



Billionaire's Frenemy

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Category: Romance, Billionaire Romance

Description: Jameson

Willow Tate is a monster. A self-centered brat with delusions of grandeur...and I'm completely, irrevocably in love with her. Have been all my life. From pulling her pigtails on the playground in kindergarten to doing...different things to her tail, Willow has been my lifelong partner in crime.

But now it seems that she may have gotten tired of waiting around for me and found someone who actually deserves her. All I've ever secretly wanted was for her to be happy. And if I have to lose her completely to make that happen, then I guess that's what I'm going to have to do.

Willow

Jameson Cassel is the most egocentric, obnoxious, man I've ever met in my life. And I love him so much that sometimes I worry I might accidentally let him know. But he only loves himself. And I can't risk my heart with him.

Of course, now the situation is a little different. I don't know what to do. Lying seems the best course of action. I'm torn. Do I tell him the truth and trust that he feels the same way I do? Or do I protect my heart at all costs?

This book was originally released as Billionaire's Best Frenemy but has been extensively revised and given a bonus epilogue.

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Prologue

Jameson Cassel

“What are you doing here?” Willow Tate hissed, narrowing her gaze at me.

“Apparently, playing wingman to my older brothers,” I told her, motioning around the private room of Bradford’s, the bar my brothers and I had come to for a few drinks to celebrate closing a huge deal for our company.

The four other Cassel men seemed to have paired off with Willow’s friends, leaving me with Willow. That was my brother Fraser’s fault since he’d zeroed in on one of the women. The rest of the guys followed his lead. Luke, the oldest of us, seemed equally set on the woman beside him.

“Hmm,” Willow said, taking a sip of her champagne and following my stare. “I thought my friends had better taste.”

“Not if they hang around with you,” I sniped.

She snorted, unoffended by my standard remark. We’d been taking digs at each other for as long as I could remember.

Her chin lifted. “You’re a dick.”

“You’re a brat,” I shot back. I reached out and twirled a piece of her hair between my fingers, tugging it gently. “A pretty one, though.”

“Don’t touch me.” She rolled her eyes and knocked away my hand.

“That’s not what you said three months ago.” I stepped closer and wrapped my arm around her waist so I could whisper in her ear. “I believe your exact words were ‘God, Jamie, more’.”

“Well, that’s a mistake that won’t be repeated,” she assured me, pushing me away. “Hey, ladies, we need to get going. The limo should be waiting for us.”

Each of them extricated themselves from whichever of my brothers held their attention, and the women left in a beautiful parade while the five of us doofuses stared after them like lovesick puppies.

“Well, I gotta get back to the office,” Luke said. “Bennett, don’t you dare fucking expense this room.”

“Hey!” Bennett yelled. “Fray told me to get it.”

“And Fray will pay for it,” Fray said, clapping Bennett on the back. “Damn, did you see Emerson?”

“Who?” Luke asked.

“The hot one,” Fray continued as we headed toward the door.

“I had the hot one,” Tatum argued.

“Piss off,” Bennett said. “Penny was drop-dead gorgeous. Y’all are crazy.”

I hung back, letting my brothers argue their way through the crowd on their way out. There was no way I’d get involved in that conversation. My history with Willow

was...tumultuous, to say the least. I wasn't about to admit to my brothers I thought she was the most beautiful creature on the face of the planet.

Somehow, she and I had hated each other since our first day of kindergarten. That discontent had lasted through elementary school, middle school and most of high school. Our senior year, though...things between us had started to change. We'd still fought like cats and dogs, but there was a heat to it we didn't quite understand.

If I were being honest, I still didn't really understand it. Some days, I still wanted to push her off a swing set. And other days... Other days were different.

My driver had just dropped me at my building, when my phone buzzed with a text. Thinking it was one of my brothers, I paused to check it, in case I needed to head back to the office, no matter that it was after midnight.

It wasn't one of my siblings.

Willow:Can you come get me?

Me:Where are you?

I waited with bated breath until she sent me her location, not too far from my building.

Me:Sit tight, I'll be right there.

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Since my town car had already disappeared down Park Avenue, I cut through my building and headed down to the parking beneath it where my three cars were parked in my private enclosure. In minutes, I was pulling up the ramp then out onto the street. Traffic was never good, even this late at night, but I was thankful I could more easily navigate through it than if it were daylight hours.

Navigating around the block, I headed toward the address Willow had sent. Pulling up to the club, I handed the doorman a couple hundreds and asked him to keep an eye on my car, making sure it stayed right where it was. When I got inside, Willow was sitting on a bench, her head leaning against the wall, her shoes in her hand.

“You okay?” I asked, kneeling in front of her.

“I got drunk and broke my shoe. Then I fell down in front of a gay Australian stripper, and Emerson spilled her fruity, sticky drink on my dress.” She was pouting, but she wasn’t crying, so I took that as a good sign she wasn’t that drunk.

I’d known her for a long time. And I knew a super-drunk Willow was a very tearful Willow.

“Come on,” I said, helping her to her feet. “Let me take you home.”

“Can we go to your place?” she asked, batting her lashes at me.

I scooped her into my arms and carried her to the door, claiming her mouth in a quick kiss.

“You’re the devil,” I told her, shaking my head as she giggled.

“And you love me,” she said.

“I’ve never said that,” I reminded her.

“You will, though,” she taunted. “Someday.”

The doorman opened the passenger door of my car, and I dumped her into the seat. Leaning inside over her, I kissed her again.

“That’s never going to happen, cupcake.” Then I shut her inside before she could respond.

I gave the doorman another hundred and a thank you then got behind the wheel and sped off toward my penthouse.

“How drunk are you?” I asked her as I pulled into my parking garage.

“Not very,” she promised.

“So, you’re of sound mind and body at the moment?”

She lifted a slim, tempting shoulder. “Um, mostly?”

Good enough for me.

We were barely through the front door when she jumped into my arms, wrapping her legs around my waist and throwing her weight forward so we fell back onto the sofa.

“We have to stop doing this,” I told her as I raised her skirt and ripped away the scrap

of lace she apparently called panties. “I’m going to start thinking you’re ashamed of me.”

“I am ashamed of you,” she teased. “You’re my dirty little secret.”

“And you’re my dirty little hellhound.” I picked her up and flipped us, so I was lying over her on the couch. “My fucking gorgeous demon girl.”

“And you love me,” she said again.

“Never going to happen, sweetheart.” I pulled off my T-shirt then stood so I could kick off my jeans and shorts before jumping on her again.

I thrust forward, pushing completely inside her when she wrapped her thighs around me again. Her nails dug into my shoulders as she rocked with me, her breath coming in hard pants and her body shuddering.

Sliding my hand between us, I found her clit with my finger and pulsed over it while I fucked her, hard and fast. In moments, she was screaming out my name as she came, her nails digging rivets into my skin. My brain’s pleasure-and-pain center went haywire, and I came so hard I might have blacked out for a second.

I shifted us on the sofa, spooning behind her and pulling a blanket over us.

“So, I’m staying?” she asked through a yawn.

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“Where the hell else are you gonna go?” I grumbled against her shoulder. “Good night, Willow.”

“Good night, Jamie.”

* * * *

“Damn it,” Willow muttered from somewhere nearby, her whisper-hiss cutting into my sleep to bring me awake.

I blinked open my eyes to see her breaking the heel off one of her shoes—the one that had been unbroken, apparently.

“Do you want me to have some clothes delivered for you?” I asked, sitting up and adjusting the blanket over my lap.

“No, don’t trouble yourself,” she said.

Great. So, we were starting the morning like this. Again. Whenever we ended up sleeping together, Willow got an attitude about the whole thing.

“Jesus, what’s your problem?” I scrubbed my hand over my face and stared at her, praying that for once in her life she’d just be straight with me.

“I’m not your booty call, Jameson Cassel.”

“No,” I agreed, wrapping the blanket around my waist as I came to my feet. “But

apparently, I'm yours. Let's not forget who called who last night. Or who asked to come back here. I'm so sick of this, Willow. You know, we could have something really special if you'd just let me the fuck in."

"Let it go, Jameson," she insisted, sliding her feet into her broken shoes. "Look, we're not good for each other. And whatever this is...it has to stop."

"So, I should stop answering when you call me?" I snapped, my hand slashing through the air beside me in frustration.

"Don't worry about it," she said with a sigh. "It won't happen again."

"Can I at least take you home?" I asked, suppressing a growl.

"There's a car coming for me," she said, shaking her head. She walked over and pulled my head down, kissing me softly on the lips. "I'm sorry. This is just never going to work."

I wanted to argue with her. I wanted to beg her to stay. To ask why she was fighting me so hard. But I knew better. We'd been down this road too many times. Before I could form a plea, she'd grabbed her bag and dashed from the living room. The private elevator in my foyer dinged as the doors opened for her.

Damn it. Why the hell did I have to fall in love with the most complicated woman in all of New York?

One

Willow I'm-an-Idiot Tate

I closed my eyes, wishing I could make the email from my boss disappear. When I

wearily blinked them back open, it was still there.

Get the Cassel permits pulled for the South Pavillion Rd. property.

He'd attached the necessary reference numbers, and the instruction to make it happen this morning along with who I should contact. Someone who owed him a favor, probably.

It made no sense to me. The Cassels weren't even direct competitors to the firm I worked for. Not really. Schultz and Schultz specialized in retail properties, like malls and shopping centers. Cassel Brothers specialized in commercial rentals, apartments and condos, and hotels.

There could only be one reason. S&S had decided they wanted the land. Apparently, they planned to play dirty to get it and possibly get the Cassels fined along the way.

I sighed, rubbing two fingers up and down the center of my forehead. I released a long, slow breath through my nose. This wouldn't go well. I'd known the Cassels my entire life. One of them was married to my best friend, and another was my mortal enemy. The latter would take this as a personal affront and come after me.

True to my word, I'd stayed away from him since that night almost four months ago. It was killing me. As much as we fought, as much as we played at hating each other, I had deep down forever feelings for the asshole. They were the kind that should lead to happily ever after. But it wasn't meant to be.

Jameson Cassel felt nothing for me, nothing beyond enjoying that I was an easy fuck buddy. Well, those days were long over. My hand pressed over my almost flat belly that looked as if I'd had a little too much pasta for lunch. Over the coming months, it would get harder and harder to hide. I had to figure out what to do soon. New York might be a big place, but the construction industry sure wasn't. Pretty soon, Jamie

would know he'd left a little something behind our last time together. Knowing him, he'd insist on doing the right thing.

Screw that.

After the way I'd grown up, I wasn't having some man settle for me. I wouldn't have some man be with me when he didn't love me. I'd seen that for sixteen years, my mom loving my father and my father being a self-absorbed island unto himself. He'd provided for us physically, but emotionally, he might as well have been a rock. My mom had faded more and more until finally her devastated heart had just given up on him...and me...and life altogether.

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I would not be that woman.

Jaw set, I clicked away at my computer keyboard. Quickly, I filed the paperwork and tugged all the right strings to set in motion the process to get the Cassel's permits pulled on their latest project in Tarrytown, just outside NYC. My stomach roiled as I did it, and it had nothing to do with the bean growing inside me. But it had everything to do with that bean's daddy.

I knew the Cassel brothers would get the situation worked out. This would only delay them a bit. But Jameson would come find me. He'd have words to say. And as usual, the fire between us would be stoked, and the next thing we knew...

No, no, no! I was not getting naked with him again.

The way I saw it, I didn't have much choice here. It was time to get the hell out of Dodge. The longer I worked for S&S, the more frequent the chances I'd end up in Jameson's orbit would become. And like dominoes falling, we'd gravitate, we'd clash, we'd end up in bed together.

Which meant, I needed an escape route. Intent on devising my future, I opened my internet browser and started a search for project management positions, in any field, anywhere in the country but here.

* * * *

"What the fuck, Willow!"

“Well, that was quick,” I muttered as I forked a piece of lettuce. I was on the patio of one of my favorite restaurants and until a moment ago, had been enjoying lunch in the mild weather. Without answering Jameson, I pushed the bite into my mouth and chewed slowly while I raised an eyebrow at him as he towered over me.

“Were you that desperate for my attention?” he growled. “You had to go fuck with our business? Do you know how many guys we had to pay to just stand around a jobsite today?”

“You really think that? That it’s about you? You’re more of a self-centered, conceited asshole than I realized.”

“I’m just saying, it’s been four months. Maybe, you were looking for an excuse.”

“Maybe, I was doing my damn job,” I bristled. This damn man. I could just...kick him in his overachieving balls.

He crossed his arms, narrowing his eyes at me. “Your boss told you to shut down our site?”

I lifted a shoulder in a negligent half-shrug. “If you don’t like it, you only have yourself to blame. You wouldn’t let Bennett hire me when he wanted to offer me a position, so I’m stuck over at Schultz and Schultz working as a glorified clerk.”

He leaned forward, resting his hands on the table. His dark gaze pierced into me, his gorgeous face inches from mine. “You want to know why I blocked it? Because the position you would have found yourself in most often was bent over a desk with me deep inside you.”

I shifted in my seat—because it was hot in here, but not because he made me hot. “Whatever,” I snapped. “Because you couldn’t—or wouldn’t—control yourself and

keep it in your pants, now we all pay the consequences.”

In more ways than you even know...

“You know what? I’ve had enough of this.” He stood and walked a few paces away, his hands in his hair, a gesture I noticed was common in all the brothers. I admired his tight ass and wide shoulders. Then, when he turned back to me, my gaze dropped to the bulge in the front of his khaki pants. Holy crap, was he hard now?

He cleared his throat, and I redirected my focus as he took the couple steps back to me. I met his eyes, unashamed that I’d been caught staring at his generous package. It was a gift that should be mine. After all, we’d lost our freaking virginities together. And I hadn’t ever been with anyone else. Just him, pretty randomly over the years.

But no, I couldn’t have him, not a man who didn’t love me—or even like me a whole lot. Tolerance and lust weren’t enough. Jameson didn’t love anyone but himself...and maybe, his business.

“Okay, here’s the deal,” he said, rapping his knuckles twice on the surface of the table where I sat. “Tomorrow morning, you come to Cassel Brothers. You work for us now.”

I stared at him. “What?”

“You’re one of us, and you damn well know it. Get your ass into our office tomorrow morning by eight, or so help me God, I will come and get you and haul you there myself. After I give you the spanking you’ve been begging for, for years.”

“I have not,” I exclaimed, too gobsmacked to even reply to the rest.

“Keep thinking that. But you’re wrong.” He grinned. “Be there by eight. You’ve been

warned. See you tomorrow, babe.”

Two

Jameson

Argh! That woman!

Arguing with her should not give me such a hard on. Like...literally. And she'd noticed, which was both embarrassing and encouraging. If she was looking, she wasn't as over me as she liked to believe.

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I got into my town car, directing my driver to take me to Cassel Brothers, then took deep breaths until my inopportune erection subsided. It took a minute, because every time I started to think about Willow, it chubbed back up again.

Damn her.

I called Luke while I rode back to the office.

“Tell me something good,” he begged when he answered.

“The permits will be back in place by Monday. You want me to call the crew?” I asked.

“Nah, I should probably go into the office today anyway. I’ll make the call.” I heard a pretty heavy sigh in his voice.

“How are things with Laura?” I teased.

“How are things with Willow?” he shot back.

“I just hired her to work at the firm.” I actually hadn’t planned to mention it to him. But I figured he’d find out soon enough anyway, so whatever.

“You did what?” he bellowed, his voice so loud through the speaker it bounced around the entire car.

“Calm down, dude. Y’all have wanted her there for years.”

“Yeah,” he agreed, his tone calmer. “But, you talked us out of it. Every time we’ve tried to bring her in, you gave us a hundred reasons why it would be a bad idea.”

I shrugged, even though he couldn’t see me. He wasn’t wrong. But things were different now.

“Look, I’ll support any decision you make in this firm,” Luke continued. “I know the others give you a hard time, and it’s got to be tough being the baby of five brothers, man.”

“Not any harder than being the oldest I’d imagine,” I told him.

“Anyway, if you want her to work there, I’ve got your back. But let her work,” he warned. “Don’t bring her in if you just think this will be a way for you to get some control over her.”

“First of all,” I said with a laugh. “No one will ever have any kind of control over Willow Tate. Second of all, why wouldn’t I want her to work? She’s smarter than the five of us combined.”

“You love her,” he said.

“I despise her,” I lied. “But I’m about to get her fired from S&S, so I’m giving her a backup option to smooth things over a little.”

“Did you have to get her fired?” he asked, his tone growing sharper.

“Shultz senior called to warn me if I get the permits reinstated, he’ll fire her for gross negligence.” I had no idea how Shultz knew I’d care about what happened to Willow, but as we traveled the same circled, he must have picked up something. I blew out a heavy sigh. “What was I supposed to do? Pick one girl over hundreds of people’s

jobs?”

“I think you might have grown up a little too much,” Luke said sadly. “Look, thanks for getting it done. I hope this works out for you.”

Yeah, I was pretty sure it wouldn’t.

* * * *

“You selfish, arrogant asshole!” Willow yelled, startling me as I left Luke’s office. I had no idea where my brother was, so I’d been searching his desk for some paperwork I needed. My mind had been fully on that, I hadn’t notice the woman who drove me crazy until she growled at me.

“How did you even find me here?” I asked, playing it cool. I hadn’t expected her sneak attack since it had been days since I’d seen her.

“You got me fired,” she said, stomping her foot in apparent frustration.

“Yeah,” I agreed. I turned and handed Luke’s assistant, Roz, a folder. “Can you get copies of those sent to Doug at the site, please?”

“Of course, Mr. Cassel,” she said, standing quickly, probably hoping to make a fast escape.

I raised an eyebrow at that. Roz had never called me Mr. Cassel, not once in my entire life. If she was trying to make me look good in front of Willow, it was sweet, but that ship had long since sailed. Speaking of my frenemy, I refocused on her.

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“You’re late,” I said, crossing my arms and glaring at her.

“What?” Her eyes widened, and she took a step back from me, her hand resting on her stomach. “What are you talking about?”

“I told you to be here last week. I told you to come work here. Your office is ready, and your assistant has been sitting at her desk for days with nothing to do.” I studied her, wanting badly to pull her into my arms and at the same time, damning myself for the urge. “Wills, why didn’t you come to me right away?”

“I don’t like who I am around you,” she admitted, hugging her arms across her stomach. “And I don’t know how to not be that way. You bring out the worst in me, Jamie. And I hate it.”

“We could try a different tactic,” I offered. “We could maybe...start over? Try being nice to each other?”

She made a gagging noise, and I laughed. Twenty-some years of animosity was hard to erase. But damn it, I actually wanted to try.

Roz came back as her phone started to ring. I motioned for Willow to take our conversation out into the hall but froze when I heard Roz say something about a wedding chapel.

“You want me to book a wedding chapel for you and Miss Moretti?” Roz met my gaze across the room. “No, Luke, I won’t call your family. But your mother will be very disappointed.”

I looked at Willow in shock. My asshole brother was about to get married without any of us there. That wasn't happening.

By silent agreement, we both walked back to Roz's desk the moment she hung up.

"Well?" I asked.

"What?" She glared at me. "He specifically asked me not tell the Cassels what was happening. If you'll excuse me, I have some calls to make." She pointed at the chairs across from her desk with a wink.

So, Willow and I sat while Roz made calls and got my brother booked at the Tie the Knot wedding chapel. I thanked Roz, and we dashed out, eager to get across town and not miss the ceremony.

"I still can't believe you got me fired," Willow snapped as she followed me down to the sidewalk where my driver was waiting, since I'd texted him as Roz made arrangements.

"Technically, you got yourself fired," I told her. "You knew what would happen. You didn't even get them pulled. You got them frozen."

"Well, I needed more time than Shultz gave me, so yeah, I froze them until I got the right signatures to have them pulled." She climbed into the back of my town car and slammed the door behind her.

"Whatever," I said, getting in on the other side. "Look, you can pretend to be pissed at me all you want. But we both know you were always going to end up working here."

"And where exactly is here?" she asked, her tone dangerous.

“At the family firm,” I answered. “Where you belong. Regardless of what happens between you and me, can you really deny you’re part of this family?”

I knew her family wasn’t great and her mom had passed when Willow was too young. When we were younger, we’d bickered a lot. Some would say we’d fought constantly, but we were also joined at the hip all through school. She was nearly always my partner on school projects, and outside that, she was a fixture at my house. None of the Cassels thought that strange, and my mom had basically adopted her. Sometimes, I was pretty sure my mother loved Willow more than she did me, and I knew my brothers all adored her. As a little sister, of course. I’d kill any of them who thought to make a move on her, and they all knew it.

“Nothing is happening between you and me, Jameson,” she said, taking subtext from my statement—subtext I hadn’t realized was there.

The finality in her tone just made me want her more. Made me want her forever. For just a second, and I would never have admitted it to anyone, I wondered if I could convince her into marrying me while we were at the chapel.

Probably not. Besides, when I finally got Willow Tate down the aisle, and I would someday, I wanted her in the big white dress and I wanted all of our family and friends there. As prickly as my girl could be, I’d need all the witnesses I could get.

Three

Willow I-Wish-I-Had-A-Clue Tate

Well, this wasn’t how I’d envisioned my first day of work with the Cassels. I hadn’t even been to my desk, and I was already in a wedding chapel. Granted, it wasn’t with me in a big white dress, my groom staring adoringly at me, but at the moment, Jamie’s eyes were devouring me, and it was making me hotter than I wanted to

be—ever. I'd sworn off this man. He couldn't keep making me tingling and wet.

Shifting my gaze from my infuriating temptation, I refocused on the couple at hand. Despite his no family at the ceremony dictate, I think Luke was glad to have Jamie and me there. Laura was thrilled to have one of her closest friends in attendance. And I was super glad to be there when her father had shown up in the middle of the ceremony and tried to break up the most nontraditional wedding I'd ever witnessed.

When he'd first shown up, I'd thought, wow, I'd like to have a dad who cared even a little about what I did. Then I'd realized Laura's father was as much of an asshole as my own was. Maybe, all men were just dicks.

I glanced over at Luke, who was ready to go to war for Laura. I knew Luke and Jamie's brother, Fray, would do the same for my best friend, Emerson. So, maybe, I couldn't count them in that generalization.

And that's when I realized, Jamie was shielding me with his body, standing between me and the angry interloper. When the man left, realizing he'd lost the confrontation, Luke had pulled Laura into his arms while they'd declared their love.

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Jamie moved beside me. His fingers brushed my wrist, sending a shiver through me as he started to take my hand. Apparently, thinking better of it, he crossed his arms while we watched his brother and new sister-in-law.

“You’re mine. All mine. Forever,” Luke growled, pulling her closer.

Laura melted into him. “All I want is your love. And maybe babies, one of these days.”

At the mention of babies, I fought the urge to splay my hand over my stomach. Thankfully, the pants and loose, untucked blouse I wore hid the start of my bump, but I knew there’d be no hiding it soon. Especially since Jameson insisted I work at the family firm, now.

Luke grinned. “I look forward to making as many as you want. And as for my love, you’ve owned that for months. You’re stuck with it.”

Beside me, Jameson made a gagging sound. Infuriated that he’d interrupted the romantic moment, I punched his arm.

“Shut up, dick,” I chided. “Your brother is exactly what women want. Sweet, romantic. He’s the kind of guy I’ll—”

I screeched as Jameson suddenly threw me over his shoulder and stormed from the chapel, interrupting my declaration about the kind of love I desired. We were barely outside the building when he had me around the corner and pressed up against the wall, his mouth devouring mine. And my traitorous body... My arms squeezed

around him, my legs wrapped around his hips, and I kissed him back with equal hunger and ferocity. Whenever we were apart, I missed him so much, more than I'd ever be willing to admit. His hand wandered over to my breast then down toward...

My eyes went wide, and I shoved him away hard before he touched my stomach. My feet thumped to the ground, and I stumbled a few steps from him. Jameson was dazed for a split second before he came after me and enclosed me in his arms. I tried not to shake, not to sink into him, not to fucking cry, but my over-hormonal body had a mind of its own. It wanted a home. And whether I liked it or not, home had always been him.

Maybe, that was why I hated him so much. Hated him, loved him... It was a fine line, and I tended to leap back and forth over that boundary like I was playing jump rope. I knew if we just surrendered, we could have the kind of relationship history wrote about. But Jameson would never give in. He said he didn't love me, and mostly, I believed him. And God knew, I would never show my vulnerability and admit my feelings to this man. Loving him and not having him love me back would be completely humiliating. I wanted and deserved more.

"Why do you fight this so hard?" he asked into my hair where he pressed his lips to my crown.

"Because I'm in love. And that means I can't be with you," I said, telling the truth, but knowing he'd take it wrong and believe there was someone else in my life. Did that actually make it a lie?

He stumbled backward a few feet, his hands up as if he'd touched lava. His eyes were wide and full of hurt. "W-what?" he gasped. "Since when? Who?"

"None of your business."

Okay, Willow. Your maturity level is stunning.

My hand went unconsciously to my belly, and Jameson's eyes followed the movement. If possible, they widened even more as he interpreted the movement. "You're pregnant?" he practically yelled. "Willow...but...you're..."

His shoulders slumped, incredible pain emanating from him. Stricken, he breathed hard through slightly parted lips, his eyes shining in the late-afternoon light, appearing almost glassy with emotion.

Instant regret pricked me, and tears filled my own eyes. More than ever, I knew if I revealed I carried his baby, he'd do the right thing.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. At the moment, I didn't hate him nearly as much as I usually did. Far from it. He was reacting as if...he might have feelings of some sort. For me. Was it because he was losing his toy, his regular fuck buddy? It certainly was love. He'd said a million times that he'd never love me.

I pushed away my own confused feelings. This reaction was nothing other than him realizing he'd lost a convenient plaything or something.

He gave a sharp nod as he absorbed this new reality between us. His gaze fell to my stomach again before he closed his eyes, hiding his thoughts from me. But... Had I seen longing there?

"We should go," he said.

I sighed quietly. "Yeah, probably. I have things to do."

"Like what?" he asked, his voice flat, devoid of anything, as he led the way to where his driver waited. I'd never heard this tone from him.

“Well, for one, I need to find a job,” I sighed.

“You have a job.”

“Last I knew, you got me fired.”

He growled, glaring at me. “Damn it, Willow! You work at my company now, and you fucking know it. Why do you have to be such a pain in the ass?”

“Why do you have to be such a dumbass?” I retorted.

He held the vehicle’s door open for me, silently glowering. It slammed behind me, then he circled to the other side.

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“We had something good going,” he muttered as the driver pulled away from the curb.

“Excuse me!” I exploded. “How is constant fighting and random booty calls a good thing? I’ve never been anything to you but a good fuck—a very good fuck, if I do say so. Beyond that you... You havenevercared about me. Pardon the fuck out of me if I want something more than that.”

His mouth opened and closed a few times while he stared at me. Then he shook his head angrily, not saying another word for the rest of the trip.

* * * *

Jameson wasn’t speaking to me. In the week since I’d officially started working atCassel Brothers, he’d avoided me like the proverbial plague. As a project manager in the remodeling division, I was under the supervision of his brother, Tatum. That was just fine with me. Aside from personal issues with Jamie, I was happy as a clam, so to speak. I had charge over a small remodel at one of Tarrytown’s hotels, and I wasn’t doing peon work.

But like a clam, there was a little grain of sand irritating me. Namely Jameson and my never-ending desire for him. Though, some days, I waffled between desiring his dick and desiring junk-punching him. On most days, both would make me equally happy. I didn’t see a pearl coming from the irritating situation, either. Unless you counted little baby Tate-should-be-Cassel.

Annoyed by my thoughts drifting in that direction again—and to be real, when didn’t

they?—I grabbed up some paperwork Fray needed and headed over to the executive offices.

“Hey!” I heard just after I’d handed off the folder to Fray’s assistant.

“Emerson,” I exclaimed, hugging my bestie. “How was your honeymoon?” I hadn’t seen her since her wedding on the cruise ship, where I’d spent most of my time avoiding Jameson.

And there was that huge grain of irritation again.

“Perfect,” she sighed dreamily. The girl had it bad for her husband. Stars in her eyes and all that...

“You’ll have to show me pictures when you get a chance—the PG ones, of course.”

She swatted at me, rolling her eyes. “They’re all PG. Fray is completely paranoid about someone seeing too much of my skin. I just know he’ll freak out and make me see a female OB when the time comes. Heaven forbid, a male doctor see my business.”

“Damn straight!” he called through his open office door.

She rolled her eyes again.

“We should go to lunch,” she told me. “Catch up and stuff.”

“Oh,” I groaned in regret. “I wish I could, but I have a doctor appointment today.”

“Doctor?” Jameson said from behind me. I closed my eyes and huffed out a breath. Of course, he’d heard that. Where had he come from, anyway?

“I’ll see you later,” Emerson whispered, giving me a pat on the shoulder before practically skipping away. I swear to God she should have birds, butterflies and fairy dust fluttering around her.

“Is everything okay? Why do you have to go to the doctor?” he demanded, drawing my attention away from my departing friend.

“Now you’re talking to me?” I asked through gritted teeth.

“Cut the shit, Willow. Why are you going to the doctor? Are you okay?” His eyes scanned over me as if he could detect something wrong.

“It’s just routine,” I said then whispered, so the whole office didn’t hear, “It’s my first ultrasound.”

He swallowed hard, looking as if he’d just tasted something bitter. And maybe, it was a bitter pill to him that his booty call was out of his reach.

“Is...um...” He scrubbed his fingers over his lips then looked over my shoulder. “Is the...father...going with you?”

“No.” Though, I wished he was. And I really wanted to tell Jamie he was the father more than I wanted anything, other than for him to love me.

“Can...can I come with you?”

My first instinct was no. I should say no. I knew it.

I swallowed hard around the rock of emotion in my throat. “Yeah. Sure.”

Four

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Jameson

What in the hell had possessed me to ask Willow if I could go with her to this thing? Two nurses and the lady at the intake desk had asked if I was the father, and I'd had to hear Wills confirm to them all that no, I wasn't.

"So where is this asshat love of your life?" I asked, leaning against the wall with my arms crossed over my chest.

"Busy," she snapped.

"Too busy to see the first images of his child?" I was being a dick, and I knew I wasn't helping the situation. But I was in too much pain to find anything but anger.

When she'd told me she was in love with someone else, that she was carrying his child, it had felt as if I'd died. As if she'd gutted me and left me to bleed out. We'd been each other's firsts, each other's only, ever since...since whatever this was between us had started. I thought she knew we'd end up together, eventually. It had never occurred to me that she might be on another page and find someone else.

I loved her. I'd always loved her. And now, it was way too late to tell her.

"You didn't have to come," she said with a sigh.

"You shouldn't be here alone," I argued. "I want to be here."

I forced myself to loosen my posture and walked over to her. She was wearing a

paper gown and lying on an exam table with a blanket over her legs. She looked so tiny. Her hand rested on her belly, which showed no obvious evidence of a bump. How could she be pregnant?

“Sorry!” the doctor chirped when he came into the room. “We’re running a bit late today.” He held out his hand to shake mine. “I’m Dr. Bob.”

Dr. Bob? Her OB was named Dr. Bob. Jesus, really? That’s really his name?

“That’s okay,” Willow assured him, propping herself up on her forearms.

“Let’s get a look at that baby.” He dropped onto his stool and wheeled over. He helped Willow push her gown up under her breasts, and I had to clench my hands into fists to keep from knocking his hands away from her.

I had to get a grip. She wasn’t mine anymore. Apparently, she never really was.

“Don’t you have... Doesn’t a tech usually do the ultrasounds?” I asked, wanting to demand a female member of the staff do the scan.

“Not always.” Dr. Bob chuckled.

Undeterred by me, her doctor squeezed some goo on Willow’s belly and started pressing the ultrasound wand over it. He pushed a few buttons on the machine and soon a softthwump-thwump-thwumpsound filled the room.

“Is that...” Willow’s eyes went wide.

“Baby’s heartbeat,” he confirmed with a smile.

Tears suddenly pricked at my eyes, and I had to turn my head away, not wanting to

let her see what this was doing to me. Damn it, this should be the happiest moment of our lives. Instead, I was just an interloper, standing in a room with what could have been.

“And there it is,” Dr. Bob said softly.

I couldn’t resist looking at the screen. My heart leapt into my throat at the sight of the tiniest little bean, nestled inside Willow.

The doctor clicked a few more buttons, and little lines surrounded the nugget.

“Too early to tell the sex yet,” Dr. Bob murmured. “Looks like you’re right around three and half...maybe four months along. According to your chart four, and you’re measuring right for that.”

Four months. She’d met someone, fallen in love with the guy, and gotten pregnant by him all in four months. How? I’d had over twenty years with her and look at us.

I was an idiot. All of this was my fault. I pushed her and goaded her and fought with her. It had been a game to me. A game I’d thought she was playing, too.

A game I’d just lost.

Dr. Bob helped Willow clean up, and I wandered back to the window, looking out over the city and feeling sorry for myself. When he was finished, I followed him out into the hallway, so Willow could get dressed.

“Hey, Doc?”

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He stopped and turned to face me, an eyebrow raised as I handed him my business card.

“I’d like all of Ms. Tate’s medical bills sent directly to my office, please.” I glanced toward the closed door, knowing she’d argue with me if she knew. “Can you see that it happens.”

His brow furrowed. “You’re not the father?”

“No, but I’m her employer...her friend. And my firm will be taking care of all of her medical expenses.”

He nodded, smiling softly, a knowing look in his eyes that made me uncomfortable. “You’re a good friend.”

“Not good enough,” I muttered as I walked out to the waiting room to wait for the girl I’d lost.

I sat in one of the chairs, my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands. I had no idea what the father’s financial situation was, but it didn’t matter. It wasn’t about the money. It was about taking care of Willow in the only way I could.

Maybe, one day, I could be Uncle Jamie. Poor, lonely, drunk Uncle Jamie. Because there would be no one else, except the specter of all I’d lost.

Willow came out a few minutes later, made her next appointment with the clerk, then silently followed me outside.

“Do you want me to take you home?” I asked her when the oppressive silence became too much to bear any longer.

“I need to go back to the office,” she said.

“Right.”

“Thank you,” she said, reaching over and putting her hand on my forearm. “For coming with me today. I’m...glad you were there.”

“Of course,” I insisted. “You shouldn’t have been there alone.”

She blew out a sigh and turned to stare out the window. She seemed so sad. It confused me. Shouldn’t she be happy? She had everything in the world she wanted. Love. A baby. A family. Everything I’d never given her...had never offered to give her.

But as I thought about it, I hadn’t seen her smile in the week she’d been at the firm. I knew she didn’t realize I’d been watching. Okay, lurking. Sort of stalking. I’d been avoiding her, but I couldn’t help checking up on her. I loved her. But if she was happy, then I’d let her be happy.

This...this didn’t seem happy. And something was wrong. Something she wasn’t telling me. Damn that guy for not being at her appointment. And damn me for not being that guy.

Five

Willow I’m-Such-A-Liar Tate

Guilt ate at me like little drips of acid. I wasn’t happy; Jameson wasn’t happy. But I

saw no way out of this thing I'd created. Plus the man was as blind as a rock.

I mean, I'd told him the truth. I loved the father of my baby. Dr. Bob had told us how far along I was. It didn't take much more than a memory and basic math to figure out when I'd gotten knocked up.

Jameson just didn't want to see it.

For the past two days since the appointment, he'd been eyeing me as if I were a one-of-a-kind toy, the thing he'd always wanted, always intended to claim, but now saw belonged to someone else. I wanted to yell at him to wake up, but I refused to have an I'm doing the right thing husband. I knew he'd insist on marrying me. All the Cassels were honorable, even Jamie, especially Jamie in my opinion.

God, I really wished I had someone to talk to about this, but I had no siblings, my mom was gone, and two of my besties were married to Jamie's brothers, Fray and Luke. I could call Penny or Phoebe, our other close friends who rounded out our group. Tapping my fingers I considered which sister to phone. Phoebe was traveling for work, but Penny would be done with teaching for the day. She was the perfect choice anyway, since she kinda knew about my situation.

Since it was past five, I didn't feel bad calling from my office. I closed my door and dialed up Pen.

"Hey, girl, hey!" she crowed across our connection, bringing a smile to my lips.

"Hey, how's it going?"

"Mmm...fine? What's wrong?"

I sighed heavily. I didn't call her only when I had problems, but she always knew

when it was the case. We'd been roomies in college, and she was the closest I had to a sister.

"My life is a dumpster fire," I groaned. "And one lie after another is just making it worse. Guess I should get used to it. I'm totally going to hell."

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“You are not,” she replied, not buying into my dramatics, a skill she’d developed from dealing with hormonal middle schoolers. “Tell me what you did and why the lies. I’m guessing you haven’t told Hot Brother Number Five that he’s going to be a daddy before all his older brothers will be.”

“Ding ding ding! Give the girl a prize,” I deadpanned.

“What happened?”

“I told him the truth, and he took it the wrong way. I mean...I wasn’t specific. I didn’t say, ‘Hey you’re the dad. Surprise!’ But the dingbat should be able to figure things out. I mean he was a frigging Math major in college. He just doesn’t want to see the truth because then he’d have to do something. And he definitely doesn’t want to do something because he doesn’t love me.”

“And...you want him to do something?”

“No! Not if he doesn’t love me. I’m not an obligation!”

“You’re making me dizzy, friend. Look, I know what you grew up with, and it sounds horrible. Still, I know the Cassels and I know Jameson, just like you do—well, not exactly like you do. The thing is, he’s not like your father. He has feelings for you. If you told him that he was going to be a dad, he’d be all in. One hundred percent invested.”

“I know.” He’d be all in for his child. I was being selfish because I wanted more.

“And doesn’t he deserve to know?”

“Yeah,” I sighed.

“And...”

“God, I can tell you’re used to dealing with junior high kids,” I complained, annoyed more at myself than at her.

“And annoying besties,” she laughed. “So...”

“I know I have to tell him the baby is his, and I know he will be the best dad he can be, but I don’t want him to choose me because he has to, you know? I don’t want to be second choice. I want to be his first choice. I never will be. He’s told me a million times he doesn’t love me.”

“What?” she asked in disbelief.

“It’s a thing between us. I say ‘You love me,’ and he says ‘Never going to happen.’ I mean, I’m not a rocket scientist, but—”

“Obviously,” she deadpanned, interrupting me.

“What?” I said, echoing her question from a second ago.

“Don’t you think maybe that’s a game between the two of you? He’s playing the game?”

Crap. Was he? Could Jameson possibly actually love me? Like love me love me?

“Oh no...” I breathed.

“Willow?” she asked.

“He’s going to hate me when I tell him,” I whispered.

“He might be angry, but he’ll get over it. You two snipe at each other like crazy, but that man could never hate you.”

I shook my head, even though she couldn’t see me. “I don’t know. This is pretty big. He’s going to hate me and fire me and try to take the baby—”

“Whoa! Okay, there, let’s put the brakes on the overdramatic, hormonal train, girl. I have known all the Cassels long enough to know Jameson would never hurt you.”

“She’s got that right, though I might fucking spank you,” an angry voice growled from the doorway to my office—the door I’d closed but was now open. Jameson looked thunderous yet a little bemused. I wondered how much he’d heard. Too much probably.

“Penny, I’ve got to go,” I said.

“Sounds like it. Love you.”

“Love you, too.” I disconnected and looked up at the man I loved, the man who looked like he could strangle me right now. “Jamie—”

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He held up a hand. “I saw the light under your door, and I was wondering why you were still here on a Friday night. And... Why the hell would you think I’d hurt you?”

Right then, I realized he hadn’t heard the part about him being the father of my child. Also, I knew I had no choice but to tell him the truth—the whole truth and not the partial truth right now.

“Jamie... I didn’t...” I shook my head, gathering courage. I stood to face him. “Jameson, there’s not another man in my life.”

He stared at me, and I could see my point wasn’t sinking in. Time to jab harder.

“There’s. No. Other. Man,” I enunciated.

His head tilted, his brows starting to knit, making him look a little like a confused puppy.

“Oh for fuck’s sake, how do I even love you?” I muttered under my breath.

“I...”

“You’re the only man I’ve slept with.Ever,” I practically yelled.

His lips parted, the color blanching from his face, and he staggered slightly.

“I... You... We...” His hand waved at me, generally in the direction of my belly and our child.

“Yes,” I said simply.

He sucked in a breath, shook his head once then turned and walked right out of my office without a word.

What the hell?

I stared after him, expecting him to storm right back in, demanding answers, demanding all my wildest dreams. When he didn't, tears welling in my eyes. I dropped dropped into my chair, burying my face in my hands to muffle my sob.

That went fucking spectacularly well.

About as spectacularly well as a train wreck.

I'd told him he was going to be a father, and he'd left. Just left. What the hell?

Blinking back tears, I started to gather my things to leave for the day. I needed to get out of here and get someplace where I could just shut down, sink into a hot bath and pretend to have a nice big glass of wine. Juice would have to do. Then I'd curl up in my most comfortable jammies and do what I'd done way too many nights for the past few months—cry and figure out where to go from here.

Six

Jameson

“I'm going to be a dad,” I said for about the twenty-fifth time in as many minutes.

I'd run into Bennett on the way out of the building and dropped my bombshell on him. Like a damn phone tree, he'd gotten all of my brothers together, and we were

now sitting at a dive bar drinking heavily.

Well, I was drinking heavily.

They were giving me shit.

“So,” Fray said, staring at me over his beer bottle. “She told you the baby is yours, and you just...walked out on her?”

“I didn’t walk out on her,” I spat. “I walked away. I needed to clear my head. Needed to think.”

“You’re a jackass,” Bennett said, shaking his head at me.

“You’re a cocksucker,” I slurred.

“Okay.” Luke reached over and pulled the whiskey out of my hand. “You’re done.”

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“Totally done,” I agreed, nodding emphatically. “Life is over. I’m officially a deadbeat dad.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Tatum asked, his tone incredulous.

“She’s not going to marry me,” I said. “She was trying to hide this from me. She doesn’t want me. If she did, she wouldn’t have lied about it.”

My brothers all exchanged looks around the table, and I knew I’d made my point. I leaned back smugly and sighed.

Willow was out there, walking around with our little nugget growing in her belly, and she didn’t want me involved. All those years of push and pull between us, and she’d finally pushed hard enough to shove me out of the picture.

“You’re not going to marry her?” Tatum asked softly.

“She wouldn’t accept,” I hissed. “She’d think I was just like her dad. She does think I’m just like her dad. A guy with morals but no heart.” I shook my head. “She doesn’t want me.”

She might have said she loved me. That part was just starting to filter through now. When I’d realized the baby was mine, the rest of the conversation kind of evaporated from my head.

It didn’t matter, though. It might have, if she hadn’t gotten knocked up. But now, she’d never believe I love her, too. I knew her. She’d think any attempt at a proposal

was just me ‘doing the right thing.’ As if I even knew what that meant.

If I knew how to do the right thing, we’d already be married. Or at the very least, living together in sin and fucking every night. She’d know she was mine and only mine.

Fuck, I loved to sin with that woman.

“Jameson!” Fray yelled, punching my arm. “You still with us, man?”

I realized he’d been trying to get my attention for a while as I’d been lost in thought.

“Nah, man,” I said. “I’m a million miles away.”

“You need to go to her. Now. Right now,” Fray insisted.

“Maybe not right now,” Luke interjected, his tone holding a warning.

“No. No, Fray is right,” I said, jumping to my feet and swaying so hard that arms shot out from all sides to hold me steady. “I have to go tell her I love her. Tell her I’m sorry. Push her off the swing set.”

“No pushing pregnant women,” Tatum barked.

“It was a meta—a metaphor—I’m not really gonna push her, stupid.” I rolled my eyes and hiccupped.

“Luke is probably right,” Bennett said. “Maybe, this should wait until tomorrow.”

“Now!” I pointed toward the door. “Tatum, drive me!”

“No fucking way.” Tatum laughed.

“Fray!” I yelled.

“I’m your huckleberry,” Fray said, getting to his feet.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Luke said. “Fray can’t drive you. He’s three sheets, too.”

“I’ll call Em,” Fray said. “She’ll drive us.”

“That’s a great idea!” I said, slapping his cheek a little harder than I’d meant to. “I can get her on my side, and we can all gang up on Willow. Make her accept my marriage proposal.”

“You idiots are going home,” Bennett insisted. “Emerson is going to ring Fray’s neck, and Willow will never speak to you again if you show up at her house piss drunk in the middle of the night. And besides that. Neither of you dumbasses drove. Fray’s driver brought us.”

“You guys are party poopers,” I said, dropping back into my chair. Luke was whispering something to Tatum, so I leaned forward and snagged my drink, knocking back the shot in one pull. “I should at least call her.”

“There you go!” Fray said, punching my arm so hard I fell over into Tatum.

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“You two are ridiculous,” Tatum said, shoving me back upright. “Every time the five of us go out, it’s always you two who can’t handle your liquor.”

“Fuck off,” Fray and I said together. Then we burst into laughter.

It was actually pretty rare that the five of us ever got together anymore. I’d missed hanging out with my brothers. And despite what Tatum claimed, I very rarely drank.

Granted, I was drunk now. Very, very drunk. But drunk just makes you honest, right? So, if I called her three sheets to the wind and confessed my love to her, she’d have no choice but to believe me.

“You know you’re talking out loud, right?” Luke asked, narrowing his gaze at me.

“I did not realize that, no,” I slurred, pointing at him. I pulled out my phone and pushed Willow’s number. “But I am not wrong.”

The phone rang a few times then kicked to voicemail.

“Voicemail,” I whispered loudly to the guys. “Wills, it’s Jamie.”

“Jamie,” Fray cooed, moving in to whisper into the receiver. “Your baby daddy.”

I shoved him off me.

“Sorry, he’s drunk.” I cleared my throat. “Willow, you know I love you. Can we please stop playing games and just get hitched already? You’re being really stupid.

Call me, okay?"

I hung up and dropped my phone on the table, giving a wide grin to my brothers...who all stared at me with horrified looks on their faces. Even Fray.

"What?" I asked.

"Did you just call her stupid?" Luke asked, his tone taking on that dangerous low thing it did when he was really pissed.

"I don't know." I shrugged. "Probably. She is stupid."

"Boy," Tatum said, chuckling softly. "You're so fucked."

Seven

Willow I'm-the-Stupid-One? Tate

Bemused, I listened to Jameson's voicemail for the third time since getting up this morning.

Willow, you know I love you. Can we please stop playing games and just get hitched already? You're being really stupid. Call me, okay?

Sipping my decaf, which, yes, did taste different from regular, I pressed play again. The phone was halfway through the almost amusing message when someone hammered on my apartment door. The same voice as on my voicemail, only much grumpier, bellowed my name from the other side.

"Willow! Open up!"

My amusement fading, I scowled and marched for the door.

“What the hell is your problem?” I demanded as I yanked it open and he almost fell inside.

Straightening, he took in my fuzzy pants and baggy T-shirt, horror dawning on his face.

“Oh God, did I wake you up? I know you pregnant ladies need all the sleep.” He captured my arm and started herding me back toward my room.

“Oh my lord, you’re still drunk.”

“Probably,” he admitted. “My brothers and I went to the bar...and I drank it. Drunk it. Drunked it.” He shook his head. “Got fucked up.”

“So I break the news to you, you just leave, go get skunk-ass drunk and show up here still impaired? Oh and called me stupid. Not winning a lot of points, Cassel.”

“I took a cab.”

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I pulled my arm from his grip and headed back to the kitchen and my coffee. In my small apartment, that was about six steps. Jameson followed on my heels and plopped down on the stool beside mine at the breakfast bar.

“Do you have more coffee?”

“In the pot. It’s decaf, though. I’m not sure it will do you a lot of good.”

He made a face. “I think right now, anything will help. So look,” he said as I grabbed him a mug, filled it with brew then slid it toward him, black like he preferred it. “I think you and I should go away somewhere. We can be alone. See if we can work—which I know we will because you love me and I love you, damn it. And...then...I don’t know, I’ll prove I love you. Where can we go that I can fight a bear for you or something?”

As he leaned on his elbows, cup in his hands, he looked absolutely sincere, and it took everything in me not to laugh. “I don’t know that we’re compatible, Jamie. Fire and water could love each other, but they’ll also destroy each other.”

His eyes squinted. “You give me a headache.”

“No, whiskey is giving you a headache. Also, I just started my job. I can’t go off on a vacation with you.”

“I know the bosses,” he whisper-yelled. “I can arrange it. Worked for Fray and Emerson and for Luke and Laura, too.”

“Luke and Laura didn’t go anywhere.”

“They didn’t leave their penthouse for a long time, either. But your apartment is too small, and the neighbors will complain about all the screaming I’ll make you do. Good screaming.”

I stared at him, just riveted by the directions of his inebriated mind.

“And my place...too many memories of fighting. Lots of good fucking there, too.” He made a karate chop motion with both hands. “But no. This can’t be about that. We need neutral ground. Like Switzerland. You still have a passport?”

“Yes...?”

“Good. Go pack. We’re going to Switzerland. I’ll get my pilot to prepare the plane.”

I just stood there and took another sip of my coffee. For twenty years, I’d fought with Jameson, played tricks on him, been his partner in crime and stood up for him—because I was the only one who got to pick on him. He was exactly the same way with me. And because of that, I knew this would be the ultimate one-up prank. I had zero doubts that he’d fall asleep minutes into the flight. And when he woke up halfway over the ocean, I would take great pleasure in letting him know where we were and that no, we would not be joining the mile-high club.

And besides, as drunk as he was, he was right about one thing. We needed to work out things between us. Maybe, some neutral ground was a good idea.

“So how long are we going?” I asked in amusement.

“As long as it takes,” he replied, staring into his coffee cup. “This is some really shitty coffee.”

“I know. Tell you what... It can be your job to find me good decaf for the rest of my pregnancy, okay?”

“Good idea. Right, let me make a note,” he said, opening an app on his phone. “Good stuff coffee,” he muttered to himself as he typed.

Shaking my head, I went to pack.

* * * *

“Oh my God, shoot me,” Jameson groaned across from me where he slumped in his seat while we jetted across the Atlantic.

I put my tablet on my lap and looked over at him. “Nope, no deal.”

“You’re here,” he said, the faintest of smiles curling the edges of his lips as he opened his eyes. “Wait...where is here?” He looked around. “Are we on my plane? What are we doing on my plane?”

I smirked at him. “What do you remember?”

His brow furrowed, and he winced. “Being in your office. Leaving. Going to the bar with all my brothers then... Damn it, Willow! Why are we on a plane? Should you even be flying?”

“You don’t remember promising to take me on my dream trip? You even said you’d fight a bear for me.”

“Willow...” he warned.

“You’ve been asleep awhile.” I glanced out the window. “By my calculations, we’re

somewhere over the Atlantic. You said you're taking me away somewhere that we could hash things out. Somewhere neutral."

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“I’m taking you to fucking Switzerland!” he exclaimed. “Jesus, I must have been really drunk. But you agreed?”

I shrugged. “Seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“Don’t think I don’t know why, brat.” He pointed vaguely at me. “I know you.”

“Hey, I’m not the one who was swilling whiskey last night.”

“You better not have been. You’ve got my kid in there.”

“That remains to be seen,” I snarked.

“You and I both know it is. And I’m going to be there every fucking second—don’t you try and stop me. Ballgames, dances, wedding, whatever. We don’t even know if it’s a boy or a girl yet, but it doesn’t matter to me. I already have more feelings in the tip of my pinky for that little bean than your father had for anyone his entire life. So don’t you make a mistake about that.”

Tears pricked my eyes at his adamant declaration.

“Little bean,” I whispered. I called the baby that, too.

“Aw, fuck,” he swore, tearing off his seatbelt. He stumbled across to me, scooped me up then sat with me on his lap. “I didn’t mean to make you cry. I’ve never, ever wanted to make you cry—well, except back when I was a crappy six-year-old maybe, and even then, not really.”

“You’re really cute when you babble,” I said, leaning into his chest.

“I just want to do the right thing with you.”

I closed my eyes, fighting a tremor. My fingers fisted on the edge of his rumpled suit coat. “Don’t say that.”

“Not like that. I don’t mean it that way. Fuck, if you think I’ll marry you just for the kid, you’re wrong. When I get married, it will be because of love. Do you understand me?”

I shook my head. Then nodded, sadness swamping me. My thoughts instantly went to him finding another woman and falling for her. Pain sliced into my chest so deep that I almost gasped. Was that how he’d felt when he thought I was with another man?

“I’m sorry I let you think it was someone else,” I sniffled into his shirt. His hand buried in my hair, and he cradled me there.

His chest lifted as he sighed. “Yeah, that fucking sucked.”

“If you want to try to figure this out, see if we can stand each other at close quarters for more than a couple hours at a time, I’m willing to try,” I said.

“You were the one who always ran away.”

“Jamie...”

“I have my work cut out for me, don’t I?” he muttered.

“I think we both do.”

Jamie and I knew how to fight. We knew how to screw. Now, we had to define what else we had between us.

Eight

Jameson

Fucking Switzerland? This was why I didn't drink.

Willow's stomach grumbled, and she giggled into my chest. I was still holding her on my lap and didn't have any immediate plan to let her go.

"Kathy!" I called out to our stewardess.

"Yeah, boss," she said, walking over with a smile. "What can I get you?"

"Don't do that," I said, rolling my eyes.

“Do what?” Kathy asked.

“That boss shit,” I said. “You know I hate that.”

“She still calls Luke and Fray Mr. Cassel,” Willow said with a laugh.

“How do you know that?” I asked.

“Not all of us abandoned our high school friends when we became gazillionaires, doofus,” Willow shot back. “We all graduated together, and a lot of us keep in touch.”

“It’s nice to see you guys getting along?” Kathy said, her tone making it more of a question than a statement. “Can I get you two anything?”

“Ms. Tate is starving,” I informed her. “What do we have on board?”

“Pantry is fully stocked, sir,” Kathy said, giving me a mocking salute. “I can cook you something, or there’s everything to make sandwiches and I can make something a little heavier for dinner.”

“How long into the flight are we?” I asked, looking at Willow.

“Only about six hours,” she answered with a shrug. “A sandwich sounds awesome,” she told Kathy.

“Same,” I said.

Kathy nodded and bustled off to the galley.

I turned back to Willow and grinned at her. “You actually pulled this off?”

“You did,” she corrected me. “You made the flight plans. I just packed a bag.”

“Fuck,” I groused. “I don’t have anything with me, do I?”

“Nope,” she said cheerily.

“You’re very pleased with yourself right now, aren’t you?”

“Yup!”

“You’re the devil.” I pulled her face to mine and kissed her softly.

“Probably,” she agreed breathlessly.

Kathy returned with lunch, and I had to move to my own seat again, so we could eat. The ladies caught up while I texted Luke to let him know I’d be out of the office for a while.

Luke: Fair warning, dude, Mom’s on the warpath. Don’t get married while you’re away.

Me: I can handle Mom.

Luke: You can barely handle Willow. Trust me on this. She’s trying to get Dad to fire me.

Like that would happen. Our father was very happily retired and glad for Luke

guiding the company now.

Me: Sweet! Can I have your office?

Luke: Fuck off. Have fun. Don't get married.

"Texting your girlfriend?" Willow teased when Kathy went back to the cockpit.

"You're not cute," I told her, rolling my eyes. "Luke was just warning me that we'd better not get married while we're gone."

"Good thing we don't have to worry about that," she said.

“Why do you say that?”

“That’s not what this trip is about,” she explained.

“What is it about then?” I challenged.

“You wanted this,” she reminded me. “This is about connecting. About trying to be nice to each other for long stretches of time.”

“We’ve done okay so far,” I said.

“Yeah, well, you’ve been asleep for most of the flight.”

That was true.

“How’s my baby?” I asked, changing the subject before I got myself in trouble.

“I’m okay,” she said. “A little tired.”

“I meant my actual baby,” I told her. “But if you’re tired, there’s a bedroom suite in the back. Come on; let’s go lie down.”

“No way.” She shook her head emphatically. “That’s how you got my virginity.”

I tried to smother a laugh but didn’t quite manage. She was right. We’d just graduated, and my parents had thrown a massive party for the entire graduating class. Willow had claimed to have a headache, and I’d offered to let her rest in one of the

guest rooms. Except when we'd gotten up there... Well, there hadn't been much resting going on.

"Come on," I told her, getting to my feet and holding out a hand. "I promise, no funny business."

"Damn straight," she muttered.

Well, now, that sounded like a challenge if ever I'd heard one.

I led her to the bedroom then shut and locked the door behind us. She crawled up on the bed, lying down and flinging her arm over her eyes.

"How do you have a better mattress on your plane than I have in my apartment?" she groaned.

I climbed in next to her and spooned her from behind, wrapping my arm around her and splaying my fingers over her belly.

"You really have my baby in there," I whispered, placing a soft kiss on her neck. "How is that possible?"

"Well, Jameson," she said, her tone haughty. "When two people hate each other very much—"

I spun her onto her back and pushed her arm away, forcing her to meet my gaze. She worried her lower lip between her teeth while she stared back at me, but she didn't pull away.

"I know you're worried about this. About me. About us," I said. "But you do know that I love you, don't you? I've been a complete jackass; I know I have. I just... God,

Willow, I can't stand the thought that you think I hate you. That I ever hated you."

She shook her head, but tears pooled in her beautiful eyes.

"I know you don't hate me," she whispered. "Just like I've never hated you. Not really."

"I'm not going to ask you to marry me," I promised. "Not yet. When I do, I want to make damn sure you know it's because I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Both of you." I ran my palm over her barely-there-bump. "You're not ready to accept that yet, but you will be."

I leaned down and kissed her again. This time, her arms snaked around my neck, and she pulled me tighter against her. I tried to keep my weight off of her, not wanting to risk crushing my little bean.

"Jamie," she said, pulling back and looking at me. "You're not going to hurt me."

"I know..." I didn't even sound convinced to myself.

"It's okay," she promised. She pulled me down to her mouth again.

I probed her lips with my tongue, and she opened to me, sighing into my mouth as my hand slid down her body, pressing firmly at her apex. The heat from her core against my fingers, even through her jeans, made my cock instantly hard. I groaned as I deepened our kiss, rubbing harder against her until her hips bucked up into me, a soft sob escaping her throat.

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“Naked,” I insisted, rearing back and pulling off my shirt then dropping it next to the mattress before popping the button of her pants. “Now.”

“You’re so bossy,” she complained, even as she wrenched off her own tee and tossed it aside.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” I growled. I fell over her, placing wet kisses over her breasts and up her throat before pulling away again.

I slid down the mattress, gripping the waistband of her jeans and tugging them down, discarding them along with her panties while she unhooked and removed her bra.

When I stood to kick off my own pants, I looked down at her and froze. It was the first time I’d seen her naked in months. My mouth went dry at the sight of her spread on the bed, her gaze wild, hair fanned out over the pillow.

“How did I get so lucky?” I climbed up next to her again and ran my fingers over her slightly swollen belly. Lying there naked, it was more pronounced than it was when she was clothed. “I love you, you know?”

“I know,” she said, smiling as she followed the trail of my fingers over her abdomen. “We’re gonna have a baby.”

“I know.” I rolled over her and reclaimed her mouth, trying to put every emotion wracking my body into the kiss. My love, my devotion, my admiration of her. All of it. Everything I had, everything I was, belonged to her now.

If I were being honest...it always had.

I shifted my hips between her legs, spreading her open for me, before sliding inside her wet folds. As I rocked gently against her, my hands palmed her breasts as I feasted on her lips.

Small moans and gasps escaped each of us as we made love. Every other time we'd ever had sex, it had been a rough, fervent affair. This was a completely different kind of passion. I worshipped her body with mine, paid homage to the love of my life in a way I had sadly never done before.

We came together, our bodies sweaty, our breaths panting in time to one another, hearts racing at the same speed. Lightning flickered across my gaze as I spilled inside her, holding her against me as she shuddered and clung to me.

When I shifted off of her and pulled her into my arms again, she gazed up at me with slightly narrowed eyes.

"You did that on purpose," she accused.

"What?"

"You said you'd let me rest then got me to convince you that sex wouldn't hurt me or the baby."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I scoffed, pushing her head back down against my chest so she wouldn't see the smile I couldn't contain.

I hadn't done it on purpose, which was a shame. Because it was a damn good plan.

Nine

Willow My-Perspective's-Changed Tate

I couldn't even be mad at him. It had been the best damn sex of my life. No, not sex. Making love. That's what it had been. Content, I settled into him while he held me secure in his arms and traced soothing circles on my back.

I must have slept because next thing I knew I was waking to Jamie stroking my cheek. He was fully dressed and sitting on the side of the bed.

"Kathy's making us dinner," he said.

"We just ate," I grumble-yawned. Right on cue, my stomach growled.

"Hmm, not so much," he replied. "Why don't you get dressed and meet me out there. I'm having her make your favorite."

"You don't know my favorite."

"Actually, I do. You have two. One is pancakes, which she's not making. And the other is Mongolian chicken with extra veggies." He leaned forward and brushed his nose over mine. "And for dessert, you always have cheesecake with blueberry topping, which we're also having." He clapped his hand lightly on my butt. "Get dressed, or I'll eat your cheesecake."

"You better not!" I called as he shut the door. I sank back against the pillows. He knew my favorite foods? I never thought he'd paid that much attention. I mean, I knew his. Jamie loved donuts and cookies, but as far as dinner foods, give him a burger and steak fries and he was a happy man.

Wearily, I climbed from the bed and grabbed my clothes. I'd been told this fatigue was supposed to pass by the second trimester. Lies. I was still waiting for the miracle

to occur.

It took a few minutes for me to dress, then I headed out to Jamie. “Shouldn’t we be landing soon?” I asked, settling into my seat.

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“About an hour and a half. I wasn’t sure how soon we’d find food after landing, and I didn’t want you to be hungry. Hell, I don’t even know where we’re staying at this point. I’ve got my assistant on it, but we’ve been flying through a dead area for my phone, so I guess we’ll find out when I can get in touch again.”

I raised an eyebrow. “All this tech,” I said, indicating around the plane, “and you can’t get a line to your office?”

“I’m sure the pilot could raise them, but it didn’t really seem like an emergency.”

Kathy interrupted then, bringing us dinner. After we thanked her and she left, I turned back to Jamie. “I don’t know... Having a place to sleep seems important. I mean when you said neutral ground in Switzerland, I didn’t really think we’d be sleeping on the actual ground.”

He took a bite of his chicken, and from the spark in his eyes, I knew he was thinking something naughty. “That’s okay, devil. You can just lie on me. You seem to like that anyway.”

I threw a forkful of rice at him. “Jerk.”

He calmly wiped it off his shirt then kept eating. “I’m not going to fight with you.”

“Hmm,” I grumbled. “Well, A, that sounds like a challenge. And, B, our entire relationship is based on us fighting.”

“We fight a lot, but I think it’s more like sexual tension driving us. Now, anyway.

When we were young, you were just fun to fight with. You've always been my best frenemy."

"And you honestly think we're going to stop fighting?"

"Nope. Never. But you're going to stop running away, and I'm going to stop hiding my feelings, and we're going to have a lot of make-up sex. And maybe, we'll start acknowledging that we prefer to be with each other over hanging out with anyone else."

Crap...he was right. And it killed me to admit that. I did prefer Jameson's company over anyone else's. The idea of spending a bunch of time with him on this trip actually excited me a lot. That was part of why I'd gone along with his plan when I'd known he was too drunk to realize what he was doing.

"Just so you know, I expect to see the Alps and castles on this trip."

"What about if we stay at the Gstaad Palace in the Alps?" he ventured, not looking at me as he studied his Mongolian chicken as if it were the most interesting thing in the world.

"Oh my God, you jerk. You know exactly where we're staying, don't you?"

"Of course, I do. You didn't think I'd land in a foreign country with my girl and my unborn child and be unprepared, did you? Taking care of you is my top priority."

"Are you going to try to wrap me in bubble paper?"

"No," he answered, drawing out the word in such a way that I knew he was absolutely lying.

I narrowed my eyes at him. “You should be well aware that I just started my dream job, and if you try to interfere with that, I will kick your ass, pregnant or not. And I have a girl posse who will help me. You should be afraid. Very, very afraid.”

“My brothers would kick my ass for you. At first, I didn’t want you there, for reasons you’re aware of now, even though you were perfectly qualified. Then I insisted we hire you. If I tried to change things up now, they’d probably bury me in the concrete foundation of our next big project.”

I blinked at him. “Huh, I wasn’t aware I was dating into the mob. Just so we’re clear, I’m going to keep working as a project manager and doing all the tasks involved in that.”

He took a deep breath and put down his fork. “Just so we’re clear, I won’t like you going to job sites when you’re getting closer to term.” He held up a hand when I started to argue. “We have other female project managers on staff. The same accommodations have been made for them. It doesn’t affect the longevity and value of their jobs, nor their credibility. It’s a safety issue, clearly outlined in the company’s standards. Also, personally, I hope you’ll comply with the regs. If anything happened to either of you, I don’t know what I’d do. It was bad enough when I thought you belonged to someone else.”

My heart cracked a little at his vulnerability. I had two choices. I could be a pain in the ass now, because we both knew I’d follow company regulations. Or...I could play nice. Well, nice-ish.

“I suppose...” I smirked at him. “...if you’re going to be a baby about it.”

“Should we go back to the bedroom, and I’ll show what a baby I am...not?”

“Mmm...tempting, but I’m hungry, and we’re landing in a little bit. I’d rather you

make love to me in this castle we're going to. Actually, I'm very much looking forward to that." I speared a hunk of carrot. "And I think you should tell me all about it. I can tell you're rather pleased with yourself."

"When you were little, you always talked about princesses and knights and castles. Booking one seemed like a sure bet to make you happy. So Gstaad Palace is a castle hotel where we have a deluxe suite. It's right in the Alps, and our room promises to have a spectacular view. I'm told Princess Diana once stayed in the room we'll have. There are pools, a spa, restaurants and clubs, tennis, golf, skating... Whatever outdoor thing takes your fancy, really. I hear the town is the place to be this time of year, too."

And darn him for choosing a location that would cater to the outdoorsy girl in me.

"And if I just want to stay in?" I asked, just to be difficult.

Jamie grinned. "Let me tell you about the indoor pool/hot tub that's perfect for a romantic evening for two..."

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Ten

Jameson

For the first four days, this trip was everything I'd hoped it would be. Willow and I were overly polite to each other, we explored and spa'd and swam and ate. And ate. And ate.

My God, I had no idea where she was putting all the food. Our first morning there, we'd hit the breakfast buffet twice. Twice! She was still the tiniest thing, but man, she could eat. I loved it.

And every night, we'd made love for hours. The kind of slow, sweet, passionate love I'd always wanted to show her but had never had the nerve to attempt. I worshipped her body, and she seemed to revel in it.

We were happier than we'd ever been together.

On day five though...something between us shifted. She woke up on edge, and it seemed as if everything I did or suggested was completely wrong. I bit my tongue, not wanting to start an argument while we were sequestered together in the most beautiful place I'd ever seen. But damn it, she was driving me crazy.

"Do you want to check out the tennis courts?" I asked when we got back from breakfast.

"No."

“Okay. Do you want a new mani-pedi?”

“No.”

“Do you want to go swimming? Hiking? Ride a goat?”

“No.” She crossed her arms and sunk lower into the sofa cushions.

“Do you want to sit here and do nothing?” I suggested, unable to keep the bite out of my tone.

“How long are we staying here?” she asked.

“We can leave whenever you want.” I shifted to face her and ran my finger over her arm, watching her shiver in reaction. “Babe, what’s wrong?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted, kicking her heel at the carpet.

“Is it hormones?”

She narrowed her gaze at me, and her cheeks flushed the way they did when she got super pissed at me.

Shit.

“You know what, Cassel?” She jumped to her feet and put her hands on her hips, glaring down at me. “Every time a woman is having any kind of bad day, or attitude, or whatever...you men automatically blame it on hormones.”

“You’re fucking pregnant!” I yelled, standing as well and glaring right back at her. “It’s not out of the realm of possibility that it might be affecting your mood.”

“Piss off!” She started to stomp away, but I grabbed her arm and pulled her back to me.

“No way, princess,” I told her. “You’re not running out on me. We’re together now. We work this out.”

“Let. Me. Go.” Her tone was low and dangerous, but I wasn’t about to back down now.

“Wills, talk to me,” I begged. “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know,” she repeated with an exasperated sigh. “You’re just...here. All the time! I need some space. I’m too independent for all this togetherness.”

“Me, too,” I told her. “But we can be independent together.”

“That’s the stupidest thing you’ve ever said to me,” she snapped.

“I doubt that,” I admitted with a shrug.

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“Don’t do that,” she said, pulling her arm free.

“Do what?”

“Don’t be cute right now.”

“I don’t know any other way to be.” I reached for her again, and she didn’t fight me. I pulled her into my arms and sagged in relief when she hugged me back. “Do you want to go home?”

“No.” She sniffed, and I realized she was shaking.

Lifting her chin, I looked down at her tearstained cheeks, and my heart broke. I didn’t know what to do for her. I didn’t know how to fix this. I may have been wasted when I’d suggested this trip, but it really was supposed to prove we could be together. Now, it felt as if it were all falling apart on me.

“Are you hungry?” I asked tentatively.

“I’m always hungry,” she moaned, her tears falling faster. “And I’m tired. And I’m horny. And I know it’s the stupid hormones, but don’t say shit like that to me, okay?”

“Okay,” I agreed, pressing her head back to my chest while rubbing circles over her back. “I’m sorry I pointed out the obvious.”

I shouldn’t have been surprised when she sack-tapped me, but I still was. It wasn’t a hard hit, but it was direct, and I sank to the floor, clutching my balls and groaning in

pain.

“You’re an asshole,” she hissed.

“You’re a demon,” I responded, blinking back my own tears. Damn it. Was she gonna be like this for another five months? I wasn’t sure I’d survive it.

“I didn’t hit you that hard,” she complained, rolling her eyes.

“Well, I’d punch you in the boob to reciprocate,” I told her, climbing back to my feet. “But we’re not in middle school anymore, and I don’t hit women.”

“Can we eat?”

“Well, I’m trying not to vomit,” I admitted. “But I can get you third breakfast. Do you want to go downstairs?”

“Yes, please.” She walked toward the bedroom. “I’m going to change real quick.” She looked back at me and appraised me from head-to-toe. “Is that what you’re wearing?”

“Apparently not,” I said. “You change first. I’ll come in when you’re done.”

She closed the door behind her, and I sank onto the couch, clutching my forehead in one hand and my crotch in the other.

There was no way I’d survive this pregnancy with my hormonal frenemy. And if, by some miracle I did, I wasn’t sure my testicles would be able to provide me any other kids in the future.

* * * *

After we ate, Willow claimed she was feeling better and agreed to go explore the gardens with me. We walked hand-in-hand through an eclectic array of flowers, some that were just sprouting and some that were already beginning to fade. The contrast of winter blooms mixed with spring, sprinkled with summer buds waiting for the heat to come, was breathtaking. I made a few mental notes as we walked, thinking there was bound to be a hotel project that would want this kind of feel to it, and I wanted to remember how to give it to them.

“It’s nice here,” Willow said.

“It is,” I agreed. “I could see us getting married here.”

“Don’t start,” she groaned.

“I didn’t mean today.” Honestly, after her theatrics earlier, I was a little bit gun shy on proposing anyway.

I mean, I was definitely going to spend the rest of my life with her. And she was absolutely going to marry me one day.

Just...not today.

“Would you buy me a castle?” Willow asked suddenly.

“Yes,” I answered without hesitating. “I’ll build you one as soon as we get back if you want.”

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She studied me for a minute, her gaze searching my face.

“You really would, wouldn’t you?” She seemed surprised.

“Willow, I would do anything for you.” I took both of her hands in mine and stared down at her. “When we get back...I really think you should move in with me.”

“Oh, you do, do you?” she challenged.

“Your apartment is the size of a closet. And it’s way too far from my place. What if you need something? What if something happens, and I’m too far away.” I sighed. “And...I want you there. With me.”

“Jamie, I don’t know—”

“We could go buy a place,” I offered, cutting her off. “You know, just a little starter mansion until the castle gets built.”

She laughed and shook her head, releasing one of my hands but keeping the other as she started walking again.

“Do you remember the conversation we just had about independence?”

“I do,” I concurred. “I recall we agreed to do it together.”

“I’ll think about it,” she offered. “That’s the best I can do right now. Okay?”

“Okay,” I agreed.

“Would you be mad if I wanted to go home?” She stopped again and stared up at me with wide eyes.

“I can have the plane back tomorrow. Is that okay? Or I could see if we could get a commercial flight if you don’t want to stay another day.”

“Wow,” she said, laughing and shaking her head. “You’re so loaded.”

“I offered to build you a castle, but the fact that I could throw a commercial flight on my Amex is what impresses you?”

I left out the fact that we’d brought my private jet here, and here was Switzerland, at a castle that was costing me more per day than she used to make in a month.

Granted, she’d known me forever. And there were things she was used to being around. We Cassels didn’t flaunt our wealth, but we didn’t hide it either. We worked hard, and we played hard. When we could, we brought our friends along for the ride, too. So, she’d done the whole private jet, crazy vacation thing with my family before this week. But, apparently, the ease with which I was able to move her around was the thing that stuck out from the norm.

“Willow.” I pulled her to a stop again. “I need you to understand something. Right now. Regardless of our relationship status, what’s mine is yours. It kind of always was. But it definitely is now. I will hand over every last cent I have to make sure that you and our baby are taken care of. Forever.” I saw her stiffen and realized she’d just drawn together unconnectable dots in her head. “That’s not a morality thing. That’s a love thing. We are in this together. I will never leave your side. Even when you try to push me away. I love you.”

“I know,” she said, blowing out a sigh and relaxing her shoulders. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” I asked, my brows knitting together in confusion.

“For jumping to conclusions. For being irrational and cranky. For hitting you in the balls earlier.” She shrugged. “I’m just sorry.”

“Don’t apologize to me,” I said. “I’m fine. You’re fine. We’re all fine.” I leaned forward and kissed her. “Come on. I’ll get the jet back here tomorrow, and we can enjoy our last night in style, what do you say?”

“Bring it on, Cassel.”

Eleven

Willow I-Don’t-Know-What-I-Want Tate

“Wait, wait, wait!” Emerson cried as she, Laura, Penny and I had brunch on the outdoor patio at my favorite café. Jamie and I had gotten back from Switzerland a couple weeks ago, and this was the first time we’d all been able to get together. I wished Phoebe was here, but she was still traveling. “So...you got pregnant after Laura’s bachelorette party for the wedding that would never be—thank God—and you’re just telling us now?”

To tell the truth, since my belly was starting to really pooch out, I was surprised neither she nor Laura had guessed before now. But they both had their starry-eyed honeymoon glasses on, their focuses mostly on their hunky men.

“I didn’t tell anyone except Penny. You were getting married then Laura was getting married. This is the first break we’ve had.”

Laura narrowed her eyes speculatively.

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“And you’re living together now? Are you sure you didn’t get married in Switzerland?” she asked, pointing at me.

“We’re not living together. I just spend mostly every night at his place. And we definitely did not get married, Elopement Jane.”

She rolled her eyes. “But you are going to marry him, right?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted. “I’m just not sure.”

“You’re just not sure you love him?” Emerson asked. “Or that you want to spend your life with him? What his feelings are for you?” She waved her hands in little circles, as if she were weighing things. “I’m not understanding the hang up here.”

“I love him.”

“But you are going to at least move in with him, right?” Penny asked. “It’ll be hard splitting time between places, for you guys and the baby.”

“That’s my other news, I guess. We bought a little place.” Okay, it was little compared to all the homes Jameson had dragged me to. This one had seven bedrooms and nine and a half baths. And if I never wanted to leave the property again, I didn’t have to with all the extras included. Frankly, it was overwhelming, but since I’d talked him down from the ten and twelve bedroom places, I was sucking it up.

Of course, it had included a hell of a fight which had resulted in us going to our separate homes in a fit of anger. Sort of. About two in the morning, Jamie had slipped

into bed with me and proceeded to fuck the hell out of me. I hadn't even realized how much I'd missed some rough, sweaty, no-holds-barred sex. Not that I didn't crave the tender stuff he'd been plying me with. Still, I'd slept better that night than I had in weeks, maybe months.

And now, we were getting the smaller mansion that frankly reminded me of a mini-castle with its theater-style media center, library, family room, soaring spiral staircases, pool, spa...

Again...overwhelming. I'd need a freaking map to find the main bedroom. Even more surreal, we were interviewing staff later today. Thank God, because I wasn't cleaning that place.

"We're moving in next week," I told them. We chatted about other things after that, the brunch topics turning to Emerson and Laura's homes, the school where Penny taught and how things were coming as they neared the end of the school year, then baby showers. Or specifically, a baby shower for me.

"Do you know what you're having?" Penny asked.

My hand splayed over my little bump. "A baby."

"Ha-ha," she replied.

"No, really, we find out on Monday, hopefully. We're scheduled for the twenty-week sonogram."

"I can't believe you're having a baby first," Emerson laughed, her hand going to her own stomach. "I mean, we always guessed you'd end up with Jameson, no question there, but I thought it would be a while yet."

My gaze followed her gesture. “Em, you have something you want to share with the rest of the class?”

“Not supposed to talk about it for a couple weeks still.”

“Emerson!” we all yelled. And all the talk turned totwobaby showers.

* * * *

“Ready to see your little one again?” Dr. Bob asked. My physician didn’t question Jamie being here since the files had been updated to reflect Jamie as the father. Jameson still wasn’t thrilled by the gender of my doctor, but I’d told him to get over it. That had been some pretty spectacular sex, too. I was finding that bickering brought out some wildness between us that wouldn’t be tamed by our forced “niceness.” It felt so much more...normal. For us anyway.

Our kids would be so screwed up, but by God, they’d know that Mommy and Daddy loved the hell out of each other and them.

“Yes,” Jamie said, his fingers locked with mine, tension on his face like it hadn’t been last time. Happy, excited tension. A little jolt went off in my middle at his expression, and I bit my lip as corresponding happiness shot through me.

His eyes met mine as the doctor adjusted the monitor.

“I love you,” I mouthed.

In this darkened room, Jamie practically bounced as he squeezed my fingers, pure elation vibrating from him. I felt it. Family... The two of us meant to be together in a way that my parents never should have been. Jamie was my person.

“I love you,” he mouthed back.

I almost whispered Marry Me, but the Dr. Bob saved me from it by squirting cold gel on my exposed belly. Gah! Had I almost proposed? What was wrong with me? Then the thwump-thwump-thwump filled the room and all my attention was centered on the screen and Jamie’s hand clenched on mine.

The doctor took some measurements making Mm-hmm sounds as he clicked away.
“Okay, are we ready to know what we’re having?”

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“Yes,” Jamie replied, giving my hand a little squeeze. “Boy, girl, demon spawn...”

“Jameson,” I scolded, laughing. “If the baby has horns, it’s from your side of the family.”

He snorted.

“No horns...unless you count this,” Dr. Bob told us. Our gazes riveted to the monitor as we figured out what he was talking about. My mild panic receded when I saw it. Jamie drew in a breath as he saw it, too.

“We’re having a boy?” Jamie whispered. He leaned forward and pressed his lips to my temple. “Thank you. Thank you, baby. I love you so much.”

“I love you, too,” I answered, my heart so full, I could barely stand it. Our faces close together, we watched the screen containing the image of our son. I wasn’t sure if that moisture was from my tears or Jamie’s. I wouldn’t have traded this moment for anything. More than ever, I was glad he was here with me and I knew he was committed to us—a real commitment, not a duty.

“Who should we call first?” he asked as he helped me off the table after the doctor had finished and left the room.

“The Chinese takeout place. I’m starving.”

He laughed. “Fine. I have a backup fruit bar in the car, too. And after that?”

I grinned, absolutely sure who we'd tell first because his family was my family now. "Your mom and dad. But I know everyone, even Em and Laura, is at the office today. Maybe, we can get them all together in the big conference room and announce it to them all at once."

"Brilliant." He kissed the top of my head. "I'll call Roz and get her on it. She's still trying to get back in Mom's good graces."

"I'll call Penny and get her there, too. Won't Bennett be happy with that?"

"What?"

"Really, Jameson?" I laughed.

"Really what?"

"You haven't noticed your brothers seem to have a thing for my friends?"

"Huh...no."

I shook my head. Men...

"So Bennett and Penny? And she likes him, too? Does Bennett know?" he asked.

If Penny did, I certainly wasn't telling this man who'd run to his Irish-twin brother, blabbing about the news. Their birthdays were close enough they shared the same age for part of the year and had even been in the same grade in school. They'd done everything together—except pick on me. Jameson had never allowed that. I was his own personal frenemy. Now, I was his own personal everything.

Twelve

Jameson

“You have got to talk to your mother,” Willow said firmly.

We were standing next to each other in the foyer of our mansion, staring up at the nine-foot-tall stuffed giraffe that had just been delivered.

“Sir, where would you like it?” the delivery guy asked.

“Second floor, third door on the right,” I answered, still staring.

“Fourth door,” Willow corrected. “Please put it next to the elephant.” She nudged me with her shoulder and motioned for me to follow her into the kitchen.

I still wasn’t used to this house. We’d been officially moved in for a couple months now, and we loved it, but damn...there was a lot of space. We’d assigned the entire right side of the second-floor hallway as the kid’s domain. The nursery, the playroom, the overflow closet, then additional bedrooms for additional babies.

Well, that was my plan anyway. Willow kept calling them guest rooms.

“What are your plans for today?” I asked, bustling around the kitchen to make her a cup of decaf as she settled onto a barstool.

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“I have to go into the office for a couple hours.” She was already glaring at me when I spun around to argue with her. “Don’t. I just have a few things to wrap up, Jameson.”

“That’s why you have assistance,” I told her. “You’re on maternity leave. You shouldn’t be working.”

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t aware that companies gave women two months of maternity leave before their due dates,” she said.

“We’re very progressive,” I informed her, turning my back and smiling into the fridge as I got her cream. “Besides, I need you here. Laura is coming over today to continue work on the nursery, and I need you here to make decisions.”

“You make them,” Willow said, her tone exasperated. “I’ve had to deal with the whole house.”

“Because I want you to be happy,” I insisted. “I thought you’d want to decorate the house. I would have just made everything black and gray, and you would have been miserable.”

“I wouldn’t have been miserable,” she lied.

“You told me my penthouse reminded you of a television prison drama.” I handed her a mug of coffee and watched as she took a sip.

“This isn’t as awful as that Columbian from last week,” she said, shaking her head

and setting down the cup. “But still not great.”

“By the time I find you a decaf that doesn’t suck,” I picked up the mug and dumped it in the sink, “you’ll be pregnant again.”

“Mmm,” she hummed, looking down and rubbing her belly. “So, you’ll talk to your mom, right?”

“About what?” I asked.

“About the menagerie she’s purchased for the baby. About everything she’s purchased for the baby.”

“Wills, it’s her first grandbaby.” I reached across the island and took her hand. “Are you really surprised she’s going overboard?”

“Surprised? No.” She shook her head. “Annoyed, yes.”

“Why?”

“This baby is already spoiled, and he hasn’t even been born yet,” she answered. “I don’t want him to grow up expecting the world to be handed to him.”

“The world is going to be handed to him,” I insisted.

“Jameson Cassel,” she snapped.

Her mood swings had gotten a lot worse now that we’d hit the third trimester. She was tired and sore all the time, so I could see how that would wear her down. But I’d been tiptoeing around her for so long, that sometimes, I forgot and stuck my foot in my mouth.

At the moment, my basic plan was to agree with whatever she said whenever she said it. Even when it contradicted itself. Agree. Agree. Agree.

“Sorry, babe,” I said quickly. “I just mean, didn’t we work our asses off so our kids didn’t have to?”

“Is that how your parents raised you?” she asked, quirking an eyebrow. “They’re the richest people I’ve ever met, but they made you boys earn your keep. And that’s why most of you are good men now.”

“Hey!” I walked around the table and wrapped my arms around her. “I resemble that remark.”

“You know I’m teasing,” she said, cupping my face in her palm and kissing me softly. “You are a good man. And you’re going to be a great father. I’m just worried...”

“We’re about to be parents, Wills, I think we’ll always be worried about something,” I said. “But yes, I’ll talk to Mom. Do you want a cheetah or a lion next?”

“Lion,” she said, sliding to her feet. “And when Laura gets here, tell her I want to change the playroom to a safari theme to match the animals.”

“Will do,” I said, nodding as she waddled to the stairs. I sat down and blew out a heavy sigh. The women in my life were going to drive me crazy.

* * * *

“Yeah,” Laura said, looking around at the random collection of things in the room we’d decided to call the playroom. “I can make this look like a safari.” She made a note in her phone then smiled up at me. “Which room is going to be the aquarium?”

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I laughed, but she just kept looking at me.

“What?” I asked, totally confused.

“The aquarium,” she repeated. “I’ve got to get the tanks on order, but I need to see the size of the space, so I know which ones to go with.”

“Laura, I literally have no idea what you’re talking about. Is this something you and Willow talked about?”

“No, your mom said—”

“No,” I said, drawing the word out. “Uh-uh. No aquarium. And please don’t take directions from my mother anymore.”

“Hey, guys!” Willow said brightly, walking in and hugging Laura then me. “Do we have a vision for the room?”

“Sure do!” Laura agreed, smiling at Willow. “You look so beautiful. I can’t wait...” She cleared her throat. “Anyway, yup, we’re all set on the safari. The baby furniture for the nursery is due in tomorrow, so I’ll have one of the guys come and set it up for you.”

“No, I got it,” I said. “I’m going to build the furniture.”

“No,” the women said together, both of them staring at me.

“What?” I laughed. “I’m the dad here. I’ll set up the crib. It’s a rite of passage.”

“Jameson, you’ve never built so much as a card house,” Willow said, touching my arm softly.

“I’m part owner a construction firm,” I reminded both of them. “As is your husband, Laura.”

“Yeah, but you don’t do any of the actual building,” Willow said firmly. “Let’s just have the professionals do this, okay? I mean, our baby is going to sleep in it.”

“I’m not going to hurt our baby,” I promised. “Fray will come over, and we’ll all do it together. It will be good practice for him.” She still looked unconvinced, so I changed the subject.

“Mom tried to get Laura to build an aquarium in one of the rooms,” I said, my tone as shocked as I could make it sound.

“Ooh!” Willow squealed, clapping her hands. “That will be so cool. Come on, Laura. Let’s go pick a room. I’m thinking saltwater. We can hire someone to take care of that, right?”

I stared after them, unable to believe what I’d just heard. After all of Willow’s bitching about my mom interfering and overspending, she was going to let my mother install a saltwater aquarium in our house.

But, on the plus side, it sounded as if I wouldn’t have to talk to my mother after all.

Thirteen

Willow Tate-Should-Be-Cassel

“Jameson!” I screeched from the living room, bent over at what used to be my waist. My knees buckled, and I could barely keep upright while I clenched the back of a club chair.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, this hurts like a mother...

Where the hell was that man? This was not happening. I still had two weeks. I still had to pack my hospital bag. I had a clownfish delivery coming today... And now, I had a puddle of water at my feet, and I was soaked. This was not how they wrote about it in books. Total bullshit.

“God damn it, Jameson,” I screamed. “Get in here, or I’m freaking leaving you!”

Not that I could leave if I wanted to, I couldn’t even walk, which was why I was bellowing for him. I didn’t think I could move from this spot without falling as pain clamped around my middle and radiated outward. I mean, I knew childbirth was painful but, sweet Mother of God... I needed the drugs. All the drugs. Stat!

“What?” Jameson panted, skidding into the room. He took one look, and his eyes went wide as if he’d encountered a scene from *The Shining* or something. Of course, my position, my white-knuckled grip on the chair, the amniotic fluid all over the marble floor, seeping toward the Oriental rug, gave him a clue.

“Oh my God,” he gasped, going white.

“I swear to God, Jameson, if you faint and leave me alone in this, you’re going to be living in the pool house.”

“It’s time?” he asked, clearly trying to gather himself. He looked faint.

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“No, I just thought we should do a fucking dry run. What do you think?” I growled as the pain edged up again. Already.

“Doesn’t look very dry,” he commented, recovering enough to taunt me as he came toward me then swung me carefully into his strong arms.

“You’re going to get all wet,” I muttered, burying my face in his neck. Being cuddled close to him made me forget I was ready to plot his murder for the very wet comment. At the moment, he was the most comforting thing in my life. My hands clenched into his shirt as he walked, my mouth pressed to his shoulder.

“Doesn’t matter. You okay?” he asked. He grabbed a throw off the couch and wrapped it around me, moving the whole time.

“It hurts,” I whined.

“We’ll get you drugs as soon as we can,” he said gently.

“Okay,” I agreed as he placed me in the BMW crossover he’d gotten last month and fastened me in. He’d claimed it was the closest he was ever getting to a minivan, and we needed a bigger vehicle. “We need a bag or something,” I exclaimed when he slid behind the steering wheel.

“It’s already in the back.”

“You packed my bag?”

“Well, you weren’t doing it. You’re supposed to have it prepared by the eighth month.”

“Don’t judge me.”

“Of course, I’m not judging you. You’re my warrior woman.”

“Don’t feel like it right now. You’re handling this really well,” I observed. Aside from the near panic when he first answered my screams. His calm was almost...annoying. Still, I homed in on it, my touchpoint outside my body. “I thought you were going to pass out back there.”

“I don’t want to live in the pool house. I’d miss my game room.”

“Jerk,” I laughed. Weakly, but it was a laugh. I winced at the movement of it in my torso.

“There’s my girl. I’ve got your phone list, favorite nightgown, some leggings and tops in your bag. I packed the outfit you wanted and baby essentials in the diaper bag for Jamie Junior.”

I rolled my eyes. “We did not agree on that name.”

“You know you want it.” Probably...but I wasn’t ready to say yes or no. I wanted to see our baby before we decided. Maybe, he wouldn’t look like a Jameson. Maybe, he’d look like a Frank. Nah...I doubted any kid of mine would look like a Frank.

“Why did I agree to let you be the father?” I asked, watching the landscape speed past. Jameson was driving way over the speed limit. We were heading to the local one, in Sleepy Hollow, and not the one in NYC since we no longer lived in the city.

He laughed, and I wanted to smack him. “Sorry, princess. It was my Olympian sperm that made that decision. We picked you.”

“Hmm.” I rolled my head toward him. “And why have you never proposed to me? Your sperm didn’t make that decision.”

I yelped as the vehicle suddenly swerved.

“Fuck, Wills!” he swore, righting the crossover.

Right. I was good for fucking, good for having his baby... I sniffled as tears filled my eyes. “Because you don’t want to marry me. That’s what I’m guessing. I get it.”

“Now?” he growled. “Now, when we’re on the way to the hospital and I can’t stop and kiss some sense into you? Are you kidding me? You don’t get anything!”

“I know you don’t want me!” I yelled back then groaned.

“I swear to God, Willow! As soon as you’re cleared for...whatever...I’m spanking you. I cannot believe you! Of course, I want to fucking marry you. I figured you’d kick me in the balls again if I tried to propose.”

“I didn’t kick you,” I mumbled.

“I’m not going to ask you anyway,” he announced. I closed my eyes and turned my face toward the window. Between my emotions and the pain in my middle, I was about to turn into a blubbering mess. Jameson reached for my fingers. I tried to pull away, but he wouldn’t let me. His grip was like iron as he tugged my hand toward him and pressed it to his lips. “You are marrying me. Do you think I’d take the chance of asking your obstinate ass? You’d say no just to be a little brat.”

“Jameson—” My words were lost on a loud cry as pain ripped through me.
“Jameson,” I breathed, my blurry gaze rolling toward him, my words thready.
“Hurry. I don’t...I don’t think...I don’t think...it’s supposed...to be this bad, this fast.”

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Both his jaw and the fingers on the wheel were clenched, his blanched features even whiter at the edges. He swallowed hard. “We’ll get there. We’re almost there. You’ll be okay. I promise you’ll be okay.”

It wasn’t supposed to be this way. Where the hell was my picture-perfect, earth mother birth moment? I’d done all the stupid classes, damn it.

“Jameson, I love you,” I whispered. My vision grayed, and I moaned. My arm curled around my belly. I just wanted my baby here and for both of us to be in Jameson’s arms.

“I love you, too. Hang on, baby. Please.”

* * * *

I smiled into the pillow as I heard the little cry of my angry baby. He was hungry. I guessed so, anyway. What did I know? I hadn’t had much cognizance the past few hours. I’d been swept away from Jameson almost as soon as we’d gotten to the ER. They’d let him come into the OR for the emergency C-section. Then our son was here, healthy, squalling, perfect. I’d cried. Jameson had sobbed, big baby. It was absolutely beautiful.

“Jameson,” I murmured.

“We’re both right here, me and Jamie junior, princess.”

“I didn’t agree to name him that.”

“Are you sure about that? You said a lot of things while you were under those powerful drugs.”

“Anything I said while impaired doesn’t count.” I held out my hands for the swaddled bundle he held. “Gimme the baby.”

“Nothing counts?” he asked as he settled the weight in my arms.

“Depends.” I stared into my son’s baby-blue eyes. I drew my finger along his soft cheek. We’d made this perfect little human.

“You said you love me.”

“You already knew that.”

“I love you, too.” He kissed the top of my head and settled onto the bed beside me. One arm went around my shoulders while the other fiddled with my hand. “And you said you thought we should get married right away.”

“In the car—”

“In the ER.”

I maybe vaguely remembered that.

“The family’s on the way here.”

“Good, they’ll want to see little Frank.”

“Frank?”

“I can’t call you both Jameson.”

His hand cupped the back of my head, and he brushed his lips over mine. “I love you, devil woman.”

“I love you, too.” I sighed. “I guess...for forever.”

“Oh, well, that’s lucky for me, since I suppose it’ll be that long for me, too. So about getting married...”

“Okay.”

“Yes?”

“I thought you weren’t going to ask me,” I teased, my heart so full right now. This man, our baby. The world couldn’t be much better.

“I’m not. I’m just checking in with you.”

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“Oh, I see,” I laughed. “Well, so you know, I am going to marry you. Someone has to take you on.”

“Back atcha, babe. I mean who else would take you?”

“I’m sure I could find another frenemy.”

“Impossible. You only have one best frenemy, and I’d bury anyone who tried to take you from me.”

I covered the baby’s ear that wasn’t pressed to my chest. “You’re turning me on a little, Jamie. I’m pretty sure that’s not allowed in the maternity ward.”

He groaned. “Pretty sure the next six weeks will kill me. I guess we’ll have to fill the time with wedding planning.”

“You? Me? Meet at the altar in six weeks?” I asked.

“Deal.” His lips covered mine, and I knew it would be a long, long, frustrating six weeks indeed.

Epilogue

Jameson

Two months later

“I’m gonna put another baby in you tonight,” I whispered to Willow, holding her close as we swayed to the music.

“Not on your life, hotshot,” she hissed. “I got you a big box of condoms as a wedding present. You’ll break my heart if you don’t use them.”

We were alone on the floor, celebrating our first dance as husband and wife. My mom was holding Baby Jamie—not Frank—at the parents’ table, and it felt as if this were the first moment Willow and I had had alone since he was born.

I loved him to pieces, but he was a little cock-blocker. We were exhausted and had lived on what seemed like zero sleep for the past eight weeks.

Our immediate honeymoon was a single night at a hotel about ten minutes from our mansion, just in case. And it would be a miracle if I could stay awake long enough to impregnate my wife. But I’d give it the old college try.

“Don’t you want a big family?” I asked her, running my hand up her back. “Lots of little Cassels running around.”

“Hmm,” she said thoughtfully, laying her head on my shoulder. “What I want is a bath and six solid hours of sleep.”

“How about a shower and four hours?” I offered.

“Throw a cup of warm water on me and give me five hours and you have a deal,” she countered.

“Kinky. I love you so much.” I leaned down and kissed her softly, flipping off Bennett when he wolf-whistled at us.

“I love you, too,” she said. She leaned her head against my chest again, and I started to worry she’d pass out here on the dance floor.

“Let’s go cut the cake,” I suggested, leading her toward the dessert table before our song had ended.

I honestly had no idea how my mother had managed to raise the five of us. Jamie was our first, and we were about dead. I could tease about having another immediately, but I couldn’t fathom how Mom had dealt with Bennett and me being less than a year apart.

“I like cake,” Willow said, a smile tugging at her lips.

“I know you do,” I said.

The wedding had been beautiful, and my wife was stunning. She wore a pale, ivory gown, simple and elegant, and her hair cascaded down her back in big waves. Today was the first time in a while I’d seen it brushed, actually.

Parenting was hard.

We cut the cake, and I gently fed a piece to my wife. She winked as she sucked my finger into her mouth, nipping it softly as I pulled my hand away.

When I bent to take the piece she offered me, the little devil shoved it into my face, smearing frosting across my lips and chin while she giggled hysterically.

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“You think that’s funny?” I asked, wiping my face with a napkin.

“I really do,” she confirmed, still laughing.

“Well, now, you’re getting knocked up with twins,” I informed her, my voice a low growl against her ear.

She visibly blanched.

“You can’t control that shit,” she hissed, narrowing her gaze at me.

“Oh, baby, we Cassel men can do whatever we want.”

“Is that so?” she challenged.

“Got you to marry me, didn’t I?” I wrapped my arm around her waist and pulled her against me. “Never underestimate me, demon woman.”

“Your demon woman,” she said. “You think you caught me? I snagged you the first time I saw you.” She grinned. “You’ve got your work cut out for you, Cassel.”

I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Epilogue Two

Willow

Five Years Later

“Are you crying?”

“Shut. Up,” I growled at my husband. “It’s his first day of kindergarten. I’m allowed to cry.”

“It’s a half day and you’ll be working the whole time,” Jameson teased.

As soon as we lost sight of our son who’d just skipped through his classroom doorway after telling us to leave, I turned my glare on the man in a bespoke charcoal-colored suit who stood at my side. “Don’t act like I didn’t see you staring at his baby book this morning, Mr. Cassel. You’re ridiculous.”

“You just seem extra emotional,” he said as he led me back out to our waiting town car, the same one that would bring me back here in about four hours. Today, anyway. Since both Jameson and I worked, sometimes traveling, our son, who went by JJ now since he’d rebelled at still being Baby Jamie, had a nanny.

“I’m not emotional.”

“You are,” my husband insisted after handing me into the back seat and sliding in after me. “I haven’t seen you like this since...” He turned wide eyes on me. “Since... Are you pregnant, babe?”

“Maybe,” I whispered.

“Maybe?”

“I’ve been afraid to check.” Despite teasing to the contrary, I had not gotten pregnant on our wedding night, nor during the subsequent years when we’d been trying in

earnest. I'd come to terms with JJ being an only child.

"How late are you?" Jamie asked, taking my hand in both his.

"A couple months."

"A couple months!" he exclaimed.

"I've been careful and I've been taking vitamins and not drinking or anything, but maybe I'm not pregnant. Maybe it's menopause. It could be early. That happens, you know."

He shook his head slowly, drawing in then releasing a slow breath while never taking his eyes off me. Without a word, he pressed one of the buttons on the console beside him.

"Change of plans. We're going to Willow's doctor's office."

"Of course, sir," the driver replied.

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Jameson pulled out his phone.

“Amber,” he greeted his assistant. “Call Dr. Wilson Bob’s office and let him know that Willow and I are on our way. We don’t have an appointment, but get him to fit us in.”

“Of course. Is everything okay?”

He slung his arm around my waist and pulled me closer to him. “Yes. I mean...I hope so. Yes.” He hung up and pulled me onto his lap. His hand immediately settled on my belly. “Babe, how long were you planning to wait.”

I shrugged. “I think I would have had irrefutable proof soon enough.” My lip wobbled then I pulled it between my teeth. We’d both know yes or no soon. I had no doubt the doctor would fit us in, especially since Jameson was friends with the man’s colleagues, Dr. Grammer and Dr. Brixton. “I was okay with JJ being an only child, but I really hope...”

“Same.” His lips brushed over mine. “Hey, maybe, it’s twins.”

“What is it with you and twins?” I asked with a watery laugh.

“You know Bennett and I are really close—close enough to be the same age part of the year. I thought our kids would like that.”

“You two used to fight as often as you didn’t.”

His shoulder lifted beneath my cheek. “He was my best friend—he is my best friend. After you, of course.”

“Heh. More like I was your frenemy.”

Tilted his head, he caught my lips again. “Makes things interesting. But no, you’re my everything, even the air I breathe.”

And as he kissed me, I forgot about my nerves or anything but being in my husband’s arms. Until reality intruded and we arrived at the building housing my doctor’s facility. But Jameson and I were together and that was all that mattered as I was led back to the examining room mere minutes after arriving. A few tests and and an ultrasound later...

Jameson got his wish. Twins.