

**A CHRISTMAS TART -
BONUS SCENE**

LOLA WEST

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It was another girl. was growing another girl baby and pretending like the whole thing didn't make me feel like crying. I had told the doctor and Patrick that I didn't want to know. At my first appointment with my OBGYN, she looked at us and asked, "So, what are you thinking with regards to knowing the gender?" I think I blanched. Ignoring me, my doctor smiled brightly at Patrick and added, "Just want to make a reveal or don't reveal note here in the file."

Patrick took my hand and turned to me. "Totally up to you, Max. I'm happy either way."

I tried to seem excited but for sure I just sounded weird, as I blurted, "Gender-schmender, Amiright? We like peens and vages around here."

Dr. Wrightman looked uncomfortable, but Patrick had my back. "That's right, we're pro-genitals." I laughed awkwardly, showing too much teeth. Then, Patrick did the work and offered a clear and more definitive statement. "We're gonna go with a surprise baby, Doc."

She kinda signed and shook her head but made the note

in my file. And for the last seven months, it was all good. No gender sightings, no discussions of gender, no anxiety. And then today I went in just for a normal check in. I told Partick he could go to the bakery. It was a nothing appointment. Everything was fine. The doctor came and went, the heart-beat was normal, my blood pressure and weight were perfect. But just as I was leaving, the lovely new nurse whose name I didn't catch, smiled at me and said, "Get excited, before you know it, she'll be here." Nameless pretty nurse didn't know what she'd done. I didn't want her to feel bad, so I said nothing. I smiled even but a dark cloud brewed in the hollow of my belly. A girl. I was having another girl.

I'd been doing my best to not connect or compare this pregnancy with my first one. They were so very different. This time everyone was happy for me. This time Patrick loved me and our child. This time I was not alone or scared or feeling shameful. But also, I wondered what if that had all been true last time. What if I'd kept my little girl? What if I raised her? What was her life like? Did she look like me? Was she happy?

My parents had made all the arrangements for her adoption. I knew she had gone to a good family. I knew she was safe and well cared for, that she would have everything she ever wanted and be loved. But I wasn't allowed to know anything about her. The only thing I did know was that someday when she was eighteen, she could ask for my information, if she wanted it. I'd given the adoption agency a letter. I told her everything. How she was conceived. How I wished I would've loved her. How I hoped she'd want to meet me someday. I didn't know if she would ever read it but sometimes, lying in bed, I hoped so. And now, with another little girl growing in my

belly, I wished the first one was mine. I wished she was sitting in the car next to me, excited to meet her new baby sister.

But she wasn't, so I cried.

I sat in my car parked just in front of the Laurent Bakery and I cried. At first, I was subtle about it, just little docile tears rolling down my cheeks but then the sorrow deepened. I felt so harrowingly sad that I started to sob. I let my whole body be overtaken by a decade of hidden anguish and just straight up ugly cried.

I don't know how long I spent trying to bawl out my grief, but eventually I was shaken from that state by someone knocking on the car window. I looked up expecting a nervous Partick or at the very least a familiar face but instead I found myself staring at a stanger. She was younger than me with long unruly strawberry blond hair and sun kissed cheeks. She had a little white daisy tucked behind her left ear. Smiling softly, she signaled for me to roll down the window.

I did, but I wasn't exactly sure why. Part of my brain was in shock. Who randomly disrupts a stranger in the middle of a breakdown? But another part of me was relieved to break free from my own anxiety. As the warm summer air filled the air conditioned car, she said, "You wanna have breakfast with me?"

I couldn't help it. I laughed nervously. "Umm..."

She shrugged goofily, and added, "Sure, we're strangers and sure, you're clearly having a moment, but..." she pointed to the door of the bakery "you can't tell me that the smell coming out of this place isn't incredible."

I swallowed, clearing my throat and said, "There is nothing in there that doesn't taste like heaven."

She grinned. "Duh." Then she stuck her hand through

my window offering to shake mine. "I'm Summer." It was an appropriate name for her. Summer felt like sunshine.

After introducing myself, I turned off the car and climbed out. Unlike most people she didn't try to coddle or assist me, even though I was clearly super preppers. She was taller than me, but most people were, and she was dressed like she just stumbled onto main street on her way home from Woodstock in 1969.

"So," she said, pointing to my belly. "That must feel insane."

I laughed and I just popped, "You're odd, aren't you?"

She shrugged and smiled. "Uninhibited, perhaps."

I liked her. "Breakfast is on me," I winked. "I know a guy."

Inside, Patrick caught sight of my post-freakout puffy red face and literally jumped over the counter and came running to my side.

"What happened?" He asked nervously, searching my eyes, one hand on my side and the other on my belly. Then, he drew me into a baby-crushing hug. "Are you okay?" He asked his lips close to my ear.

"I'm fine," I assured him. "I'm fine."

He leaned back looking into my eyes again. "But you were crying."

I nodded. "Just a little."

Summer exclaimed, "Oh, she is so lying."

I turned to her and lifted my eyebrows and giggly whispered, "Traitor."

Summer shook her head and disagreed. "No, truthsayer." Then, she looked at Patrick and with an emotion filled tone that made me like her even more, she said, "This woman, who you clearly love, was crying so hard her car

was shaking. I think she needs sugary things. Yes, bring her sugary things.”

Over his shoulder Patrick called, “Ryan, Grab Max two pistachio eclairs.” Ryan responded immediately and Patrick turned back to Summer and with the affection that she so easily commanded, he said, “I don’t know who you are, delightful hippie girl, but I think you did me a solid, and I am forever in your debt.”

Summer curtsied, gripping on to an imaginary skirt rather than her cut offs and then playfully quipped, “It was nada, fine sir, but I’ll not lie. I am hungry and in need of sustenance. Would you, could you, take my order?”

Patrick smiled. He smiled all the time lately. “Anything you want is on the house.”

Summer sighed, “Well, thank you. I will take your offerings for me, but I was actually gonna grab some things to try to sweeten up the hermit where I’m staying and I will not allow you to pay for that...”

“What hermit?” I asked, just being nosey. She was the truthsayer afterall.

“In the haunted mansion on Lucy Vincent Beach,” She bounced her voice like she was a ghost.

My jaw dropped as Patrick asked, “With Warner? You’re staying with Andrew Warner?”

She nodded and then, smiling in a way that felt like an intimate secret, she added. “I’m pretty sure he’s a frog prince, trapped under a terrible spell. Do you have any curse lifting cookies? ”

Patrick shook his head. Then looking at me he said, “Who is this woman? And where did she come from?”

I shrugged, but I was certain. I adored her, and I didn’t care if she was on island for a week or a year, I was going to be friends with her.



LATER THAT EVENING I was lying in the bath, relaxing when Patrick came home. Earlier, in the bakery, he hadn't pressed me about the crying, but I knew he was dying to know why I was upset. In general, he'd allowed me to avoid talking about how my past pregnancy related to my current pregnancy, but I was pretty sure it was time to end that behavior. I didn't wait for him to ask the question. When he came into the bathroom and sat down on the edge of the tub, I said, "It's a girl."

Instinctually, he goofy grinned and then schooling his face, he asked, "Did we want a boy?"

I laughed. I shook my head no, then shrugged. "Maybe. No. I don't know." I rubbed my hand over my face. And then I whispered, "I'm so guilty."

He didn't placate me. "I get it. She was yours and then she wasn't and now you have a second chance but you still never got to love her."

Yep. He got it. He looked away from me for a second. And then he said, "I held her, you know." My breath caught in my throat. I didn't know. He continued, "You were sleeping after the delivery, and the nurse asked if I wanted to see her and they let me hold her. They thought I was her father." As if he'd said nothing important, he leaned over and untied his shoes.

I started to cry again, but I wasn't sobbing. I was happy. I was happy Patrick held my little girl.

"She was perfect, Max." he heaved out a breath and then he started taking off his watch. "She was perfect and I told her." He stood and placed the watch on the vanity countertop.

“Told her what?” I managed to ask, all verklempt from his confession.

“I told her you loved her and that I loved her and that if she ever needed us we would always be here.”

My eyes fluttered closed as I tried to hold back all the feelings, love, gratitude, loss, all of them.

“She wasn’t even yours,” I whispered, watching him take off his shirt.

“She was,” he said softly. “What you love, I love.” He dropped his pants and boxer brief on the floor and pulled at his socks, jumping from one foot to the other. “Sit up,” he commanded, climbing into the bath behind me. Water spilled over the sides as he got in, making me gasp and laugh. “We’re making a mess.”

“We know how to clean up messes,” he replied, as I leaned into him, my back pressed to his front, his legs alongside mine. He wrapped his arms around me and stroked my belly. “I’m happy she’s a girl,” he said. “And I think we should name her Eve,”

“Like Christmas Eve,?” I asked.

“Of course. It’s our most important day. The day our first daughter was born. The day you told me our second daughter existed and the day I knew you were mine forever.”

“It’s a good name.” I rolled on to my side and pressed my cheek into his chest. He was perfect. “I love you, Patrick.”

“Duh,” he joked before adding, “I love you too, Max. Always.”

INTRIGUED BY SUMMER? Wondering if she can pull Andrew Warner back into the land of the living?? Read their story: [Summer’s Dad Bod.](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lola West writes short, sweet, smart, silly, sexy romance. With a PhD in women's studies and a flair for the dramatic, Lola likes to keep it real. Her loves are cotton candy, astronomy, kitten heels and small-town hunks. Lola's heroes make you swoon and her heroines that talk back. Also, she believes that consent is always sexy, even in books.

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