

Chapter 1

Spinning

I was standing in the kitchen.

My dad looked at me like I was a stranger, a stranger he didn't want to know. It was a look I had become really used to.

Dad stood there in his neatly pressed suit. He swirled a gold-coloured drink around in one of the heavy crystal glasses that he prized. "Give it to me," he finally said.

I squeezed my biology test tightly in my hand.

“Tyler,” he said sharply.

I extended the test to him carefully, as if it was a time bomb. Then I waited for the *kaboom*.

He glanced at the mark and grimaced like he had tasted something awful. Then he held it out to me, pointing at the sixty-four written on the top of the page. “What happened to the other thirty-six per cent?”

“I’m sorry.” I sighed.

“Are you stupid? Or just plain crazy? Let me see if I can put this in simple terms that even you can understand. You get bad marks, you’re worth nothing in this world. And I didn’t raise you to be a loser.”

I should have been used to it, but his harsh words cut deep.

“It’s disgusting,” he went on. “This is the kind of mark the junkies who show up at my emergency room got before they dropped out of school. And you have even less excuse than they do. You have had every advantage. So how am I

supposed to explain that my son,” he spat out the word, “is worse than some strung-out street kid?”

My whole life, I wanted to be just like my dad. I wanted to go to medical school and become an emergency room doctor, just like him. I wanted to help people, to save people the way he did. And for a long time, Dad seemed happy to have me follow in his footsteps. Then things changed. Suddenly, nothing I did was right. No matter how hard I tried, he demanded more. And when I couldn't meet those demands, he punished me and told me what a waste of his time I was.

“Now that I think about it,” Dad said shortly, “this could be a very good thing. I owe you a thank you.”

I didn't fall for the bait.

“It's clear you won't be needing your college fund, Tyler. That leaves more money for your mother and me.”

My mom had always been anxious, but things got much worse in the last couple years.

At first, she stopped shopping and making family dinners. Then she stopped going out at all. When she started staying in bed all day, Dad got worse. I guess helping patients at work and having one at home was too much. Because he was spending more and more time at work, Dad hired a home nurse to look after Mom.

The worse Mom got, the more impossible Dad was to be around. If we were in the same room too long, he'd end up screaming at me. I used to be able to stand it. But after a while I'd come home for food and to see Mom only when Dad was at work. So Dad got the nurse to rat me out every time I came home to see Mom. I'm sure he paid her extra to keep control of his house when he wasn't there.

I turned to walk away. Maybe if I wasn't there to insult, he would forget how much I disappoint him.

"Where do you think you're going?"

I turned, but I couldn't meet his critical stare.

“I’ve just about given up on you,” he said. “And who else would want you? Look at yourself. You can’t even clean or dress yourself properly. I’m ashamed to have people know you are even related to me.”

Dad loosened his tie and emptied his glass. “I’ve had a long day at the hospital.” He slammed my imperfect test down and went to the liquor cabinet to pour himself another drink. “I guess you know you get no allowance this week. Why should I pay you if I’m not getting anything back? And you’re grounded. I want you in your room and that door shut.”

Grounded again? I thought. *Who gets grounded at sixteen?* But I knew I was lucky I didn’t get below 60 per cent on that test. The last time that happened, I was locked in my room over the whole weekend.

This isn’t a home, I thought as I trudged up the stairs. It was just a house with four walls and no heart. And locks that kept me in instead of keeping me safe. What it was, was a prison.

I waited a half hour in my room so Dad could drink enough to not notice I was gone. Then I moved slowly out of my room and down the stairs. I checked that his study light was on before I slipped out the front door.