

Perfection

Christian Troy marched across the lobby of McNamara & Troy, hurrying toward the exit. His footsteps echoed through the deserted hallways. He finished his last procedure two hours ago and the staff had gone home shortly after. Sean was over at St. Mary's Hospital, fulfilling his quota of pro-bono patients and hoping to ease his conscience by playing Good Samaritan, like he did every Friday.

It was late afternoon, his files were up-to-date, and the weekend was about to begin. Christian delighted in the knowledge that Sean would be on call in case an emergency came up with one of their recovering patients. A world filled with sunshine beckoned behind the tinted glass windows of the front door, and a weekend of freedom and fun lay ahead. Maybe he would take *The Boatox* out for a spin tomorrow. In his head, Christian was running through a long list of female acquaintances, trying to decide whom he would favor with his attention tonight. He barely glanced at the waiting room as he passed it, fully expecting it to be empty. But that single look was enough to stop him dead in his tracks. He blinked to make sure he wasn't dreaming.

He wasn't.

Even after he closed his eyes for a full five seconds, she was still there when he opened them, sitting patiently in the waiting room. If Christian were to create Eve, she would look like the woman browsing through a months' old copy of *Women Today*. She was the quintessential female for the third millennium.

His experienced gaze roved over the parts of her body he could see, looking for flaws. He saw none that were obvious. Instead, she seemed perfect. Thick, auburn hair cascaded to her shoulders. A plain, white blouse covered full breasts that, even covered with cotton, hinted of a firm, even roundness. Her upper body tapered into a narrow waist and well-proportioned hips. Long, shapely legs rose from slim ankles and disappeared beneath the hem of a denim skirt just above her knees.

He wondered what such a woman was doing here, in the nearly deserted offices of their plastic surgery practice. His secret appraisal didn't reveal anything that he or Sean could improve on. Yet, first looks could be deceiving. Perhaps she was hiding some unknown defect beneath her clothes. A tummy that was in need of liposuction, or perhaps thighs marked with cellulite. Or maybe, he chuckled, she had a mole on her butt she wanted removed. He wouldn't mind finding out.

But he couldn't refute the sense of perfection.

Christian's curiosity was awakened. He walked over to the door and entered the waiting

room. She glanced up, and his breath caught. Smooth skin, unblemished, with a hint of a tan. Full lips. High cheekbones. Straight nose -- the trained part of his mind ticked off the list of features that patients usually wanted his skilled hands to improve on.

The rest of his brain tried to regain its grasp of the English language and remember his name.

He cleared his throat. "Hello." None of the glib come-ons, the smooth compliments or the easy banter, which he usually engaged in with people of the opposite sex, came to mind.

"Are you Dr. McNamara?" she asked.

Christian swallowed. Even her voice was perfect. Melodious, warm, a caress to his ear.

"Ehm... no." He wrecked his brain for something to say that consisted of more than single syllables. What the hell was wrong with him?

"Oh."

"Did you have an appointment with Dr. McNamara?" It was the first full sentence that came to his mind and even as he asked it, Christian knew it was a stupid question. Why else would she be sitting in their waiting room, asking for Sean if she wasn't waiting for him? She had to be one of Sean's pro-bono cases, and he had probably forgotten all about her. Except that made no sense whatsoever. This woman didn't need surgery. Hell, she didn't even need a new haircut. In Christian's eyes, she couldn't be more perfect.

She nodded.

"I see. I'm sorry, Dr. McNamara is unavailable at the moment. He's been called away."

Her eyes locked on his, and they filled with disappointment. He noticed they were green, and speckled with flecks of light brown. There was a sadness in those eyes, a hint of pain buried deep inside. That sorrow was the single blemish he could find in her appearance, the one thing that kept her from being immaculate. No woman so beautiful should have to carry the hurt he saw in her gaze. Christian suddenly found himself fighting the urge to gather her in his arms and tell her that everything would be all right, that he would fix whatever caused her anguish. He wanted nothing more than to make her smile. But although he knew the female body inside and out, knew which touches elicited the most passionate response, knew how to shape and mold breasts, thighs or buttocks, or how to lift a face and inject Botox, yes, was even able to correct God's mistakes, he had no clue about a woman's heart. He had no idea what could cause the

grief he saw in those green eyes, or what it would take to dispel the sorrow. He swore an oath to himself that he would find out, though, one way or another.

Suddenly his brain kicked back into full working order. It showed him the opportunity, and he grabbed it with both hands. "But you're in luck." He offered her his brightest, sincerest smile. "I'm Dr. Troy, Dr. McNamara's partner. I'd be happy to see you instead."

"Would you?"

The surge of gratitude that washed over those flawless features made him feel both pleased and guilty at the same time. Guilt wasn't something Christian Troy was accustomed to, and he wondered for a moment if he wouldn't do better to walk out the door and begin his weekend

"Of course. If you'll follow me to my office?"

She got up. *No*, Christian amended. That wasn't the right word. She rose gracefully to her feet, moving in an unconsciously sinuous way that made his heart beat faster and his loins tighten. Damn, he wanted her. He no longer remembered the list of female companions written in his head. Forgotten were his plans for the evening, and those for the weekend. No other woman could compare; supermodels would pale beside her. And he didn't even know her name.

The spell broke when she briefly turned away from him and spoke a few words. For the first time, Christian realized she wasn't alone. From the second he caught sight of her, he had been so focused on the woman that he never saw the boy who was with her. And as he finally noticed the child, everything clicked into place. Her presence at their practice, the appointment with Sean on a Friday afternoon. *She* wasn't the one looking to be sculpted into perfection. She came for the boy.

He was five, maybe six years old. Deep scars disfigured his face and arms. The kid was a burn victim; Christian instantly jotted the conclusion down in his mental notebook. Although he and Sean specialized in aesthetic surgery more than restorative procedures, he had seen enough burns and blistered skin during his days as an intern to recognize the telltale mark flames left on a human body. A hot, fast fire had consumed the boy's skin, melted his flesh, leaving him maimed and disfigured.

"This is Sebastian," the woman said softly, her green eyes filling with hope. "He needs your help."

And Christian knew what he had to do to erase the anguish in those eyes. In this woman, he would achieve what he searched for all his life: perfection.

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