd only worry Meredith.

To her surprise, Meredith was one of the few who took her side on the divorce. Her support had been quiet but much appreciated. After a hard day, she'd find juju on a chart with a sticky note in her scrawl. A quiet understanding nod in the halls as they passed each other. Meredith came prepared for cases, answering her questions correctly.

Addison was pulled out of her musings when she heard whispers as they walked through the halls. Her hearing was more sensitive—or voices were louder to her—what would've been a low whisper was now something she could hear quite clearly.

"*Whore.*

"Dirty Mistress."

"Slut."

"Adulterer."

"Homewrecker."

Her blood boiled. Meredith wasn't any of those and certainly not a homewrecker. *Homewrecker* implied there had been a home to wreck and there wasn't one. Her home hadn't been happy in years and it had been broken long before Derek had ever known about the blonde. It was disgraceful with what the whisperers were calling Meredith to her face.

Meredith had been innocent. She had ignored Derek's advances after she found out about the existence of Addison. She'd been an unwilling mistress. But still the whispers and rumors continued to swirl around her. Derek refused to clear her name, if he really loved Meredith as he claimed, he'd take the heat instead.

Prom had been a nightmare.

Derek's jealousy seeped through when he saw Meredith on Finn's arm. He tugged her onto the dance floor, Addison's smile slid off her face—she'd felt his seething as his hands bruised her hips.

What should've been a fun night to relive their youth had been ruined. By jealousy. By forbidden stares. Addison felt like dirt on his heel, unloved and unwanted, tossed aside like an old doll, in favor of the newer model.

Addison couldn't do it anymore. She packed her bags and left his trailer that same night. She'd kindly left him a note to tell him she wanted a divorce. It had taken him days to notice

her absence from the trailer. He'd proven her right once again, surgery was more important to him than her.

In leaving, she regained her freedom.

Something she'd lost back in college when she had been pressured by her parents to find a good man to settle down with. That was when she learned her parents had eyes everywhere. Scared, she promptly quit dating women when they threatened to disown her and take away her trust fund. It was something Addison regretted—bowing to their whims. She never found a man as attractive as a woman.

Meredith opened the door.

The rush of stale deodorant hit her nostrils. Wrinkling her nose, Addison poked her head out, rows of lockers and benches. The coast was clear, she chanced a look at Meredith, a blank expression but the eyes betrayed the swirling anguish inside.

Addison cleared her throat, gripping the edge of the pocket and twiddled with the fabric, she said, "You're not what those vipers call you."

"But they're right," Meredith opened her locker and stuffed Addison's clothes inside. Closing it, she flattened her palms against the locker, "I broke you two up." Her breathing picked up, and she gasped out, "I'm sorry."

"Meredith, I need you to listen to me." She waited until Meredith glanced down. "Derek and I divorcing was inevitable, you didn't do anything wrong. Derek did. I did. Not you. Okay? This wasn't your fault."

Meredith swallowed, "Okay." She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "I need a moment and then we'll head out there."

Addison nodded and settled back in her pocket. Despite herself, it was nice being part of a we again, if only for a moment.

Meredith found Bailey outside waiting for an incoming patient.

"Fuck, sorry Addison," Meredith whispered. She stepped outside, wincing at the bitter cold nipping at her skin. The small figure in her pocket shivered, not knowing what else to do, Meredith shoved her hand inside and pinned her attending between her body and her hand. Small fists and legs kicked out, her panicked breath fell rapidly on her palm. Meredith immediately loosened her hold, but it wasn't enough for the redhead. She kicked her one last time.

Meredith took her hand out, shame curled in belly, silently groaning. She royally fucked up. *Great Meredith, I really am two for two.*

She could feel Addison squirming into a ball at the bottom of her pocket. The redhead settled for a moment and then a small shuddering cry reached Meredith's ears. It broke her heart, she

cursed her impulsivity. What had been done with good intentions had not been read that way at all.

Her stomach flipped, anxiety knotted her insides once again.

A sharp voice pulled her away from thoughts about Addison.

“Grey, what are you doing here? Don’t tell me you’re trying to get out of OB.” Bailey glared, “Montgomery fought tooth and nail to win you over Shepherd.”

Meredith stared, *Addison had fought for me? And won? Not the time*—she thought. “I need to go home, my stomach is upset.” It wasn’t a lie anymore, she felt awful. A gust of wind blew her hair, her cheeks quickly lost color at the sting. She had no idea how Bailey was standing out here with only a gown on top of her scrubs. Her pocket shivered but mostly kept still. Meredith didn’t dare put her hand back in.

Bailey looked her up and down, narrowing her eyes. “I don’t buy it, but unlike the other whiny babies of your group, you rarely complain. Nor do you switch attendings to suit your needs. If your attending says you can go, then you can go.”

Meredith sighed. “She said yes.” Unless, Addison didn’t trust her anymore.

Sirens in the distance could be heard, Bailey waved her away. “I’ll see you in two days. Stomach bugs aren’t something to mess with, but Grey. I’ll make sure you have a nasty shift when you get back.”

Meredith winced, knowing it was a promise. “Okay.” She quickly left for the warmth inside.

Meredith hurried to the locker room, her converse squeaking on the linoleum. Each step she took, she made sure it didn’t jostle the woman inside. She kept her labcoat tightly around her body. Meredith hoped the room would still be empty.

Opening the door, she heard no one and quickly checked the showers and toilets. No one was here. Meredith went back and locked the door.

Meredith said, “The coast is clear.” She moved to the pile of clean hand towels and got one for Addison. It would keep her warm and also cover her body.

“Out! Get me out!” Her voice was thick and scratchy, but she made no move to stand up.

Meredith floundered for a moment, where could she safely let Addison out? More importantly, how could she do it without touching her and for her to do it under her own power. Her eyes landed on the lockers. “I will. Hold on inside, I’m going to take my labcoat off and then set it in my locker.”

“Okay.”

Meredith opened her locker, taking the redhead’s bag of clothes along with her own clothes and satchel out. All that was left were some medical books and an unopened water bottle.

Meredith carefully took off her labcoat and placed it inside. She made sure Addison's side was on top and far away from the edge.

"You're good to come out whenever you're ready and I got you a hand towel to use." Meredith then added, "I'm closing my eyes now." She sat on the bench, waiting for Addison.

Heart pounding in her chest, Addison poked her head out, she could just barely see the top of the blonde's head and she was a step away. Close enough to help but far enough to give her privacy and even room. She let out a ragged breath, relief flooded in her system, Meredith was letting her be.

Addison wriggled out of the pocket, standing up on the scratchy fabric of the coat. She could see more of Meredith now, head in her hands, eyes closed, shoulders hunched over, her down-trodden demeanor broke Addison's heart.

But seeing a giant hand coming at her, and then pinning her in place. It had been terrifying, she'd reacted instinctively. A painful reminder of other times men had put their hands on her —to make a point or to bodily move her out of their way. Shaken to her core, she had been surprised when Meredith had removed her hand. No one before her ever listened to her.

Addison needed to clear the air and set a clear boundary.

A shiver ran through her, reminding her of her nakedness. Addison tore her gaze away from Meredith.

She scoffed at the size of the hand towel, it was an oversized beach towel to her now. Unfolding it, she wrapped it around her frame several times, leaving her arms free, so could make use of her hands.

"Thank you for the towel. You can look now." Addison crossed her arms, it was nice to be somewhat clothed and warm.

Meredith opened her glassy eyes, and immediately started apologizing, "Dr. Montgomery, I am so sorry. I wanted to keep you warm and I didn't think about what it would seem like to you."

"Mer—" Addison tried.

She babbled, "I'm really sorry—" Meredith tucked her bangs away, unshed tears filled her eyes.

"Meredith."

"I'll understand if you want someone else to help you. Someone less clumsy and—"

"Grey!" Addison barked, a touch of her teaching voice stopped Meredith in her tracks.

Meredith visibly swallowed, and wiped at her eyes.

“Apology accepted—”

Meredith interrupted, “But—”

“No, I’m talking now.” Addison stared, and Meredith mimed zipping her lips. “I accept your apology. Just,” She paused. “Just don’t manhandle me. Or surprise me. I’m tiny,” she gestured to her body. “But I’m not an invalid or a doll. I realize there’s going to be times, you’ll have to move me because I can’t do it. Just let me know what you’re gonna do *before* you do it. You can talk now.”

Meredith quickly nodded, “I’ll let you know, Dr. Montgomery. I really am sorry, I acted without thinking.”

“I know, that’s why I’m not mad.” She sat down on the fading warmth of the labcoat, the books were cool to the touch. “And Meredith, you can call me Addison outside of the hospital. You volunteered to help me, we’re on a first name basis now.”

Meredith nodded, “Addison, I’m gonna change out of my scrubs and then we’ll go to the store to find you some clothes.”

Addison leaned forward, a wide smile on her face at the mention of clothes shopping and then it fell. She’d forgotten for a second that the trip was for doll clothes.

“You forgot that you're tiny, didn’t you?” Meredith pulled her scrub top off, tossing it in the bin, she left her long sleeve shirt on.

Addison blinked, and defensively said, “No.”

Meredith laughed, and suddenly, Addison didn’t have it in her to be annoyed anymore. Her laughter made her heart beat a little faster, shyly glancing away.

Meredith kicked her converse off and wiggled out of her scrubs. She quickly pulled on the jeans, buttoning them up and put her converse back on.

“Do you just wear the same shoes everywhere?”

“This coming from the woman who wears heels to work.”

Addison shrugged, and pointed out. “You wear the same pair everyday.”

“They’re sensible and I have two others just like them. I switch them out every week.” Meredith tugged an oversized winter jacket on. “I don’t know how you wear heels to work everyday. Especially the taller ones.”

“I’ve worn heels for most of my life. I’m used to it.”

“Do you own anything besides heels?”

“Yes.” Meredith arched an eyebrow, rolling her eyes, Addison continued. “There’s flats, sandals, and boots.” She wasn’t going to admit to having a large collection of crocs too. Or

go into more detail on the different types.

“So no tie on shoes.” Meredith teased, emptying out her pockets, she placed her gloves, chapstick, and a couple of band-aids in her satchel. She unbuttoned the front pocket by her chest.

“Hey,” Addison glared, “I wear sneakers in the OR. You’ve seen me wear them. I just forgot about them, they’re a fashion travesty.” Belatedly, she realized who she said that to. “No offense.”

“Some taken.” Meredith stuck her tongue out, and changed topics she said, “Okay. You ready to go to the store?”

“Yes, some clothes would be nice.” Addison stood up. Meredith placed her hand inside, and flipped her palm up just under waist height. Plopping down, she wiggled to the center of her hand.

“I’m going to support your back, okay?”

Addison nodded.

Meredith cupped her back, carefully holding her as she brought her out of the locker. “So pocket or satchel?”

“Pocket.” It felt like the safer choice and she could steal some of Meredith’s warmth for herself.

“You’re gonna have to ditch the towel for now, I’ll keep it in my other pocket.”

“Fine.” She said quietly, “Why couldn’t this have been the other way?”

Meredith barely held back her chuckle, she raised her hands up and let Addison move into the front pocket by her left breast on her own.

Addison hesitated, “How deep is this pocket?” She poked her head in, it was dark but it looked to be cozy and warm.

“About ten inches. It’s the biggest pocket I have and I’m not bringing my labcoat with me. Do you know how many strangers will come up to you for a diagnosis about a mysterious rash?”

Addison laughed, “Rookie mistake. I bet you didn’t make that mistake twice.”

“Never again.”

“I’m going in now.” She stared at Meredith until she closed her eyes.

Untucking the towel, Addison got on her knees and slowly lowered herself down. If she stood on the tips of her toes at the seam, she could look out from the pocket with ease.

Meredith stuffed the towel in her pocket and slung her bag over her right shoulder, coming into view of her—their—reflection, she stilled. Her jacket worked to their advantage, Addison's small frame was hidden in the puffiness and bulk. "Try curling up, I want to see what it looks like."

Addison glanced at her in the mirror, sliding down she curled around the curve of her breast, her ear pressed over the blonde's heart—she could barely hear anything over the gentle thumping.

Against all odds, she finally relaxed. Addison couldn't remember the last time she'd let her guard down enough to allow herself this luxury. She hummed, a deep pleasurable sigh and let herself sink further into the warmth and softness. This was nicer and offered more security than the labcoat pocket did.

A gentle finger ran down her spine, startling her out of her musings. The vibrations of Meredith's voice rumbled through her, she could barely make out her own name. Addison stood up, her bouncy curls frizzed from the static. "What?" She tucked her hair behind her ears.

Meredith raised an eyebrow, and she asked "Comfy?"

Addison pinkened. She couldn't just tell her the whole truth, it was sad and possibly pathetic. She said, "Answering a question with a question. How very teacher of you, Grey."

"Learned from the best," Meredith drawled. "My coat hides you in both positions, so you'll be good to go."

Meredith sneaked out of the hospital without running into her friends. She assumed they were either in surgery or rounding on patients.

The icy cold March air hit Addison square in the face, she held out for two seconds before she closed the flap and dropped, shivering as she curled deeper inside the pocket. Goosebumps appeared on her flesh, Meredith's warmth alone wasn't enough to cut through the chill.

Meredith unlocked her *Jeep* and placed Addison's clothes in the backseat—she'd return the pillowcase another time. She got in, putting the keys in the ignition and turned the heater on high. Cold air blasted them.

"You can come out, now."

"No."

Sighing, Meredith moved, setting her satchel in the passenger seat and buckling it. The car slowly warmed up, trying again, she said, "It's warmer in the car."

"I'll be the judge of that." Addison stood up, her toes digging into Meredith's ribs, and moved the flap. She wrinkled her nose at the state of the car, it desperately needed a cleaning.

Holding her tongue, she remembered her interns years all too well. There had been no time for anything that wasn't surgery or finding sleep. Warm air hit her face, she sighed. "Fine, I'll come out."

Meredith pulled the hand towel out from another pocket, setting it on her lap. "Hold my finger, and I'll pull you out and place you on the towel."

"Okay."

Meredith placed her index finger inside, Addison blinked—her thin finger was just shorter than her legs. Addison wrapped her hands around the finger, holding tight, her tiny fingers digging into the blonde's skin as she pulled her out of her pocket. She placed her on the towel and let Addison figure out what she wanted to do.

Awkwardly balancing on her thigh, she held on to the steering wheel and kicked the towel out from underfoot. Addison bent over and brought the corners of the towel up and wrapped it around her shoulders, closing it around her body and huddling into its warmth. "I'm covered."

Meredith nodded. "Good, I'm placing you in my satchel for the ride." She set her hand out.

Addison plopped down on her hand, letting Meredith take over. There was no way she could climb on her own to the other side. Not in her current attire anyway. Meredith set her down inside the satchel, her toes touching the glossy cover of some magazine.

Addison hopped off, and she settled in the bag.

Meredith put the car in drive and pulled out of the car.

Addison fell over when Meredith turned right. Grunting, she righted herself and held onto the edge of the bag. She peeked inside, she saw several hair ties, chapstick, flashcards, and what she thought was a magazine turned out to be a medical journal.

Addison smiled, "Hey, I recognize that medical journal. I have a paper in there." She touched the issue number, one she'd memorized like the back of her hand.

Meredith stopped at a red light, turning on her blinker. "You do? What's it about? I just picked it out of my stack today."

"*The effect of maternal cystic fibrosis in pregnancy*. It was a case study from back in New York." Addison hesitated, weighing if she really wanted to share.

Meredith kept quiet, sensing there was more. The light turned green, she pressed the gas pedal and turned left.

Addison tightly gripped the edge and stayed upright this time. She tilted her head, For some reason, she sensed she could trust Meredith.

"Derek," Addison said softly, and tucked a curl behind her ear. "He didn't like that my case was being considered for it. He started scrounging for cases and stopped coming home for

days at a time…" She trailed off, lost in the memory as she fingered the towel, trying to smooth out the wrinkles. Clearing her throat, she continued, "I thought having his attention was awful. But it was his jealousy and self-inflated ego that was somehow even worse. Every…every interaction we had at the hospital or at home ended in a fight. He did the same thing here that he did there. Never clearing my name or taking responsibility for his failures, he always had to blame someone else."

Meredith glanced her way, she softly said, "He never deserved you."

"Or you." Addison caught her eye.

The rest of the drive had been a silent one, but it wasn't awkward. Meredith turned on the radio, a pop song filled the silence.

Meredith thought about what the redhead said about Derek, she pointed out things she had noticed herself. His McDreaminess couldn't hide his worst traits anymore, the ego, jealousy, tearing down Addison's reputation, and stringing Meredith along with false promises. Meredith lost complete interest in him after she saw him for who he really was with his treatment of Addison.

Her eyes slid to the woman in the next seat, she had more talent in her pinky than Derek had with his whole body. Only eight people in the world could do what she does, and Derek had yet to put himself on the map with brain surgery. Meredith glanced away, setting her eyes back on the road.

Meredith admired her and hoped to be as successful as Addison someday in the future. She enjoyed learning from the redhead, though Meredith still couldn't figure out her specialty.

Meredith pulled in the parking lot of the kids store, and found a parking spot. "We're here."

Addison perked up, "Finally." She stood up, impatiently tapping her tiny foot.

Chuckling, Meredith unbuckled her seatbelt and held out a hand for Addison, her small weight slightly noticeable in her hands. She closed her eyes and felt Addison lower herself into the pocket with ease, and squirmed around for a moment and then settling. Meredith rolled the empty towel and placed it in her pocket. Just in case and to keep it warm.

Turning the car off, she put her keys with her wallet and phone. "Ready to brace the cold weather?"

"Not really but let's go, I need clothes." Addison closed the flap and burrowed, curling around her breast again.

Chapter End Notes

I used a real American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology for the title that would fit Addison's background, here is the link if you were interested in learning more about it. https://www.ajog.org/article/S0002-9378(04)01383-3/fulltext

Thank you, Plegg, for everything!! This fic couldn't have happened without her support.

PS I'm a barbie girl 😘

Chapter 2: gold cage, hostage to my feelings

Chapter Summary

Shopping trip, it goes differently than you would expect.

Chapter Notes

I definitely overdid it with the ~~unnecessary~~ research on this one, so many Barbie outfits…

So there are a variety of real outfits/Barbies from, ‘04, ‘05 and ‘06, vintage from the 80s and 90s, and outfits I just made up for the sake of Addison actually being comfortable i.e. her having bras and panties with no velcro or buttons. Tumblr and barbiepedia were incredibly helpful guides. And it took me down memory lane to my childhood. It was a fabulous time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Meredith hurried inside. She got a shopping cart and made a beeline to the Barbie aisle—which turned out to be three aisles of nothing but pink boxes lining the shelves. Her eyes widened at all of their options. Modern, themed, childish, and a few vintage. All boxed in plastic, their pretty features inviting her to look closer.

Pushing the cart in, she walked a few steps past the giant heads of different Barbies that would let you put their make up on and play with their hair.

Out of the corner of her eye, Meredith noticed Addison had moved the flap so she could also look, she stood on tiptoes.

“See anything you like?” Meredith asked.

Addison said, “There’s so much pink.”

“You wear pink scrubs.” Meredith frowned, glancing down at the woman in her pocket. Addison muttered something under her breath, Meredith saw her mouth moving but couldn’t make it out. “Sorry, I didn’t catch that.”

She huffed, sharply looking up, “It clashes with my hair.”

Meredith pressed her lips together, trying to hold in a laugh. “Well switch to the attending ones, you’d look good in the navy scrubs.” She winked.

Her face pinkened, and her lips opened in an ‘O’ shape. “Uh, how about that box?” She pointed randomly.

Meredith followed her finger, the blonde Barbie was dressed in a long sleeve purple shirt with a ribbon and jeans—“Complete with a purse and heels, no way.” She grabbed it and placed it in the cart. Her eyes slid onto the next one, “Huh, Barbie wearing Barbie themed clothes.” She grabbed it, the doll wore a crop top under a plaid jacket and jeans.

Addison stuck her head out further, eyeing more options. “They’re all bleak and not to my taste at all.”

“They’re for kids.” Meredith unhelpfully pointed out.

“Ugh, just put it in the cart, at least it’ll be warm. Does Barbie have to wear crop topped shirts for *every* occasion?”

“Apparently, but isn’t that *in* style?” Meredith tossed the doll in the cart. She moved closer to the shelves, so Addison could see more.

Addison waved her off, “Somewhat.” She settled down in the pocket, hands on the edge.

“This one has a long shirt, it’s like a tunic and she has leggings.” Meredith pointed to the Kennedy doll in front of them. It was the most modern outfit she’d ever seen, including the crimped hair.

Addison scoffed, and firmly said, “No.” She leaned out again, poking her head out to glare, “I *will* put you on scut if you put that in there.”

Meredith laughed, “I surrender. Now get back in there before you fall out.”

Huffing, Addison shot her one last glare and lowered herself down.

Eyes widening as she heard voices coming closer, an older woman and a young girl wandered down the aisle, checking out the toys too. Meredith whispered, “Company.”

Addison pulled the pocket fold down, she squirmed around for a moment, making sure to keep quiet and stilling once she settled.

Meredith watched them out of the corner of her eye, the young girl led her companion further down the aisle. She faced the shelves, keeping her back to them.

“Granny, can we get two Barbies, one for you and one for me?” She sweetly asked.

Her eyes watered, rubbing a fallen tear away, she said in a thick voice. “Yes, dear. You pick. I haven’t played Barbies in years.” She trailed after her granddaughter.

Meredith felt her heart speed up as they passed by, desperately hoping they'd go to the next aisle. Addison couldn't be seen, she was hidden well but it didn't stop the thoughts of her being found out. Covering up her nervousness, she reached for a random Barbie. It was a veterinarian themed one, sighing as she remembered Finn and Doc. She missed that lovable scruffy dog. Meredith put the box back, Addison wouldn't wear it.

Meredith moved the cart a couple more steps forward, the little girl was at the other end of the aisle with a box under one arm. She sighed when they left, relaxing for a moment to just breathe and settle her heart.

A Barbie caught her eye, this one darker skinned and dressed in something she'd wear. Addison's hang up would be the patches on the pants but it appeared cozy. The cream colored jacket would provide her some warmth, and it wasn't branded—something Addison would appreciate. Quietly, placing the box in the shopping cart, she eyed both ends of the aisle. Free of people.

Meredith whispered, "The coast is clear." The flap opened again.

"Did you place something in the cart?"

"No."

"Liar."

"Liar?"

Addison moved the flap up higher and raised a challenging eyebrow at her. "Nice try. You repeat back what someone says and you fidget." She glanced down, a victorious smirk on her face, pointing at Meredith rubbing her fingers together.

Meredith stopped the motion. "It's a surprise."

"Of clothes?"

"It's a surprise." She repeated.

Her face dropped, her delicate fingers worried the pocket edge again. "I don't really like surprises. Too many people have always gotten the wrong thing and made it a thing."

"What kind of thing?" Meredith asked, curious about the cause. No one had bothered to give her a surprise gift before. Her mother never cared to give her birthday gifts. Just a sticky note, telling her to be home before curfew—something she rarely did in high school and her mother never found out.

"The usual…" She trailed off for a moment, a faraway look in her eyes. "Nevermind, it makes me sound ungrateful and selfish."

"Oh." Meredith had an inkling of an idea, Derek had cruelly aired out many things about Addison with snide comments about rich girl problems. Meredith sensed there was more to it. Addison could buy almost anything she wanted in the world at the drop of a hat. It clicked.

People either didn’t get her a gift or they got her stuff she didn’t ask for. A woman like Addison valued sentimental and thoughtful gifts, not a hastily thrown together gift with no thought behind. Money couldn’t buy happiness, it only offered stability. “Addison, it’s okay to share. I won’t judge you.”

“Everyone judges me.” She quietly said, her voice tight with emotion.

Meredith could feel Addison tensing up and about to hide again. “I’m not everyone, I promise.”

Addison sighed. “I know you aren’t. You’re one of the few who tolerates me at the hospital. But I really don’t want to talk about it.”

Nodding, Meredith dropped it. Exhaustion had leaked through in her voice, she’d had this conversation before and she expected Meredith to react the same way everyone else did. This wasn’t the time or place to push her into an answer. If she ever felt comfortable answering it.

The Barbie in the cart looked back at Meredith. This wasn’t the moment to surprise Addison, maybe another time when she knew more about her and her tastes. Meredith reached in, “I wanted to surprise you with this.” She sensed the redhead breathe out a sigh and relax in her pocket.

“Oh.” Addison quietly took the outfit in, the details of the cream jacket, the scarf tied around her neck, and the jeans. “I love this one, it looks like normal clothes.”

“You actually like it?”

“Yeah.”

“So this would’ve been a good surprise?”

Addison glanced away from the Barbie to look up at Meredith, “Yeah.” She tucked a curl behind her ears, a pleased smile curving her lips.

Meredith felt her heart stutter a beat, she’d do whatever she could to keep that smile on her face. *Don’t be stupid, she’s way out of my league. Focus*—she thought. Scanning the shelves—determined to not think about Addison, her smile, or the way her big blue eyes shined with happiness and gratitude—she found a blonde Barbie with pig tails, dressed in a *Disney* themed red and black minidress, smaller Mickey ears silhouette lined the hem. She said, “Barbie at *Disney*.”

Addison squinted, “I don’t think it would cover my ass.”

“It might, you’re all leggy and fabulous.” Meredith said without thinking.

“I’m all what?” She choked out.

“Shit, I said that out loud.” She temporarily forgot just who she was talking to for a moment. “Forget I said that.”

“I don’t think so,” Addison smoothly recovered. “It’s not everyday someone calls me leggy and fabulous.” The redhead grinned, a teasing Cheshire smirk. “It’s sweet.”

Meredith felt her cheeks flush, silently kicking herself for turning into a teenager with her first crush. “Shopping. We’re here to shop.” She said it to remind herself. Her habit of inserting her foot in mouth was not helping. Nothing intelligible came out, just word vomit or worse—her impulsivity. She lost her filter around the redhead.

Addison chuckled, “Oh, we’re circling back to this sometime.” She gestured between them.

Nervously swallowing, Meredith grabbed a random box. “Clothes. You need clothes, so you’re clothed. Uh, how about this one? This one has…many clothes.” Icy blue and silver clothes with three types of heels, she held it up closer for Addison to see.

“No, it’s party girl themed and it wouldn’t keep me warm. I like the heels though.”

Meredith put it back, looking down in the cart she winced at the few options. “Okay so we have three yeses and we’re halfway down this aisle.”

“How many aisles are there?”

“Three.”

“Oh.” Addison crossed her arms. “It’s not my fault the clothes are something I’d never wear.”

“You’re gonna have to start saying yes to some clothes. Is this a yes?” Meredith grabbed a package of Barbie bra and panties, it came in nude, white, and black.

“Yes. Put it in the cart.”

Meredith got three sets and threw them in the cart. Along with three sets of socks and tights were next to it. Meredith put a few packages in the cart. It was a basic necessity, hopefully it would help keep the chafing of the plastic shoes to a minimum.

Her eyes slid to the shelf below, Meredith gasped, "Barbie is going on a sleepover!" She’d never seen anything like it before.

"No, Meredith, Barbie is not going on a sleepover. 'Barbie' is a real person named Addison Montgomery, Meredith. Barbie does not need *Winnie the Pooh* pajamas. Barbie is a surgeon. Bar–" Addison stopped mid-sentence, realizing her misstep too late.

Meredith bit her lip as silent laughter shook through the blonde’s body at that rant, it made Addison hold on to the pocket edge with both hands, her grip tight. She wiped a stray tear away, “I meant the tiny Barbie accessories that come with it—look at that tiny bag.” She pointed, “Why does Barbie even need a bag?”

“It’s usually for the child to use.”

That stopped Meredith in her tracks, she'd never heard of that before. She raised an eyebrow, "So like Barbie and me?"

"Have you never played with dolls?" Addison poked her head out further.

"Sorta, I had Anatomy Jane with all of her detachable organs, but I didn't know the names as a kid. You need a couple pajamas." She tossed it in the cart.

"Hey, hold up. What if I didn't want that one?"

Meredith pointed to the Barbie wearing purple négligée and the strawberry themed pajamas. "They only have these three options."

Addison hesitated, weighing the choices. She rolled her eyes, "I'll take the childish ones."

"Barbie at a sleepover." She set the two Barbies inside the cart. Chuckling, she corrected herself, "Sorry, Barbie is a *surgeon*."

"Shut up." Addison said, but it lacked any real heat to it. She settled back down and crossed her arms.

Meredith grinned, informing her. "I'm still looking for a Barbie with a white coat."

"No, I'm not treating patients like this."

"You don't have to wear it, but I'm still getting it for you." Meredith said, secretly pleased her word vomit distracted Addison from her memories even if only for a moment.

It seemed she wasn't the only one here who could slide into the dark and twisties, but Addison didn't really have a Cristina to pull her out of one. Savvy had come and gone. No one was there for the redhead, Meredith foolishly wondered if her presence would be accepted for that role.

The cart slowly filled up as they went down the aisles, two more incidents of someone wandering down their aisle made Addison drop deep in the pocket. Her heart pounded nearly as loud as Meredith's did, wondering if this was when she'd be found out.

The clothes options were not all what she'd normally go for, but the circumstances were dire. She'd rather be clothed and vulnerable, then naked and vulnerable. Even in Meredith's oversized pocket, she felt a lingering chill settle in her bones. Shrinking to nearly the size of a Barbie had taken her ability to keep warm.

They rounded the last aisle, Addison breathed a sigh of relief. From her vantage point, she could see this aisle was filled with accessories, furniture, and Kens. It meant they were nearly done, something she never thought she'd be happy about before. Normally, her shopping companions were complaining about their feet burning long before she'd be ready to call it. Today was a really strange day.

Meredith hesitated in front of the Barbie furniture section.

Addison glanced up, eyeing the blonde, “No, we don’t need it.”

“But it has storage.” She let go of the cart and touched the edge of the box. A small open wardrobe with a mirror as the backing, a rack with hangers and three drawers.

“To store my Barbie sized clothes?”

“Yeah.”

“Couldn’t they just go in a shoe box?”

“Well—”

Addison interrupted to ask, “Or one of your drawers?”

Meredith grabbed the box, “I’m trying to give you independence to get your own clothes.”

“Oh.” Her breath hitched and she leaned into Meredith’s sternum. Meredith once again considered her independence and freedom. She hadn’t gotten that growing up, always under her parents’ thumb, no say in what she could and couldn’t do.

Meredith set it in the cart without a word, along with a few other pieces—a dresser, twin sized bed complete with bedding, a chair and small table.

“A bed?” Addison couldn’t help but ask.

“We need it, I’ve been told I’m a restless sleeper.”

Addison let it go. It wasn’t her business to know more. Though she couldn’t help but wonder why Meredith was helping her and considering, well, everything she’d need. She really lucked out with Meredith finding her in the on-call room. She shuddered if Yang had found her or worse Karev. It would’ve been a nightmare.

Meredith moved the cart forward, the Kens came closer into view with each step she took. Their features eerily similar to Mark’s face, she made a face. On a higher shelf, one stood out, the gray hoodie similar to her Yale hoodie. It appeared cozy, she hesitated, smoothing the end of a curl.

“Addison?” Meredith stopped.

How did she know? She kept being in tune to my emotions. It was weirder than shrinking to this size.

She prompted, “Do you see something you want?”

Addison swallowed her pride, asking for a hoodie was something she could do. She cleared her throat, “Add the Ken doll with the gray hoodie to the pile, please.”

“Sure.” Meredith stood on her tiptoes, reaching for the Ken with the tips of her finger. She barely grazed it, huffing, she knocked it down with her middle finger—Addison flinched,

ducking and covering her face—catching it with her other hand. “Got it.” She lowered herself down to the balls of her feet.

Addison rapidly blinked, heart pounding in her chest. She gasped out, “Please, don’t do that again.”

“Oh shit, I’m sorry. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Addison stood straight up, she breathed in deeply a couple times—willing her heart to slow.

Meredith suspiciously eyed her, “That’s my line.”

“Well, I’m borrowing it.” She resisted sticking her tongue out.

Meredith opened her mouth when her eyes widened. “Company,” She whispered, turning to face the shopping cart.

Addison ducked down, curling around her breast and made herself smaller. Her heart picked up once more but this in time to Meredith’s heart. She found herself getting used to the faster rhythm, it soothed her. Being tucked away in her pocket quickly became her favorite spot in the whole world, she’d never felt this safe with another person before in her life—it terrified her.

She felt Meredith move, more than likely she was figuring out if Addison would need an item. Addison hoped the blonde wouldn’t get her anything else and she was just looking closer. They had more than enough for a week’s worth of clothes. A part of her felt guilty that she couldn’t pay for any of this right now, her wallet and keys were in her locker at the hospital. Even with access to her trust fund, she remembered what an intern’s salary was like. It wasn’t enough to cover groceries and bills—let alone for this kind of excursion. She would be paying her back the second she could.

Shopping with Meredith was an experience, she both valued Addison’s wants and needs but she also teased and made jokes. She simply cared in a way most people never bothered. It made for a memorable time, if slightly confusing as well.

Addison *liked* Meredith. Her wit, charm, and compassion were all traits she looked for in a partner. Many things held her back from pursuing her, the main one was the power imbalance. Meredith was still an intern, her career starting out and despite the flagrant sexual conduct amongst Addison’s peers—it was unprofessional and wrong. Addison couldn’t and wouldn’t cross that line, no matter how much she liked the blonde.

Though she was unsure if Meredith felt the same about her. Her gaydar was impeccable, she’d clocked her as bisexual within two days of being around her. That she wasn’t worried about, it was her personal life.

She repeatedly twirled a curl around her finger as she thought more on why Meredith wouldn’t want anything to do with her. Her personal life was a dumpster fire. She’d been

shoved back into the closet, a failed marriage under her belt, currently no home to her name, and an ex who couldn't keep her name out of his mouth.

Not to mention, Derek's relentless pursuit of Meredith. He'd been incensed with the vet. Derek was blinded by his lust for Meredith, he didn't see he was hurting her education by keeping her in Neuro. Meredith needed a well-rounded education in all the specialties Seattle Grace offered. Addison hated his backhanded way of getting the blonde *after* she was assigned to an attending. It was frustrating and unprofessional.

Addison humorlessly smiled. Derek would have a field day if he ever found out. She had never confessed her truth to him, not on the night he left nor while signing divorce papers. She couldn't do it. If he had a tendency of overreacting when it came to her over their careers, she couldn't imagine what it would be like if she told him *everything*. Their entire relationship had been built on a lie, he'd lash out and attempt to make her life a living hell. She shuddered if that day ever came. She couldn't face that storm.

At least her parents no longer had the same power over her, she'd become of age to gain full access to her trust fund. They no longer had a real say in how she ran her life, she saw them once a year at Thanksgiving. She hated going back.

Meredith interrupted her circling thoughts, a gentle finger ran down her spine—pulling her back to reality. Her voice soft, "Going to checkout."

Addison tried to unwrap the curl, it tangled in her finger, shaking her hand loose, she roughly tapped her chest twice to signal she got the message.

"Got it." Meredith whispered, a small chuckle in her voice and something Addison could feel, she pushed the cart forward and left Barbie-land. One step closer to being dressed again, she'd never missed being clothed this much until now.

Meredith stopped for a moment, reaching for something and set it in the cart. Addison wondered what she found. She hoped it wasn't anything pink.

A few minutes later, they stood in line. Addison huffed, she hated not knowing what was going on. She breathed a sigh of relief when Meredith moved forward.

The cashier blinked as she put the last item on the conveyor belt. Meredith stood tall, refusing to be embarrassed by the amount of Barbies she's buying. It was for Addison, she needed clothes and to have options. They had no idea how long Addison would stay this size, better to over prepare then to not have enough.

He started ringing the items up, one at a time. His eyebrows disappeared into his fringe with each box. A question on the tip of his tongue but he kept swallowing it.

Meredith offered with a small shrug, "It's for a toy drive."

"Oh, that's nice. Didn't know they were running one this time of the year?" He picked up the *Winnie the Pooh* pajama Barbie, scanning it and putting it in a bag. Meredith hid a smile with

the back of her hand, Addison's rant had been hilarious.

He chattered as he finished up scanning, Meredith hummed and nodded at the appropriate spots but she stopped paying attention to him. Her mind wandered to how she was going to hide the tiny redhead from her nosy roommates. They meant well but they had turned into mother hens after she'd gone under the knife. Izzie hadn't let up, making her hearty meals and snacks. George still wouldn't let her carry anything over ten pounds. In a strange way, she appreciated their attention even though they were going overboard. But she was fine, Bailey *and* Webber cleared her for work.

"Are you paying with cash or card?"

Meredith glanced up, "Card." She pulled out her wallet, she got out a rarely used card. It was the one she used for her mother's care and emergencies. She swiped it.

"Will you be needing a hand to take this to your car?" He printed out the receipt and handed it over.

Stuffing it in her wallet, she set it in her back pocket. "No, I'm good." Meredith picked up all of the bags, careful to not dislodge Addison from her hiding spot or hit her with a bag.

Meredith placed the last bag in the back. "Addison, do you want an outfit now?"

Addison lifted the fold over the pocket, shivering as the cold air hit her flesh. "No, it might not fit. Might as well wait until we get to your house." She closed the fold.

Closing the tailgate, Meredith said, "Okay." She got in the car and put the keys in the ignition. Cold air blasted her in the face. "Just a minute, it'll warm up."

Addison dreaded coming out, she huddled deeper in the pocket. At least the towel would be warm. She'd prefer to stay inside the pocket but she knew Meredith wouldn't go for it, she'd cite the airbag instantly killing her. A surgeon wouldn't be able to help her.

Surgeon, surgery…oh fuck, fuck, fuck.

She uncurled herself and opened the flap, not caring about the cold anymore. "What time is it?"

"Ten."

"Shit, where's my phone? I have a surgery scheduled to start in an hour." Addison started to climb out, no longer caring about nudity. She had not once ever canceled on a patient before until now.

"What are you—" Meredith yelped. Addison pushed off her chest with her toes. She held her hands out as Addison fell out head first, catching her around the waist and setting her on her other palm. "Addison, you can't do that. You'll get hurt."

Addison pushed red hair out of her face, her blue eyes sharp, she demanded, “Get me my phone, now!”

“Alright.” Meredith set her in the satchel and turned around to get the pillowcase from the backseat.

Addison chewed on her lip, she resisted the urge to tell her to hurry. Heels. Her stack of clothes. Finally her labcoat. Meredith dug around, finding her phone. “Here.” She set the phone down inside the satchel.

Addison nodded, she grimaced at her reflection, her hair had frizzed and snarled while inside the pocket. Ignoring the state of her hair, she pushed the button to check her phone call log. Several missed calls from: *Richard, Callie, and Mark.* A voicemail from Mark, she’d listen to it in a moment. The missed call from Callie surprised her, perhaps she really did make a friend with her.

She called Richard back, drumming her fingers against her thigh.

Meredith placed the items back in the pillowcase, putting it in the back seat.

“Addie, are you okay? It’s not like you leave the hospital without a word.”

Addison hunched over and lowered her voice, making it gravelly to sound sick. “I’m coming down with the flu.” She coughed, covering her mouth. “I—I c-can barely stand. My patients —”

He interrupted her, *“I’ll get someone to cover for you. You stay home and rest up.”*

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Meredith turn to stare. Addison shrugged, coughing she said, “Are you sure? I c-could try—”

“I need my star surgeon back on her feet.” Addison rolled her eyes, he said that to all his surgeons. *“You rest. Stay home until you’re feeling better. Do you have all the supplies you need?”*

“Uh-huh. I got all I need.” She sniffled, rubbing her nose.

“*Good, I’ll see you in a week.”* He hung up without another word.

“You just lied to the Chief of Surgery.”

Addison dropped the act, straightening her posture, she said with a shrug, “Yeah.”

“And you did it convincingly.”

Addison shrugged again, “I learned as a kid, if I was going to lie, then I had to do it well. Plus all the years of ballet helped.” She left out the part of living a lie for the last twenty years, pretending to be a straight woman had been a testament to her ability to act.

“You’re sneaky, I like it.” Meredith handed the towel over. “Follow up rule to the ‘no grabbing you by surprise’ rule.” She waited for Addison to tuck the towel around her body. “No jumping out of my pocket. You could seriously get hurt.”

Addison tried, “Does it help that I knew you’d catch me?”

“No!” Meredith cried out, throwing her hands up in the air. “I could have squeezed too hard on your waist. Or missed altogether.”

“I won’t do it again.” She pushed the button to listen to Mark’s message. “Scout’s honor or something.”

Meredith rolled her eyes, mumbling underneath her breath about reckless redheads.

“Red, are you okay? It wasn’t Derek, was it? He didn’t touch you—”

Her eyes widened, she hurriedly clicked it off before he could reveal more. She berated herself for listening to it where Meredith could overhear.

“What was that all about?”

“Nothing, it’s fine.” Addison crossed her arms, her mouth set in a firm line. She kicked her *Blackberry* in the bottom of the satchel, looking out the window—she refused to elaborate, it wasn’t something Meredith needed to know.

The blonde suspiciously eyed her, “Okay, then.” She took the car out of park and drove them away.

Meredith set Addison on her made bed, “I’ll be back with the rest of the Barbies.” She set the redhead’s phone on the bed, “Call me if anything comes up.” She put the pillowcase by her own dresser.

Addison silently nodded, sitting cross-legged without a word.

She frowned. It was unlike Addison to be this quiet, she filled any room she walked in with some kind of sound whether it was heels clicking on the floors, a comment, or to ask a question. Her presence alone could fill a space, but seeing her curl into herself, small tremors wracking her frame, she was trying to hide in her own skin. After that voicemail with Mark, she’d been distant—her walls thrown back up. Whatever he’d been about to say, Addison clearly knew and cut it off before he could reveal more.

Meredith reluctantly left, she closed the door behind her. She walked down the stairs, slower than normal to give Addison an opportunity to process her emotions and thoughts without her there. They’d been practically glued together for most of the morning. Addison had just rolled with everything that had happened to her, almost too easily.

Her stomach rumbled, Meredith sighed. They’d have to figure out food and drinks for Addison. She hadn’t said a word about hunger and thirst, but Meredith noticed Addison

usually ate a small breakfast and then some kind of snack with water before she got into surgery.

Opening the front door, Meredith got to her car and grabbed one bag. She walked inside and placed it by the door—doing this several times.

“A thimble could work for a cup.” Meredith mused out loud several minutes later. “Maybe Izzie has one lying around in her sewing kit.” She put the last bag in the house, hanging up her jacket on the coat rack and kicking her shoes off. She left her shoes by the door, Izzie hated that particular habit and had on more than one occasion thrown all of her shoes into her closet herself.

Meredith did the same thing as before, she took one bag at a time up the stairs. “Where did she last leave her sewing kit?” She made several trips, on the top of the stairs, she glanced in the direction of her closed bedroom door—nothing, no noise could be heard.

She wandered into the living room, the sewing kit laid on the side table. Opening it, she found two thimbles. She grabbed one and closed the lid. Meredith walked into the kitchen, quickly cleaning the thimble—double-checking it was watertight. A small grin appeared when it did. Meredith dried it off, opening the fridge for a water bottle.

The door closed with a click. Addison carefully listened for her footsteps to go down the hall, her eyes pricked with unshed tears. Everything hit her all at once. The whispers behind her back, the lies Derek spewed, her divorce, selling the two properties in New York all by herself, the lack of a support system, and the unexplained shrinking. Her perfectly put together mask started to crack into pieces.

She fell over onto her side, hugging her knees to her chest, rapidly blinking as she fought to not cry. The unfamiliar room not helping her to ground herself, but everywhere was unfamiliar to her. Nowhere was home. She stupidly found herself wishing for the safety of Meredith’s pocket. A traitorous tear fell, swiping it away; another one took its place. Her breath hitched and a raw cry fell from her lips, more tears dripped sideways and pooled underneath her cheek. Addison sobbed into her knees.

The unfairness of it all hitting her square in the chest, especially Mark bringing up her past in a voicemail. He had no right. There were women in worse situations than she’d been in. She was okay. She made it out. She didn’t need the reminder of what could’ve happened, not when she lived through it.

Addison closed her eyes, concentrating on her breathing—just like her therapist had taught her in their second session. She buried her nose in the comforter, hints of lavender filled her nostrils. A shuddering sigh left her, she just focused on her breath, it was something she could control right now.

Addison didn’t know how long she laid on her side when the front door closed with a final slam. Opening her eyes, the crushing wave of emotions had settled. In its place, she felt exhausted and numb. She wiped the remnants of tears and snot away with a corner of the towel.

Footsteps going up and down the stairs alerted her to the end of her alone time. She sat up, a quick glance at her reflection in her phone showed her makeup had been wiped off, red-rimmed eyes matched her red nose. She fingercombed her hair, the curls had dropped into loose waves. Sighing, she shrugged, it was the best she could do. Her mask slowly rose into place, the longer she sat there, listening to Meredith's footsteps going back and forth.

Meredith knocked, waiting a couple seconds before she came in. "I found you a cup to drink out of, Izzie has a water tight thimble." She showed her two prizes, a cup and the water bottle.

"Wha—ugh," Voice thick, Addison coughed into her elbow to clear her throat, trying again, she asked, "What, you didn't get a tea set at the toy store?" She tried to wink, but it felt clumsy. "Thank you."

"Don't tempt me, we could always go back out for more supplies." Meredith pointed at her with the water bottle, she filled the thimble and handed it to Addison. She set the water bottle on the night stand. "I cleaned the thimble. I'll be right back to get your bags." If she saw through her act, she kindly let it go.

Bringing the metal rim to her lips, she sipped, the cool liquid a balm to her dry throat. She drank half of it in several gulps.

Meredith made two trips, she set them in a pile on the end of the bed. She pulled a pair of scissors out from her dresser, "Ready to get dressed?"

"Yes please." Addison finished the rest of her cup.

Addison came out of the bathroom, dressed in the crop top with Barbie written across the top and jeans. The velcro on the back of the shirt felt weird against her skin, but she could get used to it, she was finally clothed. The pants dragged on the floor, she rolled the ends twice. She pulled on the cream plaid sweater that went with the outfit. The shoes were a lost cause, the pink plastic pinched her toes.

Meredith had put on a hoodie and settled herself in the middle of the bed, plastic boxes neatly stacked around her. Naked dolls off to the side, a growing pile of clothes on the other side. "Look at you, straight off the runway." She teased.

Striking a pose, Addison said, "Very fashion chic, all the Barbies will be jealous I rock this outfit better than them."

"Yes, you do. How's the fit?" She carefully undressed another Barbie, the one with the fishing pole. Addison had almost not picked that one, it reminded her of that stupid trailer and Derek. But the pants were cute.

Addison hesitated for half a second, truthfully it was itchy but she could live with it. She lived in tailored designer clothes for her whole life, it was natural for her skin to feel the difference in material. "It's comfortable enough."

Meredith tilted her head, eyeing the redhead. “Addison, how bad is it?” She folded the top.

“It’s fine.” Addison said, “I can live with it.”

“Okay.” She said, dropping the subject. “Do you want to be up here?”

Addison nodded, walking closer to the bed she got in reach of Meredith’s waiting hand and took a seat. Meredith brought her up, she cleared a spot for her in front of her.

Addison stood up, taking it all in, she really was tiny in comparison. The various stack of boxes were like buildings in a city, Meredith herself was a giant. Addison had to strain her neck to look her in the eye.

“Here,” Meredith’s voice pulled her out of her thoughts. “I finished unboxing the furniture. You can put the clothes away.”

Addison smiled, Meredith hadn’t just been taking the clothes off, she’d been folding them too. It was sweet of her. “Sure.”

They went about their joint activity together, a comfortable silence filled the room. Addison quickly caught up as she filled the drawers and wardrobe. She soon took over the folding as well.

Meredith unboxed the Ken doll, “Do you want the whole outfit? Or just the hoodie?”

Addison shook her head, “Just the hoodie.” It was eerie looking at the pile of discarded Barbies, they were now life-size mannequins, something she'd see at a clothing store but the painted details on their faces creeped her out. Shuddering, she kept her gaze firmly on the clothes.

A small chuckle left the blonde, Addison whipped her head around. “Barbie at a sleepover, complete with the tiny bag.” She held the bag out, the key ring on her index finger. “Do you want the bag?” It swung in the air between them, the fuzzy blue bag, complete with a picture of *Winnie the Pooh’s* face.

Addison narrowed her eyes at the stupid bag that captured the blonde's amusement. “No, it can go in the trash where it belongs.”

“I’ll keep it then.” Meredith said with a laugh, “Could come in handy, you never know.”

She scowled and folded the *Winnie the Poo*h pajamas, she tried on the slippers. “Comfy.”

Meredith whispered. “Barbie at a sleepover.”

“Stop it.” She resisted throwing a slipper at the blonde.

“You’re right.” Meredith pulled the second to last box out. “Barbie is a surgeon.” She showed Addison the box.

Addison shot a death glare at the vintage blonde Barbie with a white coat, “Let it go.”

“Nope.”

Meredith placed the last broken down box in the trash, she’d tossed the dolls in the back of a drawer. She wasn’t sure what to do with them. Maybe she could donate them.

She walked back inside and found Addison still working on bits of chicken and rice, eating with her fingers off a plate—Meredith reheated leftovers from last night—a used napkin next to her. There were no utensils in the house that would work for her, the smallest one was a teaspoon, but it had been too heavy and awkward for Addison to use.

Addison wiped her hands on a napkin, she grabbed the thimble with two hands and finished the last of her water.

Leaning against the door jam, she asked, “You wanna watch old surgery tapes of my mother’s?”

Her eyebrows rose, she wiped her mouth with a napkin. “Old surgery tapes?”

“Yeah, my mother recorded surgeries in her residency. It’s something my friends and I like to watch.”

Addison stood up, “Sure.” She walked close to the edge of the table. “Stevens still hasn’t deposited that check?”

Meredith asked, “How did you know about it?”

“She asked me a couple weeks ago if I felt guilty for being rich.”

“Oh, sorry she asked.” Meredith took the plate, she threw the excess food away and put it in the dishwasher. “She’s been struggling with what she’s gonna do with it. It’s driving George and I crazy.”

She took the thimble, thoroughly cleaning and then drying it. *Now where to put it while it’s not in use. Oh, a reusable bag*—she thought. Meredith moved to an upper cabinet, standing on tip toe, she grabbed a bag out and turned around.

“It’s fine, I’m used to that question.” Addison got a lost look in her eye for a moment, waving it off, she said, “So, old surgery tapes?”

She put the thimble in a plastic bag, setting it in her pocket. “Yeah.” Meredith smiled, she moved closer and held her hand out. Addison sat on her palm, she rested against her fingers.

Meredith set Addison on the couch, she busied herself with getting the VCR set up. Pressing play, she turned around to find Addison had made herself comfy and dragged one of Izzie’s pillows to the middle of the couch. The comical size difference between the couch and Addison was laughable.

“What surgery is this?” Addison crossed her legs, resting against the cushion.

“A skin graft.” Meredith said innocently, she took a seat next to Addison, draping an arm over the back of the couch. Her attention half on her mother, the other on the tiny redhead slowly inching herself closer to her warmth.

Twenty minutes later, “She literally pulls his face off.” Her jaw dropped as she watched in fascination.

“It’s great, isn’t it?” Meredith wished she had a bowl of popcorn.

“Yeah.” She leaned forward, closely watching her technique.

To Addison’s surprise, she actually liked watching the old surgery tapes. After the skin graft, Meredith put on a couple more tapes. They spent the afternoon and most of the evening watching them. It wasn’t normally how Addison would spend her time off, she’d read a novel or watch Star Wars. This was fun, it reminded her of her own intern years, sneaking into galleries with her intern group to watch their attendings work.

Neither of them kept an eye on the clock, they were both lost in watching a young Ellis Grey perform life-saving surgeries. It was fascinating.

Addison frowned, the key in the lock broke the spell she was under. Diving into the front pocket of the blonde’s hoodie, the plastic crinkling underneath her body. She curled around the thimble, she heard Meredith start to say her name when the front door unlocked, Izzie and George on her heels.

“Oh.”

“Did you forget that we carpooled today?” George kicked his shoes off, placing his backpack on the stairs.

“We had to get a ride with Callie of all people.” Izzie complained. “Don’t leave your shoes there.”

“Izzie, be nice to my girlfriend.”

Addison intently listened to the interns, a frown appeared, from what she’d seen Callie was a good person. There weren’t that many people who would offer to climb over a bathroom stall door to comfort a stranger. *Did Stevens not like her?*

“I am nice!” She retorted. “And she’s your ex-girlfriend.”

“I’m sorting out things.”

“Sorry,” Meredith shrugged, interrupting their argument. “I got a stomach bug, Bailey let me have today and tomorrow off.”

George sat down next to her on the couch, “You should go to bed, Mer.”

“I’m making you chicken soup.” Izzie decided, she left the room and went to the kitchen, the rattling of cabinet doors and the pot being set on the stovetop.

Addison’s mouth watered, homemade chicken soup sounded delicious. Her stomach growled.

Meredith got up, “I got it George. I’ve been home all day by myself.” Through the opening of the hoodie, Addison could see Meredith batted his helping hand away. She went upstairs, fast footsteps right behind her.

Addison grew nervous, she forgot how nosy Meredith’s roommates could be.

“I’ll bring you a bowl when it’s done.” Izzie shouted from the kitchen.

Meredith turned around, “I got this.” She informed George. “I made it to my room with unnecessary supervision.”

“You passed out that first night after you got home from surgery.” He said dryly.

“I told you, I turned wrong and pulled at my stitches. It hurt. I didn’t pass out. Besides, it’s been six weeks since the appy, I’m all healed up.” Meredith slipped in and slammed the door closed, locking it for good measure.

Addison breathed out a sigh of relief, crawling to the edge, she poked her head out, “That was too close.”

Meredith nodded in agreement. “We lost track of time, it’s 8.”

Her stomach growled again, reminding her of how little she’d eaten today. “How long until the soup will be ready?”

“Forty-five minutes or so.” Meredith moved onto the bed, Addison crawled out from the pocket, jumping feet-first down. The bed bounced slightly underneath her feet. Addison resisted jumping on the bed, the surface was like a giant trampoline. She walked up to the pillows and rested against them.

“Okay.” She sighed.

An awkward silence filled the room, Addison wasn’t sure how to broach it. Now that Izzie and George were here, she couldn’t figure out how to talk to Meredith. All the conversation skills in those etiquette classes evaporated into smoke. She felt clumsy in her own skin, like the gangly-limbed teenager with the lisp and braces she would always be.

“You want to read a medical journal while we wait.”

Addison smiled, relieved that Meredith offered something they’d both be interested in, “Sure.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, Plegg for everything!! This fic couldn’t have happened without her support. I sent her soooooo many pictures of my findings of all the Barbies/outfits I came across. There are more outfits than what I listed in the fic, you’ll see them as the fic goes on.

Chapter 3: without your past, you never could’ve arrived…here

Chapter Notes

> New tags were added, please look at them. This chapter is long, well over 9k words words, it felt never ending as I was writing it. But here we are. I can’t promise there won’t be another chapter this long.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eyes fluttering open, Addison woke up on her side, she lazily blinked, taking in the unfamiliar ceiling. *Fuck, it wasn’t a dream*—she thought while pulling the turquoise comforter over her face.

A soft snore made her smile, she rolled onto her other side, almost falling off her tiny bed and onto the night stand. Peeking her head out, she noticed Meredith laid on her back, the early sun rays shining on her face—it made the blonde strands glow.

Whispers coming closer in the hall distracted her, “You check on her.”

“No, you. She’s grumpy when I wake her up."

“You’re gonna have to get over that sometime, George.”

Soft footsteps moved closer, wide-eyed Addison panicked. Jumping out of bed, she shoved her doll bed off the night stand—it landed with a small thud, bouncing underneath the bed. “This is so stupid,” Addison mumbled to herself. “I can do this.”

The door rattled, “She locked it again.”

“There’s a key on the door frame.”

“For emergencies only.”

“This *is* an emergency.”

“Is it, though?”

“Yes.”

Addison gathered her courage, she backed up and ran, leaping off the edge—years of muscle memory from ballet came back to her—automatically landing into a soft plié. Straightening her legs, she climbed onto Meredith’s shoulder, walking over her chest, she lowered herself down the other side and ducked underneath the sheets, crawling down to her hip.

A red flush overtook her body when she realized Meredith only wore a shirt and panties to bed—the shirt had ridden up, showing her belly button and a freckle near it. Blushing, Addison stopped looking and went still. Despite herself, she sighed at the warmth emanating from Meredith, even clothed and under a blanket, she'd been cold the entire night.

Meredith shifted away from her cold body, snorting awake, "What Ad…"

Izzie walked in, "Mer, can we take your car to work?"

"You can't just ask her like that." George protested. "The heater went out in Izzie's car, she's —"

Izzie interrupted him, slapping a hand over his mouth, she explained, "I haven't been able to afford the cost of a mechanic yet. It's gonna take two paychecks to cover the cost and well..." She vaguely gestured to her situation.

George pulled her hand off, "Well you could, if you'd deposit that—"

"I'm still deciding what I want to do with it." Izzie snapped.

Sitting up, Meredith yawned, "Yeah. Just make sure you fill it up." The changing of positions forced Addison to roll even closer into her.

"Thanks Mer, you're a real lifesaver. Rest and get plenty of fluids. There's leftover soup and I made breakfast."

"We'll be back later tonight."

"George, let's go." Izzie barked out, "I can't be late."

"Bye." The door closed behind him, Addison laid there, keeping still just in case one of them came back.

Meredith carefully lifted the covers past Addison's body, pulling the hem of her shirt down. She tilted her head.

Addison sat on her knees, smoothing her hair down. "Sorry, I panicked."

She frowned, arching an eyebrow, "Why are you—oh. Addison, it's fine. I walk around the house like this all the time. It's fine, but…" Meredith paused, a small smirk appeared on her lips, "I'll put on shorts next time you jump in my bed." She got up, throwing a wink her way as she disappeared into the bathroom.

Addison picked her jaw off the floor, she pointedly did not look further down then her hips. Falling onto her side, she buried her face in her hands, berating herself for finding her attractive. *She's an intern. She is an intern. She. Is. An. Intern. I cannot go after her, it would hurt her career. She's forbidden right now.*

Addison wanted to scream, the creeping realization settled in her brain, it wasn't like anymore—it was a full-blown crush, one she'd been in denial about for months now. It took

her brain time to fall in line with what her heart had already known. Addison Montgomery was crushing hard on Meredith Grey…it was a recipe for disaster and the blonde was not helping matters with her flirtatious nature.

Muttering underneath her breath, Addison said, “I’m in a hell of my own making, blondes were always my weakness in college.” She laid there, listening to the sounds of Meredith moving from the bathroom and into the closet.

“Closet is all yours.” Meredith said a few minutes later.

Addison frowned at the sound of sturdy heels on the hardwood floor, pulling her hands away from her face, she took in her appearance. She was dressed in a fitted long-sleeve purple shirt and dark jeans, but it was the boots that took her by surprise.

“You’re wearing boots.” She said, dumbfounded at seeing her in a different shoes.

Meredith glanced down, showing off the ankle boots. “I own more than just converse, you know. I wear other shoes while I’m off-duty.” She straightened her posture, “We’re sneaking out to get your wallet and keys from the hospital.”

“What? How? You just gave them your car.” Addison sat up, she scooted over to sit in the sunlight. She hummed, the warmth from the sun and where the blonde had laid warmed her skin.

“We’ll take a cab.” Meredith walked to her dresser, running a brush through her hair. Continuing, she said, “We never got those yesterday. I figured you’d want to have access to your own skincare and stuff. Plus we can take your car from the hospital and put it in the hotel parking lot. Then take a cab back home.”

“Yeah, it would be nice.” Addison admitted, though how she would use any of it without making a mess was a mystery. Last night getting ready for bed had been a fiasco from start to finish, shaking herself out of that memory, she realized what the blonde said about *her* car. “You know how to drive a stick shift.”

“Yeah, an old girlfriend taught me back in college.” Meredith put the brush down, “She taught me a lot of things back then.”

Addison critically eyed her. There wasn’t any cocky attitude, only a quiet confidence in her demeanor—just like in the OR. “I’ll be the judge of that, no one has driven my *Porsche* other than me.” It was her pride and joy when she bought it.

Chuckling, Meredith turned around, “I look forward to being the second then. You ready to get dressed?”

Addison wordlessly stood up, walking over to the edge of the bed. Meeting her there, Meredith held a hand out and lowered her to the ground. The hardwood floor felt cool to her bare feet.

Oh, my bed. I should rescue that before I forget where I put it—she thought.

Addison ducked underneath the comforter, a clear box filled with all sorts of sex toys and right next to it was her doll bed. She paused, hesitating to grab it now or let Meredith find it on her own later. Rolling her eyes at her own hesitancy, just because she didn't do that, didn't mean she held others to it. Addison put the teal comforter back on her bed, dragging it out by the head board.

"I knocked it over so your roommates wouldn't see." She said matter of factly, for once grateful to be small, her blush hopefully wasn't as noticeable this far away.

"Oh," A faint blush appeared across her cheeks, clearly she remembered what else was underneath her bed. "I would, uh, hate for it to collect any dust bunnies." Meredith bent over to pick up the doll bed and put it on her night stand. "I'll be in here. Shout if you need something."

Addison held in an unladylike snort, that box didn't have a single speck of dust on it. "I will." She walked off, the bed to the closet felt like walking a block in the city. She disappeared into the closet, finding the little nook Meredith cleared out for her last night. The few dresses the blonde owned had been moved to the other side of the closet, it freed up space for Addison's things and for Addison herself to move around with ease.

Stripping her strawberry themed pajamas off, she set them aside to rewear on top of the dresser. She tossed her panties into the jar Meredith had emptied of q-tips for her to use as a laundry basket. Addison rubbed her sides where the waistband of the panties had dug into her skin.

"It could've been worse." Addison muttered to herself, opening the dresser she pulled out a clean pair of panties and a bra. "I could've been forced to go commando—at least the bra fits." Only if she ignored the band sitting up between her shoulder blades.

Addison put on the tights, taking care to not make a run in the delicate fabric. Opening another drawer, she put on an orange mini skirt with a brown belt—the shorts on the inside had been a welcome surprise when she was putting the clothes away—and pressed the velcro closed. She noticed that all the pants had more give in the material than the panties.

She pulled on the brown leather jacket over the green sweater tank top, grabbing long socks out of a drawer. Addison moved to her shoe pile—she organized it by types of shoes and colors—picked out the beige knee-high boots with a rounded toe box, sitting down on the chair, she put on the long socks and the boots. Standing up, she tested the give of the heel, a harder shell that could take her weight.

Addison walked out of the closet, "Can you give me a boost to the sink?"

She set a medical journal aside, "Sure." She got up off the chair. Addison quickly glanced around, Meredith had made both their beds and the box of sex toys now had a towel to hide the contents.

Addison walked past the dresser and into the bathroom, Meredith a few steps behind her. Seven of her tiny steps could cross one of Meredith's strides.

She couldn’t help herself but be drawn to the clawfoot tub. It looked big enough to hold two people comfortably. Addison loved a good soak in the tub after a long day of being on her feet.

Once Addison got in front of the sink, she took a seat on her waiting palm, holding onto her index finger. Meredith lifted her up and set her over the counter.

“Need anything?” Meredith offered.

Addison took it in. After last night’s struggle to get ready for bed—she had fallen into the sink, thankfully with no real injuries—Meredith had figured it all out for her. The items were all neatly laid out for her to use: small bowl of water, drops of face soap and lotion on a clean lid, a dab of toothpaste on the toothbrush, and a wash cloth. Even a hairbrush from one of the many Barbie’s had been collected, it sat next to several small elastics.

Addison got off, holding Meredith’s finger for a moment longer than necessary. “No, it’s—it’s good. Thank you.” She whispered.

“You’re welcome, let me know if you need anything. I’ll be in the other room.” Meredith backed away, her heels clicking on the tile.

Heavily swallowing, Addison noticed the handheld mirror Meredith had propped up against the wall. Why is she being so helpful? I just don’t get it. No one has ever been like this for me.

It didn’t help her growing feelings for her, it was too good to be true. She just knew the other shoe would drop, just like it always did when something too good to be true came her way.

The last time she’d felt like this had been two nights before her 19th birthday.

Addison stripped off her jacket, setting it aside, she braided her hair, tucking the end underneath her bra strap. The memory of that weekend coming to the forefront of her mind.

Saturday, October 11th, 1986

Addison stepped into the deep pink ballgown, she huffed out a small breath as she picked it up over her chest, the dress heavier than she thought it would be. The layers and layers of tulle gave the dress a smooth, puffed out shape. It wasn’t something she would have picked out herself. She ran her fingers down the silky fabric only for Bizzy to slap her wrist.

“None of that, your fingerprints will stain the dress.” Bizzy scolded her, a drink in hand as she critically eyed her daughter.

Wrist smarting, Addison moved both hands to hold onto the beaded bodice, waiting for the woman Bizzy hired to get her ready for tonight to tighten the corset. She didn’t dare look back, in fear of yet another reprimand. Bizzy’s gaze only added to the weight Addison felt, the

dress and the pressure to live up to their exacting standards were equally heavy and suffocating.

She hated coming back home. If you could even call it that, a home was supposed to be filled with parents who loved you and each other. Or at least that was what happened in fairytales. From the age of eight and on, she stopped waiting for her parents to tell her they loved her. It only led to disappointment and crushed dreams. The only thing she could depend on them for was money, something the Forbes-Montgomery had a lot of.

The woman—Addison still hadn't caught her name—snuck behind her and tightened the corset without any warning, stumbling backwards, she made a desperate grab to the spindle of her bed. She gritted her teeth with each tug, claustrophobia started to settle, the boning of the corset pressed into her ribcage.

Ten minutes later, Addison put on the white silk opera gloves as a final touch. She stood in front of the mirror, not recognizing the person staring back at her. The deep pink of the dress clashed with her hair, the woman only tutted and pulled Addison's bright ginger hair into a bun with pins and hairspray to hold it up. The heavy layers of makeup hid her freckles and made her look older, more mature. Her eyes fell to her cleavage, the corset only enhanced what puberty had given her. Running her tongue over her bare teeth still felt weird after four years of braces, she'd gotten used to the metal. The braces had been taken off this summer and the lisp went away with it.

She felt fake, a version of herself that wasn't real, just made up to be a man's fantasy.

I don't want to be here. I just want to go back to my dorm and cuddle with Karlie—*she thought glumly.*

"Smile Addison, it's not everyday a gala is thrown in your honor."

A practiced smile automatically appeared, a Bizzy approved one.

Bizzy tilted her head, her stare heavier than the dress Addison was wearing. "You look presentable, dear. Shall we go to the cars?"

Addison nodded, she pretended she didn't hold onto her mother's rarely given praise with both fists. The smile dropped as she followed Bizzy out of her childhood bedroom. All remnants of a child residing in the room were gone, in its place was a blank guest room for her to spend her summer or a weekend from college.

Addison kneeled, swiping the cleanser off the lid and dunking a hand in the water. Combining the two, she wet her face, and scrubbed—keeping her face over the bowl. A lather formed, she rubbed her face clean.

Underneath her parents' watchful gaze, Addison danced with all the eligible men, quite a few her own age—also dragged out by their parents—some a few years older, but there was a worrying amount old enough to be her father interested in her. She felt gross when the older

ones' eyes never left her figure, not a single one interested in her brain or her academic successes. Just her body.

Addison missed Karlie. Tonight they were supposed to be studying for their big test on Monday. Her incentive with every correct answer made studying fun, soft lips teasing more to come. If she was here now, she'd be all over Addison, claiming her body as her own, dark blue eyes jealously guarding what she deemed hers. Normally, Addison didn't care for that possessive kind of behavior but something about the way Karlie did it, made her feel cared for and safe.

The night ended, she picked up handfuls of her dress and left the dance hall. The coat man handed back her fur wrap, she draped it around her shoulders and went outside.

Her driver, Liam, whistled, catching her attention. "Miss Forbes Montgomery." He got out, opening the back passenger door for her.

Addison got in, pulling the end of her dress in the car. The door gently closed behind her, Bizzy and the Captain never rode with her anymore. They'd come back home in separate cars.

Liam got in, his green eyes glanced at her in the rearview mirror. She looked away, not meeting his kind gaze. She wasn't in the mood to talk, he put her favorite radio station on in lieu of forcing a conversation. The first real smile of the day appeared, a soft-rock song played on the speakers. She didn't listen to the lyrics, only feeling the beat of the song. The lights from street lamps drifted in and out of the car, Addison watched the houses go by, her temple on the glass, something Bizzy used to chide her for as a small child.

Liam let her be. He had driven her everywhere in middle school and high school, he knew her moods and her tells. Addison missed her afternoon conversations with him, he treated her like a mature kid, always asking about things that interested her at the time. Never talking down or belittling her.

Addison rinsed and dried her face with the towel. Setting the towel aside, her shoulders dropped and rubbed the lotion in on the dry skin of her face. She eyed the toothbrush, it was smaller than last night's but it was still too big. It'd dislocate her jaw, using her finger, she swiped the toothpaste off and brushed her teeth with a finger.

Taking down the last pin, she shook her hair loose and brushed it out. She took her robe off and got in the shower, scrubbing the memory of the night off her body. The bubbly water swirled down the drain along with the feeling of hands guiding her on the dance floor.

No one told her parents' "no". Not the help. Certainly, not their children. You came when beckoned, sent back to the sidelines with a tilt of a head. Only seen and heard when it suited her parents.

This weekend, despite the half-hearted protest of a big test, her parents got what they wanted: her here the weekend before her birthday. Archer managed to weasel out of it much to her

annoyance.

Addison got out, wrapping herself in a towel. She quickly dried off and got dressed in a purple négligée. The silk soft and sensual against her skin, the hem fell to her knees. Pulling her blow-dryer out of her bag, she dried her hair with her fingers and then switched to a round brush for volume.

Arms sore, she left her tools on the counter and brushed her teeth, spitting in the sink. She took in her reflection, now she felt more like herself and looked her age—a teenager growing up and discovering herself.

Addison got closer to the edge of the sink, learning from last night, she dropped to her knees and spit the toothpaste out. Getting up, she stood in front of the mirror. She pulled her hair free, undoing the braid. The red strands a stark contrast to her ghost-like face, vividly remembering what happened next.

The landline ringing broke the spell she'd been under, notes scattered around her bed, a heavy text book on her lap. Addison scrambled to pick the phone up, papers crinkled under her weight and the book fell to the floor with a thud.

Addison picked up on the third ring, "Hello." She said, wondering who'd call her this time of night.

"Addie!"

Her eyes widened, "Karlie, uh hi. How are you?"

Her lilting voice sighed into the speaker, if Addison pretended she could feel her breath ghosting her neck. "I miss you."

Addison twirled the cord around her finger, a blush appearing on her face. "I miss you too. I wish I was there with you."

"How was the gala?"

"Good, Bizzy put it together, it was…" Addison paused, hesitating if she should tell the truth on why she'd been summoned. A gala in her name, so she'd find a man, someone her parents approved of to give her the illusion of a choice. She couldn't do it. She couldn't tell her. Karlie had a happy relationship with her parents, she never truly understood the stress of the Forbes-Montgomery household. "It was like a lavish birthday celebration."

"Did you have fun?"

"No," Addison said with a mock pout. "I kept thinking of you, wishing you were here with me. Now I'm dressed for bed—studying, my lips are cold."

"Oh, you're such a tease."

She lowly chuckled, "Maybe. Maybe not."

"You are." *Karlie insisted.*

"*It's not my fault, your lips are so warm and inviting."*

"Is that all you missed, babe? Just my warm lips? I have other attributes as well. Ones you spend hours on, if only I'd let you."

Addison let out a sensual sigh, shuffling her legs together, squeezing as a hot pulse formed between her thighs. "You don't play fair."

"Sure, I do, babe. Gotta go. I used my last quarter to make this call. I'm gonna hang up now. I just wanted to hear your voice before I go to bed."

Addison let out a small barely there whine. "You only called to get me all riled up, leaving me with want."

"Perhaps," *She giggled.* "Goodnight. I love you."

"Night, love you." Addison hung up the phone.

She picked up her textbook off the floor, sitting with her back propped up with pillows. She found where she left off in the middle of the chapter. She read for a few minutes, the words starting to swim, her mind going back and forth between the dense text and Karlie's tempting words. The hot pulse turned into an ache—distracting her from studying. She helplessly squeezed her thighs again, it did little to relieve the ache.

Addison groaned, she'd never been able to do it. Her fingers clumsy and unsure. No amount of encouragement from Karlie had helped. It just wasn't something she did.

Huffing, she put the papers back in the textbook. It was late, she'd sleep and drive back to campus in the afternoon. She could do this, less than twelve hours with her parents and most of them were sleeping.

For once, Addison felt hopeful, she'd survived a weekend with her parents on her own. Tomorrow afternoon, she'd be back in Karlie's arms—maybe her bed.

The next morning, Addison walked downstairs, a spring in her step, heels clicking as she walked into the dining room, a delicious breakfast spread set out. Her parents at either end, noses buried in different newspapers.

Addison sensed a thick tension in the air. Unsure why, she took a seat, desperately wishing for Archer to be here. He'd at least crack a joke to lighten the mood. She put the napkin down on her lap.

Stomach tightening with anxiety, she reached for a single biscuit and buttered it. Setting the knife down, she winced at the loud noise cutting the silence. Bizzy only turned to the next page while the Captain took a sip of his coffee.

Addison knew. Life had been too good lately, the other shoe was about to drop. Anxiety turned to dread, she picked at the biscuit, it crumbled into pieces on her plate. She popped a small one in her mouth, it tasted like ash.

If there was one thing she'd learned living in this house for 17 years full time, it was to wait. She finished the biscuit without tasting it, skipping the coffee—heart hammering in her ears, she waited for one of them to break the silence.

Bizzy set the newspaper aside, her sharp hazel eyes studying her. "The phone rang last night. Imagine my surprise when I heard my daughter take part in an obscene phone call." She tilted her head. "To a woman no less." The Captain tightened his grip on his newspaper, making it rustle and a tear forming, then his grip relaxed. "I didn't realize I raised such a slutty homosexual."

Addison felt the metaphorical rug be pulled out from under her, her heart plummeted, stomach tying into knots. At a loss for words, she fiddled with the ends of her hair, trying to find a way out of this or for the ground to swallow her whole. She had expected anything but that or to be called a slut.

"Stop playing with your hair." Bizzy scolded.

She straightened her hair one last time, dropping her hands into her lap. Gathering her courage, she stuttered, "It—it wasn't. Um. It wasn't like that, I love her."

The Captain lowered the newspaper, he drawled, "A monogamous homosexual then."

Addison frowned, his words and stare were directed at Bizzy who pressed her lips together, her gaze even icier with him. "I don't un—"

Bizzy cut her off, "What do you know about love? You will stop seeing this Karlie woman. If we find you seeing her or," She delicately coughed. "Anyone else like her, you will be disowned, your trust fund taken away. You're not of age or married to take full control of it. It's still within our control. Money talks as you very well know, so let me make this perfectly clear, Addison Adrianne, we will close the doors you so happen to enjoy. One toe out of line, you will find out what happens when your name is worth less than the dirt you stand on. Do you understand me?"

Humiliated, Addison felt tears prick behind her eyes, she refused to shed them in front of Bizzy. "Yes," She nodded, her voice thick. "I understand, Bizzy."

"Remember, there are eyes on you at all times. We'll know if you don't break up with that harlot." Bizzy got up, dropping her napkin on her empty plate. "Good luck on your test, dear. I sure hope you find a new way to study that isn't vulgar."

The Captain finally closed the newspaper, folding it and setting it on the table. "Find a husband or we'll find one for you, Kitten." He left her all alone to her thoughts.

Her dreams of getting a college degree, let alone becoming a doctor, would fail without her parents' money, so she sat there for a few more minutes. Addison had to let go of Karlie. If

she stayed, she'd only grow to resent the dream she lost, and she couldn't do that to Karlie. She loved her too much. With a heavy heart, Addison went upstairs to collect her weekend bag and left.

She could feel eyes on the back of her neck, walking out of the house but when she turned to the house, only curtains of the study room ruffled with a breeze from an open window. The figure out of sight.

Addison got in the car, a single sob left her mouth. She hit the wheel and put the keys in the ignition, tears falling down her cheeks she drove off.

Addison roughly chewed on her bottom lip, she hadn't thought of that weekend in years. She'd tucked it away into a neat box tied with a bow—stuffing it in the back of her memory. Breaking Karlie's heart had been the worst thing she'd ever done, Addison could still hear her broken voice echoing in her ear. No kiss goodbye, nothing—just the slam of a door matching the click of the closet and the sound of her broken heart.

Over the years, Addison had kept an eye on Karlie; she'd gone on to become a famous writer in LA. That past fall she'd gotten married to her long-term girlfriend, Alexis, in Massachusetts.

The guilt of what she'd done to Karlie had slightly eased over the years. Karlie and Alexis were a beautiful couple, the love strong enough to last nearly two decades together. In breaking her heart, Karlie found Alexis two months later. Addison only wished them a long happy life together.

Now, she waited for the other shoe to drop just like it always did. No one would ever let her just be in this life, everyone wanted a pound of her flesh. Addison didn't have much left to give anymore.

She picked up the pink hair brush, the hunk of plastic slightly too big for her grip. She brought it up to her hair when she realized something—the brush was the same color as that ballgown, a deep pink. Surprised, Addison jerked her arm, accidentally whacking herself in the temple and bristles of the brush stabbing her in the ear. "Ouch!" She cried out, holding her ear, frustrated with herself, she threw the brush off the counter, it bounced and landed on the floor.

Addison breathed in deeply. *I'm not that naive teenager anymore. Life worked for the both of us. She's a successful writer and I'm a neonatal surgeon, also successful. She's happy. I'm happy… enough. Lies! I haven't been happy in years.*

A knock on the doorframe interrupted her thoughts, "Addison, are you okay?"

Holding her stinging ear, she glanced at the mirror and curled her lip at her appearance. Face pale with no makeup, freckles scattered across her nose. Her hair had tangled overnight, it needed something more than her fingers and she couldn't wield that stupid brush.

She weighed her options, even though no one would see her in this state except Meredith, she couldn't bear not looking presentable. It had been an engrained habit from Bizzy, one she learned as a small child. Swallowing her pride, she whispered, "Please, come in here."

Meredith walked in, bending over to pick up the brush. She stood up straight, her lips parted as she cradled it in her palm, eyes flickering from the brush to her. "Hold on, I'll be right back."

Addison wordlessly nodded. The blonde's movements shifted the air, goosebumps appeared on her arms. She rubbed her skin, trying to keep warm.

"This one should work." Meredith came back into the bathroom a minute later, she showed off her prize, a slightly different shaped doll brush but this one was purple. "I can brush your hair if you want, I promise to be gentle."

Addison pressed her lips together, eyes flickering between Meredith and the new brush in her hand. For some odd reason, she believed her touch would be gentle and sat down with her back to the blonde. Bringing her knees to her chest, she wrapped her arms around her legs in a loose hug—trying not to think of that weekend

Meredith separated her hair in half, gathering a section, she started at the ends and worked way up. She was careful to not tug Addison's head back, mindful of her neck.

Her eyes slipped shut, delighting in her touch. The last time someone had brushed her hair had been Savvy, she'd gone through a phase where she wanted to learn how to braid hair. Addison had been her unwilling guinea pig, for six months she'd gone to classes with all kinds of braids.

"There, no more tangles." Meredith set the brush aside.

Addison critically looked at her hair, the tangles were all gone along with the curls. Running her fingers through the strands, she tilted her head. Figures that putting on dry shampoo instead of taking the time to wash and style had backfired. She'd been running late to work, and in an effort to get the blonde before Derek did, she skipped washing her hair. "I need to put it up."

Addison started to pull her hair up into a pony tail, smoothing out the bubbles with the fingers of her other hand.

Meredith offered, her voice timid and unsure, "I, uh, I can do that for you."

Hesitantly, she nodded and let her arms drop, hair falling down her back. Her eyes met Meredith's earnest gaze, she still couldn't figure out why the blonde was being so helpful.

After she finished eating breakfast, Meredith called for a cab. She shrugged into her jacket, sneaking the tiny bag that came with the *Winnie the Pooh* pajamas into a side pocket. The extra housekey, Addison's thimble, and a back up elastic band already in it. Meredith attached the keys from Addison's labcoat to the tiny bag.

Walking back into the kitchen, she watched the tiny redhead listlessly eat a small serving of a cut up pancake and dip it in syrup. Her face pale without makeup, the rosy flush from earlier disappeared. She was lost in thought, melancholy all over her features and in her eyes.

It worried Meredith. She'd never seen her like this, not even in the aftermath of the divorce or after a hard case. She almost wanted to call the whole adventure off, but she couldn't. Addison needed her things and her car needed to be at the hotel before people started questioning her story of being sick. She'd leave her alone at the house, but that didn't feel right either—something told her that Addison didn't need to be alone. Whatever she was dealing with, she needed someone by her side.

"The cab will be here in five minutes." She put her phone, along with Addison's, in her jacket pocket.

She glanced away from the plate, she nodded and pushed her food away. "I'm full." She washed her hands on the wet wipe next to her, Izzie kept a stack underneath the kitchen sink.

Taking the plate away, Meredith noticed she hadn't eaten much. *Maybe an early lunch then*—she thought while clearing the rest of the dishes and starting the dishwasher.

She moved back to the table, taking a seat across from Addison. "Are you okay?"

"I'll, I'll um," Addison tucked her bangs behind her ears, her smile not meeting her eyes. "I'll be okay." She stood up, movements heavier as she walked to the edge of the table where Meredith sat by—her hand automatically out for her. Addison settled in the middle of her palm, long legs crossed at the knee in front of her.

Lifting her up made her legs dangle down, she swung them once and then stopped mid-motion. Meredith held back a sigh. "Do you want to stay here?" She had to offer, yesterday some space had seemed to help Addison, but she really didn't want to leave her all alone.

Addison tensed, she briefly looked up to make eye contact, a wildness appeared in her gaze. "No." Her voice barely held back a rare desperation, one Meredith never heard from the always composed redhead. "Please, I want to go with you."

Nodding, Meredith asked, "Do you want to ride in my jacket or the satchel?" She only felt comfortable giving her an option this time because she'd be in the backseat and could position Addison into a safe spot.

"Jacket."

She lined her palm up, Addison turned and lowered herself down into the front pocket feet first. It took her a moment to find a comfortable spot, once she did, she settled deep inside.

Walking to the attending's locker room, Meredith hoped her friends were in surgery—Izzie would drag her by the hair to an on-call room if she caught her on hospital grounds. She smiled to herself at a small scoff reaching her ears when she pulled out the fuzzy tiny bag.

After thirty minutes of nothing but silence and little movements coming from the woman in her pocket, Meredith had thought this would be a quiet trip. It seemed she'd been mistaken.

"What?"

"You brought it with you."

Smiling, Meredith shrugged, "Sure, why not." She tried several keys, the fifth key unlocked the door and walked in. A quick sweep of the room confirmed no one else was in here. The door closed behind them with a loud thud.

Addison continued. "It belongs in the trash."

Meredith put the tiny bag and keys in her pocket, undeterred with her frustration over the *Winnie the Pooh* bag, she said, "Maybe but it's cute—"

She talked over her. "Childish."

"Whatever." Meredith ended their bickering, they needed to stay on track—anyone could come in. "Where's your locker?"

"Third row over by the window."

Meredith followed her directions. The lockers weren't like the interns, wooden instead of metal, with no locks on the door. She could have sworn this room didn't have the same problem her locker room did—the heavy stench of men clinging to the walls and crevices. Almost a year later, she still wasn't used to the smell, it made her nauseous.

Just like her office, Addison kept her locker tidy. A dark jacket hung on a hook to the side, along with an extra outfit on a hanger. The white sneakers at the bottom didn't surprise her but a pair of flats did. A basket of different patterned scrub caps had been set on the top shelf and right next to it was a well-loved designer purse.

She grabbed the purse, setting it in her satchel. "Need anything else from here?"

"No."

"Let's get out of here. Did you park your car in your usual spot?"

"Yeah. The door automatically locks on the other side, so you don't need to do anything to it."

"Huh, good to know if I ever have to sneak back in here."

Bemused, Addison shook her head. "Why would you want to sneak in here?"

"To say hi or something." Meredith shrugged. "Ready to go."

"Yes, I'm surprised no one's come in here."

Opening the door, Meredith walked down the end of the hallway to take a left when she bumped hard into someone's chest. She lost her balance, large hands landing on her waist, their grip firm until she found it again and stepped back.

Derek.

Her heart thudded in her chest, the figure in her pocket started to move, dropping further down—Meredith covered Addison's movements by tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

"Mer—" At her scowl, he corrected himself. "Sorry, Dr. Grey, what are you doing here? Couldn't stay away from me?"

"I'm not really here. I had to drop off something for a friend." Meredith tried to walk past him but he sidestepped—blocking her.

"Why couldn't they meet you downstairs?"

"A girl thing, Dr. Shepherd." He had four sisters and an ex-wife, surely he paid enough attention to them and could connect the dots. "I came up here to drop something off."

"Oh." His eyebrows raised, awkwardly scratching at his beard stubble, Derek said, "Forget I asked. Are you going back home? I could give you a lift."

Meredith felt Addison stiffen and the one tap on her sternum to signal no. "No. I'm fine driving myself," She tried walking again, this time he let her pass, but he walked in line with her. "I got a stomach bug. Bailey, let me have yesterday and today off to rest."

"That's generous."

"It happens. Look, I need to go and rest before Bailey catches me. She won't be pleased to see me before I'm scheduled to be here."

"I'll see you tomorrow. Maybe you'll be on my service." He turned on his heel, pulling a set of keys out from a pocket, and walked back the way they came.

Meredith cringed, she hoped for anyone but him. At least Bailey promised her an awful shift tomorrow, for once, she hoped it was scut or even the pit. *Oh, but Addison. Where would she even be where she wouldn't be seen? I'll ask her later*—Meredith thought. Shaking her head, no use in worrying about it now, they needed to get out of here. She sighed, "Too close."

"I'll say." Addison said, she stood up straight in the pocket.

Another voice piped in, "Why are you here? You're sick."

Meredith flinched, her pulse skyrocketed, bringing a hand up to her chest. She heard Addison's muffled gasp and felt her drop down again. Covering her noise, Meredith cried out, "Don't do that."

"No promises." Cristina said, a smirk on her face, pleased with herself for one-upping her. "But seriously, why are you here?"

“Uh,” Meredith floundered. The girl thing wouldn’t fly with Cristina, she’d see right through it—everyone knew when Izzie’s period started, she had a tendency of oversharing.

Addison whispered, quiet enough for only Meredith to hear, “Intern exams.”

“Intern exams!” She repeated. “I thought if I was going to be in bed all day, I’d study for the intern exams. Got a textbook.” She gestured to her satchel, and then quickly changed the subject. “Who’s service are you on today?”

Cristina deadpanned, “Neuro.”

“Good luck.”

“He’s a nutcase with how he likes his OR.”

Meredith vividly remembered his lecture on the number of towels he needed in the OR at all times. “You’ll be similar when you’re an attending.”

“I’ll be the scary attending. You’ll be the gloomy one.” Her pager went off, she pulled it off her hip, reading it. “Gotta go, Mer. My patient’s lab results are ready. Go to bed.”

“I’m going.” She waited for Cristina to get out of earshot. “Thank you.”

Addison lifted the flap and stuck her head out further. “Yeah, and Meredith.” She waited for her to glance down. “I can help you study for the intern exam—if you want.”

Meredith nodded, “I’d like that.” The intern exam had been looming over her head for weeks now.

“Okay. Let’s go before someone else finds us.” She winked, something still lingered behind her eyes but it seemed like she worked through some of her emotions.

“Don’t jinx us!”

Her stifled chuckle made Meredith happy, the dark and twisties were slowly leaving Addison.

“See, not a scratch on the car.” Meredith pulled the parking break, taking the keys out of the ignition.

Addison crossed her arms, a small smile curving her lips. “You did good.” She got out of the satchel, hopping the gap between their seats to settle on her thigh. “The doorman won’t recognize you, say you’re dropping something off for a guest, if he pushes say it’s for, ‘Dr. Montgomery.’”

“Okay, uh, anything else?”

“Walk with confidence, pretend you belong.” She patted her leg, “You’ll be fine.”

“Let’s go. Wanna pick up lunch and take it back home?” Meredith laid her palm flat in front of Addison.

Standing up, Addison used her pinky for balance and took a seat. “Stevens’ soup last night was good. It’s been a while since I had a home cooked meal.”

Meredith raised her up, “Maybe when this is all over, uh, you could come over for dinner sometime.”

“Oh,” Addison hesitated, opening her mouth a couple times. “I, um, I wouldn’t want to intrude. Besides…” Smoothing the tassels of her belt, she continued, “I don’t think Stevens would want me over.”

Stupid, how could I forget that Izzie still holds a grudge over the quint who died under her watch. Addison had been right though. If she’d learned professional distance, maybe Denny wouldn’t have died.

Meredith firmly said, “Izzie isn’t the boss of who comes over. It’s my house, she’ll just have to get used to who I invite. The offer is always open.”

A myriad of emotions swam over her face—too many for Meredith to make sense of—but one stood out to her, loneliness. An all too familiar emotion, she herself felt all the time as a kid, a teenager, and an adult, the heavy weight of it had lessened this year, finding friends in her intern group had helped.

Addison slowly said, a small wistful smile appeared, “Perhaps.”

“Just so you know, I’m a terrible cook.”

Skeptically, Addison started, “It can’t be—”

“George and I nearly starved after Denny died. We lived on takeout and sandwiches. It was dire.”

Addison let out a loud snort, covering it with her free hand, the other playing with the skirt hemline. “No one’s that awful.” She insisted, chuckling.

“Trust me.” Her rich laughter, music to her ears, she continued, “I’ve been banned from cooking.”

“Maybe you just need a teacher to help you.”

Meredith challenged, raising an eyebrow.

“Are you offering?”

“Perhaps.” She said, again, but this time her tone bordered flirty, she rested her hand at the base of Meredith’s ring finger. “Come on, let’s go sneak into my hotel room.”

“Is that what you say to all the girls?”

“No, just—hey, no! I wasn’t—I don’t.” Addison hung her head, slapping her forehead. “Oh, shut up.”

Meredith stuck her tongue out, “Nope.” She lifted Addison the rest of the way up to her pocket.

Addison shot her a death glare, the spreading blush across her cheeks and ears ruined the effect, it only made her look adorably flustered. She slid down into the pocket, grumbling underneath her breath too low for Meredith to hear.

The door closed behind her back, Meredith put the keycard back in the redhead’s wallet, setting it in her purse. Stepping further into the room, she turned on the lights. Boxes of clothes were neatly lined up against the back wall, color-coded labels designating a season. The boxes were clear, she could see a few were empty—presumably in a closet or dresser. A knitted blanket haphazardly thrown over the back of the couch, medical journals mixed in with magazines laid on the coffee table. Meredith set their bags on the couch. Turning around, on one nightstand, a lotion bottle laid near a stack of fiction books, science fiction and romance, glasses sat next to the pile. The other nightstand held some chargers—Meredith hoped one of those were for a phone.

“Do you have a bag we can use?” Meredith asked, the flap moved up.

“Somewhere in the closet.” Addison pointed to the other side of the side of the room.

She walked past the bed, hotel detergent, the spicy vanilla perfume, and something unique to Addison wafted over her senses. It clung to the room, giving Meredith somewhat of an idea on how long she’d been staying here. At least since the divorce, except for the two weeks Addison had taken off of work to go back to New York to sell off the properties and pack up the houses, something Derek had pointedly not gone with her to do—he claimed he had scheduled surgeries. Which was a lie, Meredith had been on his service, there were only a few emergent surgeries. He could have gone to help but he chose not to, instead he did everything to try to win Meredith back. It didn’t work. She turned down every advance and found herself missing the familiar clicking of heels on the hospital floor and seeing her name up on the board.

The air turned on, hot air blasted from underneath the window unit. Sweat started to form under her arms, she unzipped her coat, not paying attention to where she was going.

“Wait, look out.”

Addison’s warning came too late, Meredith tripped over something and fell forward. In mid-air, she turned and braced Addison to stay in place, protecting her head with her other arm, letting her side take the brunt of the fall. It stole the breath from her lungs, she breathlessly groaned and rolled onto her back.

Addison crawled out of the pocket and further up on her chest, her knees dug into her skin, she cried out, “Meredith!” Leaning forward, she frantically tapped her cheek multiple times, “*Meredith*! Talk to me. Are you still with me?”

“Ouch.”

“Is anything broken?” Addison demanded, unconsciously stroking the blonde’s cheek, her icy fingers delicate on her skin.

Meredith took stock of her body, her hip hurt but it felt like a soft tissue injury, nothing like a broken bone. “No. Just my dignity.” She lifted her head slightly, “Are you okay?”

Addison pulled her hand back, sitting back onto her heels. She said, “I’m—I’m good. It just startled me. Thank you for keeping me safe.”

Meredith nodded, “Yeah.”

She scrambled off of her body, standing by her head. Carefully watching her, Meredith sat up and frowned at the upside down shoe by her feet.

“I got taken out by a stray yellow croc. Why do you even have these?” She twisted around to stare.

Addison crossed her arms tightly against her chest, digging the heel of her boot into the ground. “They’re cozy.”

“*They’re cozy?*” Meredith said incredulously, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah.”

“Shoe tripper.”

“I was in a rush yesterday morning! How was I supposed to know that you’d be here? Or that you’d—”

Meredith’s lips twitched, pale blue eyes twinkling as she watched the realization slowly settle behind Addison’s big blue eyes.

Addison growled in frustration. “You’re messing with me?”

She nodded, snickering behind her hand. “It’s fun.” She said with a shrug.

Addison pressed her lips into a thin line, “You are such a—” She started and then rolled her eyes, “You know what, nevermind.” Marching off to the closet without her, the door partially open, she slipped inside and pushed it open further.

Meredith got up, hesitantly stepping onto her right leg. She tested her weight, sighing in relief when it felt normal. She walked the rest of the way and turned on another light.

“It should be on the top shelf, grab any bag you want.” Addison said.

Clothes hung neatly, organized by color and type of clothing. It was full to the brim. On the top shelf were empty suitcases, bags, and a small collection of designer purses. The floor was

covered in shoes, organized in the same way as her clothes. She couldn't help the smirk at seeing three more crocs in different colors were also in there.

Addison had organized her Barbie clothes and shoes the same way. It was charming to see. Part of her wondered what she'd do with a full walk-in closet.

Meredith reached up to the top shelf for an empty travel bag. She was about to move when she realized she didn't know where Addison was in the room, a quick scan of the floor nearby showed nothing.

"Addison? Where'd you go?"

"By the bed."

Spinning around on her toes, she found Addison halfway between the bed and the closet, heaving the croc that tripped her. "I can do that for you." Meredith started to bend over when she shook her head.

"No, I got it." Addison grunted out, dropping the toe of the shoe with a huff. She turned around, her face starting to turn pink with exertion. "You can go put the bag in the bathroom. It's over there." She pointed to the corner by the window.

Independence—she reminded herself—*Addison had made it clear yesterday in the locker room, she wasn't an invalid or a real doll. Just someone who was tiny.*

Meredith nodded, "Can I put stuff in the bag too?"

"Sure, I'll join you in a couple minutes." She picked up the end of the croc, pulling it across the floor one tiny step at a time.

Meredith moved out of the way, walking past her and the bed. She switched the light on and found the other croc a few steps past the threshold. Setting the bag on the counter, Meredith bent over to pick up the croc, its weight slight in her hand.

She tiptoed out of the bathroom, the carpet muffling the sound of her movements. A quick glance confirmed Addison had almost made it to the closet, small gasps went with each tug. Stifling a smile, Meredith hid the other croc on the other side of the dresser.

Thirty minutes later, Meredith set the *iPod* with the earbuds and the charger that went with it on top. More than toiletries had gone in the bag, the book, a change of clothes—in case she suddenly changed back, and these ones were clean—phone charger, several medical journals, and a cosmetic bag.

Addison sat on the edge of the coffee table, legs swinging in the air, drinking water out of her thimble cup. Physical exhaustion lined her eyes, once she moved both shoes, she'd asked for a drink and supervised what items would be taken.

Zipping up the bag, Meredith asked, "Ready to go?"

"Yeah." She finished the rest of the water in one gulp.

Addison regretted telling Meredith she could move the croc herself. She had gotten a full-body workout, now her back and thighs were sore. A thin layer of sweat had dried, it left her cold and itchy. She desperately needed a shower or a bath. Moving her body at least helped quiet her mind. The feeling of the other shoe about to drop still lingered like a festering disease. She couldn't figure out why Meredith kept being helpful. Sure, sometimes it was clumsy and impulsive at times, but at her core, everything she did was to make Addison's life easier. Almost like she was accommodating her.

She ignored it all in favor of eating delicious soup. It was messy to eat with her fingers, a napkin laid over her lap. Meredith had cut everything smaller for her, setting it in a small bowl with some liquid of the soup too. She picked up a piece of chicken, humming to herself at the flavor.

The slam of a drawer made Addison wince at the sudden noise. A huff followed, Meredith moved onto the next drawer. She'd already searched through all of the kitchen once. Now she was on her second swoop.

"Are you going to sit down and eat?" She gestured to the full bowl of soup across from her.

"I'm checking to see if there's anything you can use as a spoon." Meredith said.

Addison arched an eyebrow. "You tried looking yesterday and couldn't find anything besides the teaspoon which didn't work."

"Izzie sometimes goes shopping and gets new things for the kitchen." Meredith searched through a drawer, pulling items out onto the counter. "She nests when she's stressed."

Addison chewed thoughtfully on a noodle, thinking for a second. "Did you check the inside of the spice jars?"

"Why would I do that?" Meredith held a lemon squeezer mid-air, pretending to use it.

"Stevens might use a small spoon in a spice jar. You said, she likes to nest. She also seems to be the type to like going down the kitchen aisle to look for tools. She probably makes a blend of spices too."

"Oh." Meredith moved her arm over the items about to slide items back into the drawer in one swoop when Addison interrupted her.

"Please don't. Loud noises hurt my ears."

Meredith paused sheepishly, "Sorry." She put items back in one at a time, much quieter than before.

Once she finished that task, she opened the spice cabinet and took out a half full mason jar. She unscrewed the lid and pulled out the spice spoon inside. "Give me a second to clean it. I think it'll work."

Addison popped another noodle in her mouth, wiping her fingers on the napkin. She found herself watching Meredith thoroughly clean the spoon, she'd rolled up her sleeves, her forearm muscles rippled underneath her skin.

Forbidden—her mind cruelly reminded. Addison sighed, it was for the best, especially for Meredith, if she'd just let this crush go but something about her kept drawing her in.

"Here you go." Meredith handed her the spoon with a shy smile on her face.

Addison took it, the handle was long but thin, she could easily wrap one hand around it. More importantly she could lift it with ease and the mouth part was small enough. She eagerly got a mixture of chicken and the liquid and brought it up to her mouth. The combination delicious to her tastebuds, a small moan left her lips.

Meredith gasped, she opened her mouth to say something when her cellphone rang. She hurried to answer it. "Meredith Grey speaking."

Addison listened in on Meredith's side of the conversation, carefully watching her body language. Her shoulders slumped forward, features turning impassive except for her eyes, they were lost.

"Oh. She wants to see me."

Tension lined her shoulders, this was it. The moment Addison had felt earlier, she lowered the spoon. Intently watching Meredith and trying to get a read on the conversation.

"I'll see if I can swing by, but I work as a surgical intern. So it, uh, it might be hard to get off. Bye." Meredith pulled the phone away from her ear, closing it with a snap.

Addison straightened her posture, carefully watching her. She waited for her to say something but she just moved, putting the jar back with the other spices and needlessly checking each jar for another spoon. Her hands shook, the jars clinking against each other.

"Meredith." Addison tried.

She sniffed, wiping her face. "Yeah."

"What's wrong?"

"My mother."

She smiled, gentle and understanding because she unfortunately got it. "Mothers are hard."

"Yeah they are, my mother is exhausting." Meredith turned around, her eyes were glossy with unshed tears. "She's lonely and wants to, um, see…me. But she only remembers me as a five year old."

"Do you want to go?"

Meredith shook her head, “Not really, I know how it always goes but if I don’t go, she’ll just keep asking. It, uh, messes with her until she sees me.” She glanced away, her voice cracking, she uttered, “I should *want* to go.”

“I could go with you, be a silent support.” Addison shyly offered.

“Why?”

Ignoring the alarm bells ringing in her head, Addison said softly. “You could use a friend.”

“We’re…we’re friends?” Her eyes widened, tears fell down her face, she wiped them away.

Addison flushed bright red, quickly backpedaling. “Forget it, I made an assumption.” She kicked herself, Meredith had enough friends, she didn’t need her attending inserting herself into her life more than she already had.

“Oh, uh...” Meredith trailed off, “How about you stay in the car? I’ll swing by to get us some cocoa on the way back.”

Addison nodded, her heart felt like it was breaking into two, but she covered it with a practiced smile. “Juju helps.”

She had been right, it was all too good to be true.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, Plegg, for everything.

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