

CROWN AND GLORY

Excerpt

DAY ONE

“So, how does it feel?”

Charlice Darrett glanced up from the paperwork she’d just completed and stared into the eyes of her best friend Patricia. How did it feel? Coming back to work after being out on medical leave? Having cancer? Almost losing her life? How did what feel?

Charlice hunched a shoulder and said, “I’m fine.” Patricia didn’t speak, just stared at her. “Seriously, I’m fine.” She repeated.

“Okay then.” Patricia drew Charlice into a tight hug, only to release her a second later. “Don’t over do it.”

“I won’t.”

And she wouldn’t. There was nothing that could make her over do it. She didn’t have the energy even if she wanted to. Her strength was coming back slowly but surely and each day was better than the last but there were still spurts when all she could do was climb into bed and pull the blanket over her head.

Charlice shoved the papers aside, stood and walked out to the nursing unit. She turned into the bathroom and stood in front of the mirror for a minute staring at herself. Nothing was the same. She’d lost forty pounds. The expensive wig reminded her of the chemo treatments that stole her hair.

She chuckled to herself when the conversation with her doctor came to mind.

“Ninety-nine percent of the people lose their hair.” Her oncologist said nonchalant as he smiled as if what he’d just told her was nothing.

“Not me.” She ran her hand over her head and stifled the laugh bubbling up from her gut, remembering standing in the shower and looking down at her feet only to see every bit of hair swimming in the water pooling at her feet. The shower over, her head was as bald as the bottom of her feet. *Not me.* Charlice turned to look at her profile in the mirror, again wondering if people knew.

A lot had changed in the eight months she’d missed. A lot of the old faces were gone and a lot of new ones graced the halls. She paused at the corner, sucked in a breath and blew it out.

Alrighty then. Here I go. She hated the pity she saw in people’s eyes and even worse, the pity she heard in their voices when they spoke to her. She didn’t need pity. What she needed was life. Any life.

“Hey, Charli. Glad to have you back.” Nicole, another nurse yelled from the other side of the nursing station.

“Thanks. It’s great to be back.”

“When do you start?” Another nurse asked. Charlice didn’t remember her name. She had only started at the hospital a week before she left.

“Tomorrow.” She smiled. “Came in today to turn in the paper work and update my education folder.”

The nurse drew her into a hug, patting her on the back. “I’m here if you need anything.” She whispered in her ear. “My sister went through the same thing.”

“Thanks,” was all Charlice said. What else was there? She certainly wasn’t going to spill her guts to a stranger no matter how sincere she sounded. And no. Her sister didn’t go through the same thing. Her sister wasn’t her.

Chalice backed up, glancing up and down the hall searching for anything, nothing. Her eyes locked on the face of a man she'd never seen before. He smiled, tilted his head up and immediately turned back to the telemetry monitor. He wasn't much taller than her six-foot frame but his eyes grabbed her and pulled her to him. Butterflies fluttered in her stomach, unsettling her. Big deal he had the most gorgeous eyes she'd ever seen and his unblemished espresso colored skin reminded her of African royalty and the finest coffee. And those dimples could make any woman drop to her knees but she wasn't any woman now was she. The last thing she wanted or needed was a man in her life to complicate things. Men required maintenance and men required explaining things to and men required.... An image of him naked and laying beside her made her shut her eyes and blow out a breath she didn't know she was holding.

Geez. "Where did that come from?" She mumbled. Who was that man? She'd never seen him before, but hoped she'd see him again.