
LONE SURVIVOR

Crescent City Kings Book One

ANYA SUMMERS



Published by Blushing Books
An Imprint of
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.
A Virginia Corporation
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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EBook ISBN: 978-1-947132-24-5

Print ISBN: 978-1-947132-62-7

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Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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Acknowledgments

I need to thank my entire team at Blushing Books for your tireless efforts: Allison, Tahlia, Courage, Patty, Michael, and Ruth! And to Mr. B for the instruction and personal demonstration, thank you, I will never forget it.

And last, to all my readers, I am blessed to have you in my life and thank you for helping me live my dream.

Chapter 1

Code Blue: Room 3114.

The alert flashed over her pager. Sadie changed directions. Her bladder would have to wait, as per the norm. She raced to the Intensive Care Unit, grabbing a crash cart on her mad dash through the halls. The soles of her white tennis shoes squeaked against the linoleum floor. She hit the room, only to have Doctor Lucien Beauchamp shoulder past her to the patient coding on the hospital bed.

Sadie worked alongside Doctor Luc as they fought to keep the woman alive, placing a backboard beneath the patient to help with the chest compressions. Doctor Luc shouted orders as he began performing CPR. “Blood pressure is dropping. Sadie, give me ten milliliters of epinephrine and twenty milliliters of saline.”

“On it.” Sadie was already reaching for the medicine, having done this more times than she cared to count. She grabbed the syringes, one of each from the crash cart, and inserted them into the patient’s IV, injecting the medicine and then saline one right after another.

Janie, the nurse’s assistant, entered with a tray of O negative

blood packs while Nancy the respiratory therapist worked alongside Doctor Luc to try and keep the woman breathing. The patient had been in a car accident with her family. She'd sustained multiple contusions, a fractured femur and fractured right hip, but the most critical of her injuries was the internal bleeding from the deep laceration on her liver. Sarah stood at the computer in the room, recording everything that was being administered to the patient. They all worked like a chaotic symphony, playing discordant tones that worked together seamlessly.

“Heart rate is dropping. We need the defibrillator.”

Sadie applied the electrode patches to the woman's chest. Then Doctor Luc, with the paddles in his hands, shouted, “Clear.”

They stood back as he tried to shock the woman's dangerously low heartrate back up. The first shot of electricity didn't work. Doctor Luc tried a second time, and then a third, having Nancy perform CPR compressions between each one. The team raced against the clock, fighting an uphill battle to save the woman. Time slowed to a crawl. The blaring screech of the heartrate monitor flat-lined.

Doctor Luc kept them working, trying to bring the woman back. But she was gone. It was too late. Her injuries had been too severe.

“I'm calling it. Time of death, 2:16 am,” Doctor Luc said with a disgusted look on his face, and surrendered his fight of a lost battle. He looked skyward, inhaling a deep breath. Sadie felt her own heart contract. Another car accident victim. Shouldn't those death traps be safer by now? One would think that, after all this time, they would make those damn things nigh impenetrable, and accident proof.

Her gut clenched and she fought back her tears. This was the hardest part of her job. The one that no one but other nurses and doctors understood. While people sat in a waiting room

complaining about the time it took to see a doctor, they didn't realize that those doctors and nurses were busy trying to save someone else's life.

"All that's left is the little girl," Janie said with a solemn face.

Sadie turned her head and said, "What?"

"The whole family from the accident is gone now, except their little girl sent to the Pediatric ward for her injuries. She's expected to make a full recovery," Nancy chimed in. Doctor Luc had moved over and was standing by the sink, his head bowed as Nancy shut off the heartrate monitor.

All the air was sucked from the room. The silence now the monitors were off became a deafening roar as images flashed through Sadie's brain. She could hear the ragged gulps of her breathing, and fought against the groundswell of terror as it surrounded her with dark memories. The room spun. Her hands were sweaty. She shivered, cold as ice. And the tidal wave of memories slammed over her, dragging her down into the deep end.

Flashing blue and red lights split the twilight sky. Sadie blinked at the crowd of people in uniform surrounding her. A loud buzzing filled her ears. She was discombobulated, trying to make sense of everything, but she couldn't, not with the burning agony that riddled her body. She was strapped to a board, her head immobilized. Sadie tried to speak, to ask what had happened. But her mouth didn't seem to be working. Her brain was fuzzy with the details.

She had been driving her sedan, her parents in the back seat, laughing at something Henry had said. The mood in the car was congenial, with the undercurrent of strain that had been between her and Henry lately. The night, the drive, returned in flashes.

Henry shouting at her, warning her to watch out. The front grill of the runaway semi-tractor trailer slamming into the passenger side of their sedan. And the world going dark.

"He-He-Henry," she whispered raggedly. Her voice sounded muddled and weak, like she was speaking through cotton balls.

One of the uniformed men glanced down at her, and even in her haze-filled mind, she recognized the star of life paramedics logo on his navy shirt. She watched his black beard shrouded mouth move as he said, "You'll be all right. You were in an accident. We're transporting you to the hospital. Just stay with us."

Sadie struggled against the bonds on the board. The pain stole her breath. She gasped. "Where—"

"Hush, relax. We've got you," another paramedic said, his blond hair in a short, military style buzz cut.

Sadie fought to remain conscious while they lifted her body, back board and all, onto the stretcher, then loaded her into the back of the ambulance. Where were her husband and her parents? Were they injured too? The lights inside the ambulance made her wince and shut her eyes.

Behind her, one of the medics asked someone, "What about the rest of the family?"

"All DOA. She's the only survivor."

Sadie screamed and screamed and screamed.

Then it was lights out.

Sadie came to, staring at the off-white ceiling tiles of the ICU breakroom. She knew it was the breakroom by the smell of the burnt coffee that was really more like sludge scraped off the bottom of a shoe. Inhaling a few deep breaths, she could feel the remaining tension in her neck and shoulders. Holy mother of god, that had been a bad episode. She had not experienced an attack like that in months. Not since she had moved to New Orleans. There had been a few smaller, much more manageable occurrences, but she had been able to yank herself out of them before they reached the point of no return stage.

But this one tonight? It had slammed into her with the force of an atomic bomb. The hospital room had disappeared as the memories surfaced in a *the hills are alive*, full surround-sound immersion replay of the night of the accident. Back to the night she'd lost everything. It had been two years since that fateful accident. And the memories from that night still had the power to

incapacitate her, all while crushing her heart into smithereens. Every time she had an episode it reminded her that she was the walking wounded, alive but not truly living. That physically, there was nothing wrong with her. That even though her body was functioning, her heart and soul had died in the car crash.

“Sadie,” a deep, rough, male voice said softly.

She shifted her head and discovered Doctor Luc sitting in one of the breakroom chairs, his elbows resting on his knees as he faced her. Doctor Luc was one of the hottest doctors at Saint Mary’s Hospital, standing over six feet tall, with the build of a professional baseball player, his chestnut hair trimmed short, tanned skin, and eyes the color of the sea at sunset. All the women in the hospital were hot for the single doctor who unfortunately had a strict policy about not dating co-workers. As it was, his thick, dark brows and forehead were scrunched with concern, the corners of his mouth turned down in a frown.

“What happened?” Sadie wanted to play it off like she had merely fainted and hadn’t a clue. It wasn’t that she had hidden her PTSD from human resources, but she had downplayed the severity of her condition. If they discovered that she could have attacks that incapacitated her, they would remove her from the job. If she didn’t have her job, she had nothing. No anchor to keep her sane.

“That’s what I would like to know, Sadie. One minute you were fine, and the next, you were unresponsive. Your face went ghost white, then you issued a blood curdling scream, and fainted. Your vitals are good. I checked. Otherwise, I would have you in a hospital bed and not the breakroom.”

She winced as she sat up, woozy from the attack. They always left her hollowed out and unsteady. Typically, the best medicine was to crawl back into bed and sleep it off. But she had hours left to go in her shift.

“How long was I out?” She glossed over the screaming and unresponsiveness.

“Not long, fifteen minutes or so. What happened back there?” Luc pressed, not backing down. The man was like a dog after a bone. It was what made him an excellent doctor.

“It’s no big deal. I’m fine now,” she said, although she wasn’t, not by a long shot.

“Bullshit. You are not leaving this room until you explain what happened back there. I will not have anyone treating patients when I don’t know what the fuck happened, and potentially put a patient at risk. Your only option is to explain, or I will have to get HR involved,” Luc demanded, his face stern.

From the set of his jaw, she knew the man would not be budging from his stance anytime soon. She caved. What choice did she have? None. “Human resources already know about my diagnosis. I have post-traumatic stress disorder that stems from a serious car accident I was in two years ago. The majority of my episodes are manageable. I am able to pull myself back from the edge before they get too overwhelming. Back there, the accident victim tripped all my danger attack imminent sensors before I could get a handle on them. You see, I’m like the victim’s little girl. I was the only one to walk away from the accident.”

“Jesus Christ, Sadie. I’m sorry. I didn’t know. Who did you lose?” Luc’s sympathy was almost her undoing. Because behind the sympathy was always pity. Sadie loathed the pity. Bad things happened. There was no rhyme or reason to it. They could happen to anyone at any time. And she was still here, fighting to keep her head above water most days, but she was doing it.

But his sympathy had her fighting back tears. Sadie nodded. He deserved the truth. She was proud of herself when her voice came out steady. “My husband and both my parents. I was driving the four of us to dinner at this swanky place in downtown Seattle. And we had tickets to go see a production of *Les Misérables* afterward. A truck driver in a semi-tractor trailer had a massive heart attack, drove right through the intersection, and

plowed into our car, doing seventy, or at least that was what the police concluded.”

Luc wiped a hand over his face. “Jesus, Sadie. I’m so fucking sorry. Look, I think you should head home and get some rest. We can cover you. And, frankly, you look like a slight breeze could knock you over.”

“But I’m fine.” It had become her catch phrase since the accident. Everyone was so concerned, yet none of them could help. Not really. Not unless they were skilled in the art of resurrection. While she was in the land of Voodoo priestesses, she doubted their powers extended that far.

“I disagree. Sadie, you’re one of my best nurses on rotation.”

“But?” She loathed having people try to mollify her with a compliment before delivering the bad news.

“Before I can let you work with patients again, I need to know that you’re not going to have another episode. If trauma is going to be an issue and dredge things back up for you, it might be time to go work for a family doctor treating the flu and other, non-life-threatening ailments.”

Frustrated, she swung her legs over the side of the couch. “Doc, I can do the job. It’s best for me if I get back into the thick of it.”

Luc became an immovable block of granite, crossing his muscular arms in front of his chest, and digging his heels in. The man could give lessons in stubbornness. “No dice. You’re going to take the next two weeks off. I want you to go talk to a buddy of mine. He’s a psychologist who specializes in PTSD and people who have been through extreme trauma.” He withdrew a card from his wallet and handed it to her.

“You’re really not going to let me come back to work, are you?” A quiver of fear slashed through her. Nursing was all she had, the only thing that kept her from sinking headlong into depression. Financially, she didn’t need to work. As an only child, she had inherited her parents’ estate. Her dad had been an invest-

ment banker with a swanky, prestigious firm in Seattle who had taken the inheritance he'd received from his parents and increased it significantly. Upon their deaths, Sadie had gotten all of it. And then there was the insurance policy from her husband and the sale of both houses. Sadie could choose not to work another day in her life and have enough money for multiple lifetimes if she spent wisely. But nursing kept her grounded in reality. It was hard to feel sorry for yourself when you were taking care of patients being moved into hospice, or being transferred out of the ICU into a regular hospital room as they recovered from their injuries.

"I will, after you speak with my friend and he clears you for duty, but not before. Sadie, I'm not doing this to punish you. You know that, right?"

She nodded that she understood. In her head, she knew he was right. That an episode like the one she'd had today during a critical moment could put a patient at risk, that a patient could die on her watch. It was her heart and emotions that were all out of whack, just as they had been for two damn years. Her world was once again shifting beneath her feet. It left her feeling powerless, and not for the first time, she wondered if moving halfway across the country had been the right call. She could still return to Puget County General in Seattle, maybe find a small home near the water. But then she would have to drive or hire a full-time car service.

And that thought just about sent her into the dark abyss of despair.

No, dammit. She wasn't going to run home with her tail tucked between her legs. She was stronger than that. This was the place she had picked on the map to start her life over. She had to give it more than six months. If New Orleans did not work out by the time her one-year lease was up, she would pick another spot on the map, and try that one. She would keep doing it until she found the place that fit and felt like home.

“It doesn’t feel that way, Doc. But I can tell from your expression I don’t have a choice,” Sadie replied with defeat lacing her words. She hated that. Hated sounding like she had been whipped by life, by the things that were outside her control, when she worked so hard to overcome them.

“Sadie, take the two weeks. I’ll let human resources know you’re taking some personal time off. And I’ll give Ram a call, let him know you should be contacting him to make an appointment to meet with him.”

“So you can keep tabs on me? But you’re only here two days a week. The rest of the time, you’re at your private practice.” She sighed. This just kept getting better and better.

“That doesn’t mean I don’t have any gravitas with personnel or can’t tell when one of my nurses needs the break. I promise you this is not a punishment, even though it might seem like it to you. And I’m here, if you need to talk. You have my number. Call me if you need help. You’re not alone; you have friends here who care. Now, go home. Get some rest. And call Ram when you get up,” he commanded in an almost imperial tone. Luc was usually one of the more congenial, mild-mannered doctors whom everyone loved. But in this instance, he had turned into a mulish overlord who wouldn’t be satisfied until he bent her to his will.

“Fine.” Sadie rose and headed toward the lockers to grab her things.

“Good. Oh, and Sadie. Don’t beat yourself up over this. We all have things that break us. Our job isn’t easy. There’s no shame in needing time away and asking for help,” Luc said, before leaving her alone with her thoughts as she gathered her things out of her locker.

But that was what he didn’t get. Her past kept breaking her, time and time again. She had thought a location change would stop it, would help her heal, but she was finding that none of it

mattered. She could have gone to colonize Mars and there would still be this aching regret and sorrow.

No one knew the truth. No one could know what she'd said to her husband that day not an hour before he died. Then they would know what a horrible person she was—and a fraud, to boot. There was nothing she could say or do to make amends to her dead husband. *That* was what kept her up at night.

She stared down at the card in her hand listing a Doctor Ramsey O'Malley, PsyD. She could do this, continue to act like she wasn't drowning. None of the doctors she had seen in Seattle had been able to fix her. She doubted this new guy could help.

Sadie was what happened when Humpty Dumpty wasn't put back together again.