



Falling Together

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Description: Erin Corcoran doesn't believe anyone in her life will actually stick around. Her dad was the first person to leave her. Then, many years later, it was her wife. A year after her divorce, Erin is still struggling as a single mom. When she decides to hire a babysitter to watch her son, Nolan, over the summer, the last thing she expects is to fall for the woman ten years her junior.

Blair Breckenridge is fresh out of college and has no idea what she wants to do with her life. Luckily, that doesn't matter since there is a large sum of money set aside in a trust fund for her. The only problem? Her parents refuse to continue giving her money if she doesn't have a job. Blair decides to become a babysitter for the summer while she figures out what she actually wants to do with her life. Because, really, how hard could it be?

The rambunctious three-and-a-half year old Blair is stuck watching for the summer is anything but easy. What makes the situation even harder is how hot his mom is. On top of that, she's funny and sweet and has Blair daydreaming about a life she never knew she wanted. As Erin and Blair's feelings for each other grow, it gets harder and harder to ignore them, but there are so many obstacles in their way. Blair is young and immature, and Erin worries with how impulsive she is, she will be another person who leaves. Blair has to find a way to prove to Erin she's not like everyone else, because Erin isn't the only one she's becoming attached to. She wants Erin and Nolan, but at twenty-two, is she ready to take on everything that comes along with dating a single mom?

Will things fall apart before they even start or can these two find a way to fall together instead?

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Chapter 1

Erin

Erin Corcoran sighed as she stared at the email once again with the price increase for the summer program at her son's daycare. As if it wasn't already expensive enough, they now expected her to pay an extra hundred dollars a week. And for what? A few days of water play? What was water play anyway? Were they really expecting her to pay extra just because they were going to spray her son with a hose a few days a week?

When she sighed again, a small, but heavy, body plopped onto her lap. "Mommy, you okay?" her three-and-a-half-year-old son, Nolan, asked as he looked up at her with those big round, brown eyes that resembled her ex-wife's a little too much.

She ran her hands through his dark brown hair, which was already getting a little lighter even though it was only the beginning of May. "I'm good, buddy."

She tickled his sides to distract him from worrying about her. Even though he was young, he was still very intuitive, and she hated the thought of worrying him with her adult problems. He was too young and naive to realize the extent of her inner turmoil and she wanted to keep it that way.

He leaned his head back as he laughed. "Mommy, stop. I'm going to fell'ed off," he said between giggles.

She stopped tickling him, gripped him tightly, and pulled him back up onto her lap.

As soon as he had stopped giggling, he grabbed her face and licked her cheek. “I’m a cat now. Meow. Meow.”

Erin laughed in spite of the knot in her stomach. This little kitty cat might have way too much energy and oftentimes had her so tired that she wondered how she would get through another day, but she adored him more than anything in the world. Her life hadn’t been easy this past year, but she would let her heart get broken a million more times, because the person who had done the heart breaking had also given her the greatest gift in the world—the little boy sitting on her lap.

Even though it had been over a year since things ended, it still felt like a stab to Erin’s heart every time she thought about her ex, Bianca. She should be over her by now, but how could she move on after everything they’d been through? It was almost what should have been their five-year wedding anniversary. In just a few months, it would be the ten-year anniversary of when they started dating. At least, it would have been, if Bianca hadn’t left Erin as if she were nothing.

The worst part was that Erin never saw it coming. From the time they met at a beach bar just a few weeks after graduating from college, they had been inseparable. When Bianca asked Erin to be her girlfriend two months later, Erin already had no doubt that she was the one. If she really studied their relationship (which she had about a million times), things started going downhill after Nolan was born. They both wanted kids, at least that was the impression Erin had. Sure, Bianca was never quite as excited about the prospect of having children as Erin had been. Thinking about their future family didn’t keep her up at night, but she seemed happy to contribute her eggs as long as Erin was the one to carry the baby (something she had always looked forward to anyway).

The first year felt like a fairytale to Erin and it really seemed like they were the perfect family, but looking back, she was living in a dream world. She was seeing what she wanted to see, not what was actually going on around her. Throughout that

first year, Bianca became more and more distant. She chose friends over her family, and by the time Nolan was two, she sometimes disappeared for a week at a time. Erin let her have her space, because she figured that was what she needed. She would give Bianca time, and eventually she'd come back to Erin. She'd come back to them. It's not like they fought. But looking back, that was only because Bianca didn't care enough to fight.

Exactly three months to the day after Nolan turned two, Bianca told Erin she was leaving. When will you be back? Erin had asked naively.

That was when Bianca said the words that finally broke her. "I'm not coming back. This isn't the life I wanted. I can't do it anymore."

Erin wanted to ask why Bianca had never told her that before. She wanted to beg Bianca to stay and tell her they'd find a way to make it work. But she didn't, because what was the point of fighting for someone who wasn't going to fight for you in return?

The first few months after Bianca left, it killed Erin when Nolan would ask, "Where Mama?"

Luckily, before long, his two-year-old brain forgot about her. Sometimes Erin wished she had the forgetfulness of a toddler so she didn't have to think about Bianca either.

Her mind was brought back to the present moment by the feeling of teeth digging into her arm. She yanked it away from Nolan and glared at him to show that she didn't appreciate his way of getting her attention.

"Kitty hungry," Nolan said, grinning at her as if he was an angel, a look cute enough that it almost made her forget he had just bitten her.

“Well, kitty knows better than to bite someone.” Erin stood from her chair at the kitchen table and set Nolan back on the floor. “Get your shoes. It’s time to go to school.”

“Nooooo. I don’t want to go,” Nolan whined.

Erin rolled her eyes. It was the same fight every morning, yet every night when she picked him up, he told her he wasn’t ready to leave. Go figure. “You love school.”

“I love home more.” The way Nolan stuck out his bottom lip almost made Erin want to call in sick to work and stay home with him.

Almost. As much as Erin loved him, work was her chance to actually breathe for a few hours five days a week. “I know, baby, but Mommy has to work so I can buy you more toys.”

Nolan shot her a devilish grin before running off to grab his shoes. When he got back to her, he dropped the shoes on the ground and pointed to the left one. “This goes on this foot?” He pointed to his right foot.

“Almost.” Erin moved the shoes so they were sitting in front of the correct feet and Nolan dropped to the floor. She watched as he fought to get them on. “Can I help you?”

“No. I do it.”

Erin sighed as she looked at the clock. If he kept up this pace, she would be late for work again. Her boss had been very understanding since the divorce, but Erin knew that leniency wouldn’t last forever. “I’ll make you a deal. You let me put your shoes on just this once and I’ll take you for ice cream after school.”

Nolan dropped the shoe he was fighting with as if it had just burned him. “Okay.”

Luckily, with the promise of ice cream, Nolan cooperated as she put his shoes on. He even walked to the car instead of insisting she carry him, which Erin was thankful for since he was getting way too heavy for her.

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After a short drive, they arrived at daycare, and Nolan ran in as if he hadn't just been saying how much he didn't want to go. Erin was almost out of the building when the director of the daycare called her name.

She turned around and tried her best to hide the annoyance from her face, something she had never been very good at. "What's up?"

"The deadline for summer registration is coming up, so I just wanted to see if Nolan will be joining us this summer."

Erin cringed. She really didn't want to talk about this right now, especially since she had no idea what to say. Sorry, I'm a single mom who refuses to ask my ex for child support since I can't stand the thought of depending on her for anything, so I'm not sure how I'm supposed to afford the extra cost. No, definitely not that. Erin had to think fast. "I actually had a question about that. My company allows me to work from home on Fridays, so I thought it would be nice to have that extra day with Nolan." Nice or my only option? "How much would it cost to do four days instead of five?"

The director gave her a smile that Erin knew all too well. It was that pitying smile she had been getting from people ever since Bianca left. She knew exactly what Erin wasn't saying. "Unfortunately, we don't offer four days. We can either do two, three, or five." The director's face lit up. "But if you want to go down to three days, the price will stay the same as what you're currently paying."

Erin gritted her teeth. She didn't need people making assumptions about her financial situation, even if those assumptions were true. It's not like she didn't have a well-

paying job. The problem was that daycares were impossible to afford on just a single salary. “You know what? I think I’m going to hire a babysitter for the summer. He’ll like that. It will give him a chance to get out and enjoy himself more.” Erin knew that was an unfair jab. This really was a great daycare. She was just sick of feeling like she wasn’t doing enough for her son. “I would like to register him for the fall though.” Erin smiled widely so the director didn’t think she was a complete bitch.

The director smiled back at her. “We will certainly look forward to having him back. He’s a great kid.” She looked at her computer, but quickly looked back at Erin. “Oh, don’t forget that this session ends in three weeks. That’s when our summer program officially begins.”

“Three weeks. Of course.”Shit.

Shit,Erin thought to herself for what had to be the millionth time that day. She stared at the local babysitting Facebook group she had pulled up on her computer while she ate lunch at her desk. Normally, she would go for a walk during her lunch break, but this was more important. She needed to find an affordable babysitter who could start in three weeks.No pressure.

She thought for a moment before she started to type.Looking for a babysitter to watch my 3.5 year-old son Monday-Thursday for the duration of the summer. We are a five minute walk from the community pool and have a membership you can use with him if interested.Erin paused because she wasn’t sure what else to say.Any age or experience is welcome.She read it over once more. The last part might sound a bit desperate, but she was, so what did she care? She went ahead and posted it to keep herself from overthinking it more.

Much to her surprise, it only took a few minutes for a message to come through from

a potential babysitter. Hi! My name is Jan. I'm a retired teacher, mother of four, and grandmother of eleven. I would love to watch your little guy. I could watch him at your house or mine and am happy to take him to the pool anytime he wants. What hours are you looking for?

Erin smiled in spite of her gut reaction that this was too good to be true. I normally leave the house around 8:30 and am home by 6:00. Would that work for you?

Less than a minute later, a reply came through. That sounds perfect. What other questions do you have for me?

Erin knew she should have questions. This was the person who would be spending four days a week with her son, after all, but she had no idea what to ask. Well, except for the one not-so-minor detail. What is your rate?

When the reply came through, Erin blinked her eyes at the screen, because she was sure she was reading it wrong. \$25/hour.

Erin quickly did the math, and it came out exactly as she expected. That was almost double what she would pay to keep him in daycare. That's outside of my budget, but thank you for reaching out.

Erin waited for a reply, like possibly a counter offer that was at least ten dollars less. Instead, a message came through from someone else. She opened this one, hoping for better news. Hi! I just finished my first year of college and I'm looking for a summer job. I am an elementary education major and babysat my neighbor throughout high school. I am looking for \$18/hour.

That was definitely better than \$25, but it was still more than she would pay for daycare. She opened up the calculator on her computer to figure out just how much she could pay someone to make sure she wasn't paying more than she currently paid

for daycare.Ten dollars. When she thought back on the babysitting she did in middle school and the crisp twenty dollar bill her neighbors would give her after spending a whole day watching their daughter, ten dollars per hour didn't sound so crazy, but as she looked through the messages that continued to come through asking for anything from fifteen to thirty-plus dollars, she was pretty sure she was screwed.

I'll just email the daycare,she thought to herself.I'm sure it's not too late.

She typed out the email and was just about to hit send when another message popped up on her screen. She thought about ignoring it, but decided to read it just so she could have a good laugh at her own expense.

Hey! My name is Blair Breckenridge! I'd love to watch your little dude for the summer. I am a recent college grad with no clue what I want to do next, but I need to get my parents off of my back. I'm not going to lie, I have no experience with kids (unless you count my little brother, which you probably don't since he's eighteen), but I'm a quick learner. I really don't know how much people normally get paid for this kind of thing, but does fifty dollars a day sound okay? If that's too much, I can negotiate. Honestly, I'll take anything to get my parents to lay the hell off of me. Anyway, I look forward to hearing from you. I'll put my number below. Feel free to text me. I'm barely ever on Facebook because, let's be honest, it sucks.

Everything inside of Erin was telling her it would be a terrible idea to hire Blair as a babysitter. She clearly had no idea what she was doing and didn't even know how to construct a somewhat professional pitch, but fifty dollars a day was hard to turn down. She could have Blair work five days instead of four and it would cost her less than what she was paying for daycare right now. That would be almost two hundred dollars less than what they wanted her to pay per week over the summer. And really... What's the worst that could happen? A knot formed in Erin's stomach as all the worst-case scenarios played through her mind. Okay, so this could end very badly.

“This is a terrible idea,” Erin whispered under her breath as she typed out a reply.

Chapter 2

Blair

Blair Breckenridge stared up at the sky as she floated on a raft in her parents’ pool. The sound of a text notification going off on her phone caught her attention, but instead of checking it, she continued to float. Floating through life. That’s what her parents had accused her of doing when they sat her down just a week after her college graduation to ask what her plan was now that she was a legit adult.

But how was she supposed to know? She was only twenty-two after all. She couldn’t possibly know what the hell she wanted to do with the rest of her life. And how could they expect her to? Blair hadn’t worked a day in her life—a fact her dad pointed out when they were going through the list of mistakes they had made while raising her, along with spoiling her, giving her whatever she asked for, and last but not least, the very large trust fund that had served as her income these past four years.

Now they were threatening to withhold said trust fund if she didn’t get a job. They told her it didn’t have to be her forever career, just something to pass the time and teach her responsibility while she decided what she actually wanted to do with her life. They weren’t necessarily wrong to expect that of her. She was a college graduate after all. All of her friends seemed to know exactly what they wanted to do with their lives and were ready to get started. It was kind of the point of getting a degree. At least for most people. She knew she was set for life even if she didn’t work. For her, college was all about fun, and she had plenty of it. The problem was that she now had a psychology degree and no idea what the hell she was going to do with it.

The other problem was that now instead of spending the summer figuring it out while soaking up the sun, she needed to figure it out while working her first job. When one

of her friends suggested babysitting, it sounded like a great idea. How hard could it be to hang out with a kid every day, right? She was practically a kid herself, so it should be easy. So far, it seemed the hard part was convincing the parents she was responsible enough to watch their precious angel.

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When Blair sent a screenshot of the message she was sending to potential clients to her best friend, Marisol, she had responded with a page full of laughing emojis and the words, “Girl, no.”

When her phone sounded from across the yard, Blair assumed it was another text from Marisol making fun of her for being so disconnected from the real world. One of the reasons Blair loved her best friend was because of how honest Marisol was with her, but right now, she could do without that honesty.

When the text tone went off again, Blair’s curiosity got the best of her. She rolled off of her raft and swam to the edge of the pool, lifting herself out of the water and wrapping up in a towel before she picked up her phone. She was surprised to find the texts weren’t from Marisol, but instead, from an unknown number. It was even more shocking to find that it was someone getting back to her about babysitting.

Hey! This is Erin. Thank you for messaging me. My son is potty trained. He’s a little wild (aren’t all toddlers?) but also very loving. As I mentioned in my post, I’m looking for someone to watch him Monday through Thursday. If you’d be able to come from about 8:30-6:00, that would be great. Fifty dollars per day sounds great to me if you’re sure that’s okay with you. I’d love to learn more about you. Are you free for a phone call at some point?

Also, if you are able to do a few hours on Fridays as well, that would actually be great. But if not, it’s no big deal.

The second message must have been an afterthought because it was sent a few minutes after the first. Being given the option of only working four days a week made

Blair hesitant to agree to five, but at least that didn't seem like a deal breaker. She thought about texting Marisol to ask her how to respond, but this was the first person to actually show interest in her, so she didn't want to waste any time.

Hey! Thank you for reaching out. Glad to hear your child doesn't shit himself anymore. She shook her head at herself as she erased that last sentence and continued to type. I would be happy to speak with you. I'm free whenever, so just let me know a time that works for you. I'll have to let you know about Fridays. I'm not positive if I can make that work, but I can definitely keep you updated.

Less than a minute after Blair hit send, she received a reply. I could call you tonight when I leave work if that's okay. It will probably be around 5:30/5:45.

That works :) Can't wait to hear from you. Blair smiled at her phone in satisfaction. Marisol would be proud. She had handled that well. Now she just had to make sure she didn't fuck up this phone call.

Blair practically fell off of the couch when her phone started to ring. Even though she was expecting the call, she had started to doze off while watching TV and the loud noise took her by surprise. She cleared her throat a few times before picking up. "He-hello?"

"Hi. Is this Blair?"

The voice on the other end of the phone sounded nervous, but also sexy. It was low and raspy and totally Blair's kryptonite. Stop. This is a job, not a girl you're trying to get in your bed.

"Hello?"

Shit. Off to a great start. “Sorry. I must have bad service. Yes. This is Blair.”

“Oh, no, I’m sorry. It’s probably me. I’m driving. Can you hear me now?”

“Yep. All good.”

The woman laughed, and it was just as sexy as her voice. “I’m Erin. I’m calling about babysitting for Nolan.” There was a slight pause before the woman spoke again. “Sorry, that’s my son. I don’t know if I mentioned his name before.”

“I don’t think you did, but that’s cool.” Blair paused, because she wasn’t sure what she was supposed to say. She had no clue how any of this worked. “So... you had some questions for me?”

Erin laughed once again. “Yeah, sorry. I’m not completely sure what to ask. My son has been in daycare the past two years, so I’ve never interviewed a babysitter before.”

“So, is that what this is?” Now it was Blair who laughed nervously. “An interview?”

“Nothing to be nervous about. I promise. I know you’ve never babysat before, but what other job experience do you have?”

Blair rolled her eyes. Yeah, definitely nothing to be nervous about. “I’ve actually just been focused on school.”

“That’s great,” Erin replied with a bit too much excitement for Blair to believe she was being sincere. “I know you mentioned you just graduated. What did you major in?”

“Psychology.” Please don’t ask what I’m doing with my degree.

“That’s wonderful. What do you want to do with that?”

Fuck. “Honestly, I’m not sure. That’s why I’m looking for another job while I figure that out.”

“That makes sense. It’s crazy how we’re expected to figure out what we want to do with the rest of our lives so early on. I still don’t quite know what I want to do.”

“What do you do?”

“I work in tech. There’s obviously more to it than that, but I don’t want to bore you with all of the details.”

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Blair was sure that meant Erin was incredibly smart just like Blair's parents, but she hoped that didn't keep her from giving Blair a chance. "My parents would've loved it if I chose a career like that. My dad is a CEO and my mom is a pharmacist, so I think they were hoping that I would be a bit more..." She struggled to find the right word. "Motivated" Probably not the best thing to admit when I'm trying to be hired for a job.

"Sounds like a lot of pressure. I'm sure you'll figure it all out in your own time, though." A long silence filled the space between them, but before Blair could think of a reply, Erin spoke again. "So, I'm not really sure what else to ask, and I'm just about at the daycare to pick up my son. How would you feel about coming over at some point this weekend to spend some time with me and my son and see if this is a good fit for all of us? I know weekends won't be your usual work days, but I'll pay you, and I promise to not keep you too long."

"That works. How about Saturday?" Blair had plans Saturday night and was worried about being hungover on Sunday.

"Saturday would be perfect. How does eleven sound?"

"Sounds great."

"Awesome. I have to run, but I'll text you the address. The public pool opens on Saturday so feel free to bring your bathing suit. It's okay if you don't want to though. Nolan can survive not going on opening day."

"I'll bring it. Wouldn't want to deprive him of his time in the sun."

Erin laughed once again. “I think the two of you will get along well. Have a good night. I’ll see you this weekend.”

Before Blair could reply, Erin ended the call. Out of curiosity, Blair pulled up her Facebook messages on her phone to figure out exactly who it was she was talking to. She found the message from Erin and used it to click on her profile. Unfortunately, she was one of those people whose profile was super private, so there wasn’t much to see. She clicked on the one thing that was available to her, which was Erin’s profile picture that had apparently been last updated the previous summer.

Blair practically choked on her own saliva when she took in the woman in the picture. Clad in nothing but a small red bikini, Erin was the literal definition of a MILF. She was petite, but definitely had a little bit of junk in the trunk. Once Blair was finally able to pull her gaze away from that perfect body, she noticed that Erin had straight, dirty-blond hair that fell around her shoulders and the most stunning blue eyes. Blair was so distracted by Erin that she almost missed the little boy standing next to her in the photo. He was practically Erin’s opposite with his curly brown hair and dark eyes, but even Blair had to admit that he was fucking adorable.

If she could keep her shit together on Saturday, this would definitely be a very interesting summer.

Remember: she is the mom of the kid you’re trying to babysit, not some hot girl you’re trying to fuck. Keep it professional (and keep it in your pants, for God’s sake).

Blair laughed to herself as she replied to Marisol’s text. Keep what in my pants exactly?

Blair could feel Marisol’s judgment radiating from the phone when her reply came

through. For fuck's sake, woman. She's probably married to some guy that looks like Ken. You better just hope he doesn't catch you checking out his wife.

Instead of replying, Blair shoved her phone into her pocket and got out of her car. The last thing she wanted was for Erin to catch her creeping outside of her house forever before she went in, especially since it was already ten minutes past the time she said she would arrive.

She walked onto the front porch of the cute little townhouse and was about to knock when the door swung open. At first, she didn't see anyone, but when she looked down, she noticed the little boy from the picture staring up at her, head tilted as he studied her. "Are you Bear?"

"It's Blair, sweetie. B-lair," a sexy low voice said from somewhere else in the house.

Nolan scrunched up his nose and glared in the direction of the voice. "Bear! That's what I say."

"Fine. Could you please tell Bear to come in."

"I says that," Nolan replied through gritted teeth, clearly not appreciating the joke made at his expense. He stomped his feet, but moved off to the side so Blair could walk through the doorway.

As soon as she was inside, with the door closed behind her, the woman from the picture walked around the corner. She looked exactly the same as her picture, but she was, unfortunately, fully clothed. "Sorry about that. I'm Nolan's mom, Erin. It's nice to officially meet you."

It took Blair a moment to realize Erin was standing in front of her with an outstretched hand because she was so distracted by those fucking eyes. "Sorry. Nice

to meet you. I'm Bear," she said with a wink.

When Erin broke into a wide grin, Blair realized it wasn't just her eyes that were stunning. You're supposed to be a fucking professional, not a fuckboy. It was Marisol's voice she was hearing in her head instead of her own. Goddamn her.

After shaking Blair's hand, Erin moved her gaze from Blair to her son. "Nolan, sweetie, I have your bathing suit laying out on your floor. Do you think you can get it on all by yourself?"

"I can!" Nolan said before quickly running up the stairs.

Erin smiled back at Blair. "That should buy us a few minutes alone." She nodded her head down the hallway. "Want to have a seat on the couch?"

"Um, yeah, sure." Blair wiped her hands on her shorts as she followed behind Erin. Why the hell was she so sweaty all of a sudden?

Once Blair was sitting on the couch, Erin sat down on the loveseat a few feet away. "So, I figured you could hang out with us for a bit and ask me any questions you have along the way." Erin looked around the room as if she was trying to look anywhere but at Blair. "Do you have any right now?"

Blair shrugged. She was sure she was supposed to have questions, but she had no clue what to ask. "None that I can think of."

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“Okay.” Erin nodded slowly. “I guess with studying psych, you probably know all about the stages and what he should be like at this age. You probably know more than me, if I’m being completely honest.” Erin laughed nervously. This interview was clearly way outside of her comfort zone, which made Blair wonder why her husband wasn’t there to help.

“Honestly, not really. I can’t say I paid super-close attention to all of that since I’m not so sure I even want kids.” Blair cringed internally as soon as the words were out of her mouth. That was definitely not the right thing to say and the look on Erin’s face told her that she was not impressed.

“Sounds like my ex,” Erin said under her breath, her eyes going wide when they reached Blair’s, and she put a hand over her mouth as if she was trying to push the words back in. “I’m so sorry. I really didn’t mean to say that out loud.”

Truthfully, Blair was kind of happy she had. It took the focus off of the stupid thing she had just said. “Don’t worry about it. I get it. Men are dicks.”

“That may be true, but in this case, it was a woman who was the dick.”

Now, it was Blair’s eyes that went wide. “You mean you’re...” She couldn’t even say the word because she was so surprised. Her hot, possible-future-employer was into women? She loved and hated that fact all at once. Her fantasies (which was all they could remain) would be such sweet torture.

“I’m gay,” Erin responded flatly. “Is that going to be a problem for you?” She stared at Blair with a new fire behind her eyes.

Oh shit. She thinks I'm homophobic? Blair quickly shook her head. "Absolutely not. I'm gay too. I was just surprised, I guess."

Erin's face visibly relaxed. "Isn't it crazy how we do that? We get so offended when straight people assume we're straight, but then we go and do the same thing."

Blair could feel her face turning red as she stared down at the floor and rubbed at the back of her neck. Erin didn't seem mad, but that didn't change the fact that she was really messing this up. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I jumped to the conclusion of you being homophobic before I even considered the fact that you might be gay too, so it looks like we're both guilty."

"I guess so." Blair laughed as she tried to think of anything to say to clear this awkwardness that had settled between them. "So, I take it your wife was the one to carry Nolan?"

"Why? Because he looks nothing like me?" Even though Erin was clearly trying to keep her voice light, Blair could tell she had struck a chord again.

"No. Not at all. I meant because you look so good. You definitely don't look like someone who had a child inside of you at one point." Blair cringed once again. Probably also not what she was supposed to say.

Erin's face turned beet red, but the slightest smile played on her lips. "That's very nice of you to say, but I did." She cleared her throat and patted her stomach. "I carried Nolan. He's genetically my ex's, but that certainly doesn't mean anything since I'm his one-and-only mom now."

Ouch. Erin's ex clearly did a number on her. Blair didn't have to know her well to see that. It was written all over her face. Pain, loss, disappointment. "I'm really sorry."

“You don’t have to apologize for giving me a compliment. It’s a bit inappropriate if you’re babysitting my son, but I’d be lying if I said it wasn’t nice to hear.”

“Oh, that’s actually not what I was apologizing for.” Even if I should be. “What I meant was I’m sorry your ex put you through all of that.”

“Well, that’s really not something we need to get into.” Erin quickly stood from the couch and walked over to the bottom of the stairs. “Nolan, are you okay up there, sweetie? Do you need my help?”

“No. I do it myself,” Nolan yelled back.

As if she didn’t hear him, Erin hurried up the steps. After a few seconds, Blair heard Nolan complaining about how he was a big boy and assumed that meant Erin was now in his room.

“No! I do it right!” Nolan’s voice echoed throughout the whole house.

Don’t worry, buddy. You weren’t the one to mess up. It was me. Blair threw her head back against the couch and squeezed her eyes shut. There’s no way I’m getting this job.

Chapter 3

Erin

Erin took much longer than she needed to fix Nolan’s swimsuit. She wasn’t sure how she was supposed to face Blair after she had run away from just one mention of Bianca. Blair and Bianca—of course their names had to be similar, just like their looks. She was sure people would easily assume Blair was Nolan’s mom given her long wavy brown hair and eyes so dark they almost looked black. Erin clearly had a

type, because she couldn't help but realize how hot Blair was, a fact she was trying to erase from her brain, because it was wrong on so many levels. Not only was Blair ten years younger than her, but she was also most likely going to be Nolan's babysitter, which basically made her Erin's employee. Even if all of that wasn't enough, Erin could never be with someone like Blair who didn't want kids. She had made that mistake once. There was no way it was going to happen again.

She shook her head at herself. Why was she even thinking about this? A pretty girl gives her one compliment and all she can think about is the reasons they should or shouldn't be together? It was pathetic, honestly. I need to get laid. She laughed out loud at the thought. That clearly wasn't happening anytime soon.

"Why you laugh, Mommy?"

"You're silly, that's why." Erin tickled Nolan, which she hoped would make him forget all about her strange behavior.

"Stop, Mommy. I...wanna...go...pool," Nolan said between giggles.

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Erin pulled her hands back, but kept them in the tickle position. “You know who else wants to go to the pool?” She dug her hands back into his sides. “The tickle monster.”

Nolan broke into another fit of giggles, and it caused a warmth to start in Erin’s heart and travel throughout her whole body. She stopped tickling him so she could wrap him in a tight hug. “Do you know how much I love you?” she asked as she held him up against her. This little boy was her whole world and the one thing that got her through most days.

“Love you.” Nolan placed a sloppy kiss on Erin’s cheek then wiggled out of her arms. “Let’s go to the pool.”

Nolan ran out of the room and down the stairs. Erin had only made it to the top of the steps when she heard him say, “Bear? You still here?”

She stopped to listen in on their conversation.

“I am,” Blair answered. “I heard you were going to the pool, and I love the pool.”

“Want to go with us?” Nolan asked, his voice squeaking the way it always did when he was really excited.

“Can I?” Blair asked. “Pretty please?”

“If Mommy says so, you can. She’s the boss.”

“She sure is.” Blair laughed. “I really hope she says yes. I want to see what a good

swimmer you are.”

“I’m the best swimmer.”

“Then it looks like you’ll have to teach me. I’m not that good.”

“Okay.”

The sound of hands slapping together in a high five filled the house, bringing a smile to Erin’s face. Blair might not meet the standards of most parents, but this conversation was enough to convince Erin that she was the right fit for their family.

“Who wants to go to the pool?” Erin asked as she finally made her way down the stairs.

When she rounded the corner at the bottom of the stairs, both Nolan and Blair had their hands raised. Nolan bounced up and down as he looked between Erin and Blair. “Can Bear come to the pool? I need to teach her to swim.”

“How could I say no to that?” Erin smiled at Blair and mouthed the words I’m sorry.

Blair waved a hand at her as if to say it was no big deal, and the three of them headed out the door. Neither Erin nor Blair was able to get a word in as they walked to the pool, because Nolan spent the whole time talking about everything he was going to do once they got there. As soon as they were inside the gates, Nolan ran toward their usual spot at the top of a small hill that overlooked the pool.

“No running,” Erin yelled after him.

With her warning, Nolan switched from a run to a speed walk that looked more like a waddle.

“He's a really cute kid,” Blair said as she walked next to Erin.

Erin looked over and found Blair staring at Nolan with a big smile on her face. It was so sweet, Erin could hardly handle it. “He takes after his mom,” Erin joked.

Now Blair directed that wide grin in Erin’s direction. “That’s for sure.”

Erin couldn’t help but laugh. “You must be quite the Casanova with the girls your age, huh?”

“I do okay.”

With that smile, Erin had no doubt Blair was telling the truth. With the compliment, her lips curled up a little more on the right than the left in a way that could only be described as cocky. Oh yeah. This girl knows how hot she is.

“Mommy!” Nolan shouted with a huff. “You’re too slow.”

Both she and Blair laughed as they walked up to him. Once she was standing beside him, Blair put her hand on his head and ruffled his hair. “Chill out, little dude. We’re here.”

He crossed his arms over his chest and glared up at Blair. “My name is Nolan. Member?”

“That’s right.” Blair slapped her forehead as if she had actually been confused. “How could I forget?”

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“Because you’re old.” Nolan brought his hand to his mouth and giggled into it.

“Oh, I’m old, huh?” Blair picked Nolan up in her arms as he giggled uncontrollably.

“If I was old, could I throw you into the pool?”

“No! You can’t. Our clothes! My swimmys.”

When Blair set Nolan back down on the ground, Erin took off his shirt and started spreading sunscreen over all of his bare skin. She looked up at Blair as she did it. “Anytime he comes to the pool, he needs sunscreen and his swimmys before he can get in.” She shook her head at herself. She sounded just like those helicopter moms that she couldn’t stand. “Sorry. I’m not lecturing you. Just letting you know these things as I think of them.”

Blair shrugged as if she wasn’t bothered at all. “Of course. No problem.”

Erin was about to look away when Blair pulled her shirt off, revealing one of the skimpiest bikini tops she had ever seen. Not that Erin was complaining, becausewow. She wanted to look away. Sheshouldlook away. But...oh my god. Is that a six pack?Now, all Erin could think about was running her hands over those abs, which made her feel like a huge creep. This was the young girl, fresh out of college, who was most likely going to be watching her son for the summer. Was it wrong to check out someone so much younger than you? She was over eighteen so it couldn’t be that wrong, right? Plus, Erin did have eyes. No one could blame her for taking notice of the perfection standing in front of her.

Okay. That’s enough.She forced her eyes away from Blair’s body and focused on

Nolan. She was so focused it was as if she was perfecting a painting rather than applying sunscreen that would be washed away by the pool anyway.

“Mommy.” Nolan groaned. “P-lease.”

“Sorry. Sorry.” Erin held the sunscreen in Blair’s direction, but still didn’t look at her. “Do you need any?”

“I’m good. I’ve been blessed with skin that doesn’t burn.”

Erin’s eyes instinctively moved to said skin, and her mouth immediately went dry. Blair’s shorts were now off, and her legs were not only extremely tan, but also muscular. She moved her eyes to Blair’s face so she wasn’t tempted to keep checking her out, but that was a mistake, because she was forced to see the shit-eating grin that could only mean one thing—she had been caught. Erin could feel her own face turning red, which certainly didn’t help her case at all.

Luckily, Blair turned to look at Nolan instead of saying anything to Erin about her lingering eyes. “Get those swimmies on. I’m ready to get in the pool.”

“Mommy! Swimmies.”

When Blair smirked and raised an eyebrow at her, Erin realized she was still staring. “Swimmies. Right. Come here.”

She struggled to get the swimmies on even more than usual, but as soon as they were on Nolan’s arms, Blair scooped him up just as she had before. “Don’t think I forgot that you called me old. Now you have to pay.”

“I don’t have money.” Nolan giggled and tried to wiggle out of Blair’s arms.

“That’s too bad. It looks like I’m going to have to throw you into the pool.”

“Mommy, save me!” Nolan shouted playfully as Blair broke the pool rules and ran down the hill.

Erin pretended to reach out for him, but stayed where she was. She watched as Blair pretended to throw him into the pool, then jumped in with him instead, both of them laughing as they flew through the air and into the pool. Erin once again couldn’t look away, but this time for a completely different reason.

Erin held her hand out toward Nolan after they finally left the pool hours later. “Please hold my hand.”

Instead of taking it, Nolan glared at her hand as if it were a piece of broccoli. “No. I’m a big boy.”

Erin sighed. Playing the same games over and over again got very tiring. “I know you’re a big boy, but you know you can’t walk on the road without holding my hand.”

“I walk on sidewalk.” Nolan looked up at Blair, who was still hanging out with them for some reason unbeknownst to Erin. She honestly expected her to cut out hours ago. “Can big boys walk on the sidewalk with no hand?”

Blair put her hands in the air as if surrendering. “If you ask me, a big boy does whatever his mommy asks him to.”

Nolan scowled once again, clearly unimpressed with Blair’s answer, but a second later, a mischievous grin spread onto his face. “I’m the fastest boy. Watch.”

Before either of them could do anything, he took off down the sidewalk. Erin yelled after him as she tried, and failed, to keep up. Her heart rate quickened as she watched him get closer and closer to the crosswalk where the cars were moving much faster than they should. “Nolan Patrick, get back here right now.”

He stopped for a moment, and she actually believed he might turn around, but then that grin was back. “Race home!”

“Can you please take this?” Erin threw the pool bag on the ground beside Blair, not even bothering to see if she picked it up before taking off after him.

“Nolan, wait!” Much to Erin’s surprise, Nolan stopped in response to Blair yelling his name. “If you wait there and donotcross the road, I’ll carry you home on my shoulders.”

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“Really?” Nolan’s eyes went wide as he jumped up and down. “Yes! Yes! Yes!”

Erin stopped and put her hands on her knees. “Thank you,” she said as she struggled to catch her breath.

Blair smirked. “No big deal.”

It was a big deal, though. At least, to Erin it was. “You know, for someone who claims to know nothing about kids, you did a great job with him today.”

Blair shrugged, but the cocky smirk remained on her face. “It helps that I’m still a child and have the maturity of someone his age. I just thought about what I’d want and offered it to him.”

“You’d want someone to carry you on their shoulders?” Erin asked with a laugh.

“Hell yeah! You wouldn’t?”

Erin laughed once again. She wasn’t sure when the last time was that she had laughed this much. “If you still want the job after spending the whole day with him, it’s all yours.”

Blair bounced up and down the same way Nolan had when she offered to carry him on her shoulders. “Getting paid to act like a child? Of course I still want the job!”

Instead of feeling excited, Blair’s response made Erin nervous. While her naivety was cute, it also worried Erin. “He’s not always as well-behaved as he was today. There’s

a lot more to it than just having fun.”

“I’ll figure it out. Don’t worry.” The smile that remained plastered to Blair’s face didn’t ease Erin’s worries one bit.

“I just...” Erin stared down at her feet as she walked. If she really wanted to get her point across, she needed to be completely honest. “It’s too late for him to enroll in daycare for the summer, and I really can’t afford the other babysitters. If you end up realizing it’s too much or not what you expected and quit, I’m screwed. I need to know that you’re serious about this.”

“Erin.” When Erin looked over at Blair, the smile was gone from her face and replaced with a look of sincerity. “Listen, I’ve never been serious a day in my life, so I can’t say that I’ll be serious now.”

Great. Erin looked away from Blair and over to where Nolan was waiting for them. What are we supposed to do, Little Boy?

“But,” Blair’s voice broke the momentary silence, “I promise I won’t quit on you, no matter what. I might be an immature trust fund baby, but I’ve never broken a promise. Seriously. I mean it.”

When Erin looked at her once again, that sincerity was still there. She might not actually know this woman, but she believed her.

The smile returned to Blair’s face as she bent down to pick up Nolan. “Plus, he’s three. How hard can it be, right?”

Now it was Erin who was smiling. This immature trust fund baby was in for a rude awakening.

Chapter 4

Blair

“Airplane!” Nolan shouted as he jumped on Blair’s back for what must have been the fiftieth time since she arrived two hours ago.

“Seriously, dude?” She looked at the clock and sighed when she noticed it was only 10:30. Was 10:30 too early to eat lunch? Erin had left her a list of directions and it explicitly stated that they shouldn’t go to the pool until after Nolan ate, but Blair didn’t know how many more times she could run around the house making airplane noises while this kid hung on her back.

“Airplane! Airplane!” Nolan continued to shout as he wrapped his arms so tightly around Blair’s neck, she could barely breathe.

“Fine. One more airplane ride and then we’re eating lunch.”

“Yay!”

She did one more lap around the house, then sat Nolan at the kitchen table. “Time to eat,” she said as she struggled to catch her breath.

She walked to the refrigerator and took out the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and strawberries that Erin left in there for her and Nolan. She put the food onto plates for them, then sat down next to Nolan.

Nolan stared at the plate in front of him, then looked over at Blair with his nose scrunched up as if he was disgusted. “No.”

“No? What do you mean? Are you not hungry?”

Nolan crossed his arms in front of his chest. “I want chicken nuggets.”

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Blair shook her head and pointed to the plate. “Your mommy said this is what you’re supposed to eat.”

Nolan flipped the plate upside down and shouted, “Chicken nuggets,” so loud that Blair was sure the next-door neighbors could hear him. Hell, the whole town could probably hear him.

“Chicken nuggets! Chicken nuggets! Chicken nuggets!” Nolan continued to shout. As if that wasn’t bad enough, as she sat staring at him, completely dumbfounded, he stood on his chair and started jumping up and down. With each jump, he came closer and closer to falling off.

“Fine!” Blair shouted before she even realized what she was doing. When Nolan stopped jumping and stared at her, she took a deep breath. “Fine. We can go get chicken nuggets on one condition.” She held one finger in the air. “Don’t tell your mommy.”

As if she had just performed magic, the feral child from a few seconds ago disappeared, and the cute little boy returned. He giggled into his hand before holding it out to her. “No telling.”

Blair shook his hand as she breathed out a sigh of relief. “Pleasure doing business with you.”

Thank god Erin had moved Nolan’s car seat to Blair’s car that morning in case of emergencies. This was definitely an emergency. The kid could’ve fallen off of the chair and cracked his head open. Chicken nuggets were the much safer option.

It was only a five minute drive to McDonald's, and because he was getting what he wanted, Nolan acted like a perfect angel the whole way there.

As soon as it was their turn to order, Nolan started to shout again. "Chicken nuggets! Chicken nuggets! Chicken nuggets!"

"I know, buddy. Let me order." Blair stuck her head out the window to try to muffle the sounds of the shouting child. "Could I have a six-piece Chicken McNugget Happy Meal with juice, please?"

"Of course," the voice over the intercom said. "Would you like apple slices or double fries with that?"

Blair smiled. That was an easy question. What kid would choose apple slices over extra fries? "Double fries, please."

A high-pitched wail erupted in the back of the car. "Nooooooooo."

"One moment please." Blair turned around to look at Nolan, who was now thrashing around in his car seat and screaming the word no over and over again. "What's wrong?"

"Apples! I want apples!"

"Okay, chill." Blair turned back around and put her head out the window again. "Sorry. I'll actually take apple slices."

"No problem. Is that everything?"

Blair's stomach growled just from the question. She was so distracted by Nolan, she almost forgot about getting food for herself. "Actually, could I have one more six-

piece Chicken McNugget Happy Meal, but that one with a small Coke and double fries instead of apple slices?”

“Noooooooo!” Nolan screamed once again. “Apple slices!”

“Sorry. One moment again.” Blair turned around to face Nolan once again. “Chill, bro. The fries are for me. I already got your apple slices.”

“Apple slices. Apple slices.” Nolan kicked his feet and whipped his head back and forth so hard, Blair worried he might give himself whiplash.

“Fine. Fine.” Let’s try this again. “I’ll actually take the apple slices with that one too.”

“And isthateverything now?” The employee didn’t try to hide their annoyance this time around.

“Yep. That’s everything.”

Blair was happy when they made it back to the house with no further meltdowns. After getting inside, she cleaned the mess from earlier off of the table and replaced it with their new meal.

Blair had barely finished dipping her first chicken nugget in barbecue sauce before Nolan finished all of his fries. He held the empty box in the air. “More!”

Blair pointed to the untouched bag of apple slices. “Why don’t you eat those? I know how much you wanted them.”

Nolan picked up the bag, studied it, then threw it across the room. “No! No apples.”

Blair took a deep breath as she tried to not completely lose her shit. “You told me you

wanted apples, remember? You screamed about it loud enough for everyone in the state of Pennsylvania to hear.”

“No!” Nolan pointed to the fries sitting in front of Blair. “Give me yours!”

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Blair gritted her teeth. “Seriously?”

“Please.” Nolan pushed out his bottom lip, and it really looked like he might start to cry. Not a tantrum cry, but a real tears cry. Blair couldn’t handle real tears, so she pushed the box of fries in front of Nolan.

His face immediately lit up. “Thanks! You can have the apples.”

“Gee. Thanks. It’s all I ever wanted.”

“You’re welcome,” Nolan said, completely oblivious to her sarcasm.

After fighting with Nolan until she finally got him to eat two chicken nuggets, it was time to go to the pool.

As soon as they walked out the door, Nolan held his arms up toward her. “Shoulders!”

With how today was going so far, Blair had no doubt he would run into traffic if she didn’t do what he wanted, so she bent down and lifted him onto her shoulders.

“Yay! Go, car, go.” Nolan grabbed ahold of Blair’s head and pretended it was a steering wheel, moving it in all sorts of odd directions throughout the whole walk.

Blair was relieved when he begged to get down as soon as they arrived at the pool. She was even more relieved when they made it through their time there without any more tantrums. Nolan surprisingly didn’t even complain when Blair told him they

had to leave so they could be home when his mom got back from work.

She had just finished getting him changed into dry clothes when she heard a car pull into the driveway. “Remember what I told you—McDonald’s is our little secret.”

“Yep. I won’t tell Mommy.”

A minute later, Erin walked through the front door and Nolan ran to meet her. “Mommy! Bear got me McDonald’s.” He put a finger up to his mouth. “But it’s a secret.”

“Is that so?” Erin stood from giving Nolan a hug and stared at Blair.

Blair could feel those eyes burning into her. She was a literal dead woman. “Uh, yeah, so... he really wanted chicken nuggets.”

“So, you decided to ignore my directions and get them for him without even asking me?” Yep. If looks could kill, Blair would be bleeding out on the floor right now. Erin tapped her high-heeled foot and crossed her arms as she stared her down. If Blair wasn’t so scared, she’d be very turned on, because it was honestly one of the sexiest things she had ever seen.

“I... uh...”

Before Blair could figure out what the hell to say to try to save her ass, Erin burst into laughter. “Oh my god. You should see your face right now. Sorry. I couldn’t resist.”

What the hell? “You mean... you’re not actually mad?”

Erin shook her head and continued to laugh. “If this kid gets something in his stomach every day, I’m happy. I’m not the one you should be scared of though.” She nodded

toward Nolan. “You showed him that you’re weak. Now you’re screwed. He’s going to use that against you. Trust me. Toddlers are like sharks. When they smell blood, they attack.”

Blair swallowed hard. Erin’s words did send a chill down her spine. She wasn’t sure if that was because she was actually afraid of a three-year-old, or because she couldn’t handle how sexy Erin looked in her black suit and white heels that she had been too tired to notice that morning. It was most likely the second one, which was exactly why she shouldn’t stick around. She couldn’t have herself doing anything that might be considered unprofessional, like pushing Erin up against the door and making out with her while she unbuttoned those pants and...

“I have to go,” Blair said much louder than she meant to. She cleared her throat as she tried to calm her beating heart. Why did this woman have this effect on her? Sure, she was hot, but shit. It’s not like this was the first hot woman Blair ever had contact with. “I have plans with my friend tonight.”

Erin’s smile dropped as she studied Blair’s face. “I didn’t upset you, did I? I was completely messing with you. I’d prefer if he didn’t have chicken nuggets every single day, but I’m happy with whatever you want to give him. I only made that list and had the sandwiches ready because I wanted to make your job easier.”

Blair shook her head. She really needed to snap out of this trance Erin had her in. “No. Seriously. It was funny. I just remembered I have these plans and my friend hates when I’m late.”

“Don’t let us keep you.” Erin reached into her purse and pulled out two twenties and one ten-dollar bill, then handed them to Blair. “Thank you so much. I hope he didn’t give you too much trouble today.”

Blair wanted to make a joke about how he just about killed her, but she saw the bags

underneath Erin's tired eyes and decided not to go there. "Nah. He was awesome. Don't worry. I'll be back tomorrow. You're not getting rid of me that easily."

She winked at Erin then bent down and held out her arms toward Nolan. "Can I have a hug?"

Nolan shook his head and burrowed into his mom's side. "I don't want you. I want my mommy."

"Nolan Patrick! That wasn't very nice," Erin scolded.

Blair squeezed his shoulder and stood up. "Don't worry. We'll get there. I'm like a new puppy—misbehaved, can't follow directions—but I'm so cute people can't help but love me eventually."

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She watched Erin as she said the words, but Erin simply shook her head at Blair. Blair knew she was being a flirt, but she couldn't help it. That was just her personality, especially when she was around a woman who looked like Erin. Which again reminded her why she needed to leave. It might be fun to flirt with Erin, but this was the woman helping keep her parents off of her back while she figured out what to do with her life. She was toeing a very fine line right now.

She took her phone out of her pocket and shook it in the air. "Gotta get to my friend. Sorry."

Blair was out of the door so fast she just barely caught Erin saying they would see her tomorrow. As soon as the door closed behind her, she hit Marisol's name in her phone to call her.

"Please pick up," she whispered to herself as the phone rang.

"Sup, bitch? How was your first day of work?"

"Do you want to meet up for a drink?"

Marisol cackled into the phone. "Only one day in and you already need a drink? That can't be good." After a few seconds, her laughter cut off and her voice became more serious. "You didn't get fired, did you?"

"No, Mar, I didn't get fired. But thank you so much for that vote of confidence."

"Always. So, where are we going?"

Blair smiled. This was why Marisol was her best friend and had been ever since their first day of middle school. “Let’s do Ralph’s.”

Ralph’s was a run-down bar in town that rarely had people in it, which was why it was Blair and Marisol’s favorite place to go. Now that they were both old enough to drink alcohol, they liked it even better than when all they could do was drink soda and eat a bunch of fried food that normally made them sick. Ralph, the owner, namesake, and quite possibly the only employee, always joked that they were the ones keeping him in business and Blair was starting to believe it might be true.

“Perfect. Meet in fifteen?”

“Works for me.”

Ralph’s was less than ten minutes from Erin’s house, so Blair arrived before Marisol and took their usual spot at the bar. Ralph waved to her and immediately got to work making their drinks.

Ralph set the drinks down in front of Blair at the same time the door to the bar opened. “You’re way too good to us, Ralph,” Marisol said from behind her.

“I have to be. You’re the two who keep me in business,” Ralph said with a wink.

Blair stood from her bar stool and turned around to greet her best friend. Marisol was still wearing the shirt from the camp she was working at that summer to get some extra money before starting her speech therapy program in the fall, so Blair assumed she must also be coming right from work.

“You look nice,” Blair said as she caught sight of the big ketchup stain splattered in the middle of Marisol’s shirt. She was only half joking, because even covered in food, Marisol always looked good. With her dark skin and long curly black hair, she

was breathtaking. If she were a stranger in a bar, Blair would definitely hit on her. Instead, she was her very straight best friend who had become like a sister to her.

Marisol rolled her eyes and playfully pushed Blair's shoulder. "Shut up. One of the campers is already obsessed with me and asked to eat her hot dog while sitting on my lap, hence the ketchup."

"Kids, right?" Blair asked with a laugh, finally feeling like she could somewhat understand what people were getting at when they said that.

"Speaking of kids," Marisol sat down on the barstool and turned to face Blair, "how was your first day on the job?"

Blair took a big sip of her beer, then set it back down on the bar. "First of all, kids are feral." She picked up her drink again and took another large gulp. "Second of all, I'm fucked."

Marisol laughed as she took a sip of her cocktail. "Are you fucked because of point number one or for another reason?"

"Nolan's mom is so hot."

"I know. It's practically all I've heard about since you had that pool day with them."

Blair shook her head. Marisol didn't get it. "But she's not just incredibly hot physically. She also has a sexy personality. She scared the shit out of me today, and even that was hot."

Marisol put her hand in the air. "Wait. I'm going to need you to elaborate. What do you mean by she scared the shit out of you?"

Blair explained all of the details of The Great Apple Slice Meltdown and how Erin acted like she was mad at her when she found out they went to McDonald's. "And I'm telling you, watching her tap that high-heeled foot wassofucking hot."

"It's cool that she didn't actually get mad at you. You do realize most parents would've actually flipped out, right?"

"I know!" Blair threw her hands in the air. "That's why she's so cool and also the reason I'm completely fucked."

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“Because you have a crush on her.” Marisol said it as if it was a statement and not a question.

Crush? No. Blair definitely wouldn’t go that far “I wouldn’t call it a crush. I’d say it’s more like a...” she took another sip of beer as she tried to think of a word. “Lush.”

Marisol scrunched up her nose and furrowed her eyebrows. “A lush?”

She smiled proudly. I’m so creative. “Yes. Somewhere between lust and a crush. She’s not just some girl I want to take home from a bar and have a one-night stand with, but I’m also not daydreaming about what it would be like to date her.”

Marisol laughed, causing some of her drink to shoot from her mouth. “Only because you don’t date people.”

“It’s not that I don’t date. It’s just that I haven’t found someone worth dating.”

“Until now,” Marisol said with a smirk.

Blair glared at her best friend, who clearly wasn’t listening. “I can’t date the mom of the kid I’m babysitting.”

“I know you can’t. But it doesn’t change the fact that you want to.”

“Just because she might be the sexiest woman I’ve ever met doesn’t mean that I want to date her.”

“Oh yeah? What does it mean?” Marisol smiled over the top of her drink.

“It means I need to find a way to control my hormones around her. If I keep checking her out, she’s going to realize I have a crush on her.” Blair drank the rest of her beer and slammed it down on the bar. “Did I tell you how I caught her checking me out at the pool, though?”

Marisol rolled her eyes. “Only about one million times.”

“Well, what do you think that means?” Blair had no idea why she was worrying about this so much. She was used to women checking her out. She was also a hopeless flirt who was ridiculously gay. Finding a woman attractive and making that fact known was nothing new to her. She had even found herself accidentally flirting with her professors at times, but she had never spent time thinking about the way they looked at her (probably because they didn’t look at her the way Erin had at the pool).

Instead of addressing Blair right away, Marisol looked at Ralph and shook her empty glass. “I’m going to need another one of these, Ralph. This girl is driving me nuts.”

Ralph lifted both eyebrows as he looked between the two of them. “You know the rule. You can only get a second drink if you order food. I need you to have something to soak up the alcohol, unless you’re planning to have someone pick you up.”

“Fine, Dad,” Marisol said jokingly. “Give us the loaded cheese fries and an order of hot wings. That should definitely soak up the alcohol.”

Ralph gave them a satisfied smile. “Coming right up.”

Blair waved an accusatory finger at him. “You know what, Ralph? If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you only made that rule to take our money.”

Ralph laughed as he picked up Marisol's empty glass and started making her another drink. "Gotta bring cash in somehow, right?"

Marisol stuck her tongue out at Ralph, then turned toward Blair again. "Anyway, where were we?"

"I asked what you thought it meant that Erin was checking me out."

"It means she's a lesbian with eyes." Marisol ran her own eyes up and down Blair's body, an action that would've sent chills down Blair's spine if it were any woman other than her best friend. "I hate to admit this, because we both know your head is already big enough, but come on. You're hot. She likes women. She's going to notice a woman like you."

"True." Again, Blair was left to question why she was even thinking about it so much. Maybe it was the whole forbidden romance thing that made it so hot. Erin was off limits, which was why Blair couldn't get her off her mind. What she needed was a distraction. "I think I just need to get laid. It's been too long."

"Didn't some girl fingerbang you in the bathroom when you went out after graduation?"

Blair smiled as she thought back on that night. What a great graduation present. She shook these thoughts from her head to focus on Marisol. "That barely counts. I need a bed and time to really show off all of my skills."

"Like the bed in your bedroom at your parents' house? Good luck with that."

Blair shrugged. She wouldn't let a minor detail like living with her parents keep her from getting what she needed. "I'll just find a girl who has her own place."

When Marisol gave her a pointed look, Blair knew exactly what she was thinking. She put a hand up to keep her from saying it. “A girl with her own place who isn’t the mom of the kid I’m babysitting.”

“Good girl. Mission Get-Blair-Laid is officially underway.”

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Ralph chuckled and shook his head as he sat the food on the bar in front of them. “You know, if you girls are trying to meet people, my bar might not be the best place to hang out.”

Blair stuck a pile of cheese fries in her mouth and spoke through the mouthful of food. “Ralph is right. We should probably go to Philly this weekend.” They lived about fifty minutes from the city and nowhere near a train station, which meant they would need to take a rideshare, but it was worth it if Blair could find someone to go home with.

“Let me guess. Gay bar?”

“Obviously. Is there any other kind?”

Marisol shook her head. “Honestly, not any good ones. I’ll take one for the team this time and be the designated driver. That way, I’m not stuck riding home by myself with a stranger at the end of the night.”

Blair put a hand over her chest. “It’s sweet how much confidence you have in me succeeding.”

“Yeah. Yeah. Don’t let it go to your head. Which night should we go?”

“Let’s do Thirsty Thursday. Hopefully the women will be just as thirsty for me as they are for the drinks.”

Marisol groaned. “Thursday? Really? Work is going to suck on Friday.”

Blair laughed. "I honestly forgot some people work on Fridays."

"You're not working Fridays? I thought Hot Mom asked if you could."

Blair shrugged. "She mentioned it once, but it never came up again, so I'm guessing she doesn't need me to anymore."

Marisol pushed her bottom lip out in mock sadness. "So sad for you. Only four days a week with your crush."

"First of all," Blair held up her middle finger, "as I already mentioned, it's a lush, not a crush. And after I have hot sex this weekend, I'll be over it. I probably wouldn't even take the extra day if she offered it."

Marisol laughed so hard a piece of chicken flew out of her mouth. "Sure you wouldn't."

Chapter 5

Erin

"Mommy! Let's go to the pool!"

Before Erin could even respond, Nolan was clawing at her back as he tried to climb the chair she was sitting on. She tried to ignore him as she hunched over her computer, but it was no use.

"Mommy! Mommy! Pool!"

Erin closed her computer and turned to look at her son. "Sweetie, I told you we could go to the pool if Mommy got some work done, and so far, you haven't let me do

that.”

“I help you!” Nolan climbed onto Erin’s lap and reached for her laptop with his sticky, yogurt-covered hands (her latest failed attempt at distracting him so she could get work done).

Luckily, over the past three years, she had developed very quick reflexes and was able to grab his hands before they touched her computer. “You know what would help me? If you washed these hands of yours. Can you do that?”

“Yes!” Nolan jumped from her lap and ran over to the stool sitting close to the sink. He pulled it right in front and stepped onto it, singing a song he must have learned in school while he washed them.

Much too quickly, the song was over, and Nolan was running toward her again. “Pool! Pool!”

Erin rubbed her forehead as if that was somehow going to help her pounding headache. “Fine. I’ll go to the pool with you if you promise you’ll let me get work done once we get back home. Please.” Nothing like trying to bargain with a toddler.

“I p-omise.”

Erin took a deep breath as Nolan ran up the stairs, most likely to get his bathing suit. How the hell am I supposed to do this every Friday?

“Mommy! I need help!” Nolan yelled from upstairs.

Erin sighed as she stood from the table. “I’ll be right there, buddy.”

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Approximately forty-five minutes and one-and-a-half tantrums later, they made it to the pool. After laying their stuff at their usual spot, Nolan immediately started running toward the pool.

“Slow down!” Erin yelled as she walked after him. She was way too tired to run at this point, so she was relieved when he actually listened.

As she followed Nolan into the shallow end of the pool, Erin’s mind drifted back to a few weeks earlier when they went there with Blair. Even though the water was frigid, Erin’s body was heating up, which absolutely had nothing to do with the fact that she was thinking about Blair in a bikini. Definitely not.

She was just so... okay, she was hot. There was no point in denying it. Erin hated herself for the fact that she couldn’t stop thinking about it, though. She shouldn’t be lusting after Nolan’s much younger babysitter.

“Mommy! Throw me!”

Erin’s eyes darted to Nolan as her mind snapped back to the current moment. “Throw you?”

He nodded excitedly, a wide grin on his face as his head bobbed up and down. “Bear throws me.”

“I’m not as strong as Blair, sweetie.” Erin’s mouth watered as she thought about Blair’s toned arms with muscles that became very apparent any time she picked up Nolan. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it.

“Please! Please! Please!” Nolan reached his arms up as he jumped up and down in front of her.

Even though she wasn’t sure how she was going to do it, she couldn’t say no to him, especially when he actually remembered to say please. “Fine. I’ll try my best.”

“Yay!”

She picked Nolan up and awkwardly tossed him into the water. He skimmed the water and landed barely beyond her grasp.

Nolan’s eyebrows were furrowed when he turned around to stare at Erin. “Bear throws better.”

Erin shrugged. “I told you I’m not as strong as her. You can do that when she brings you to the pool.”

“When she bring me next?”

“I don’t know. Probably the next time she watches you after you spend special time with Mommy this weekend.”

Honestly, Erin wished Blair was the one with him right now. Erin had mentioned watching him on Fridays in the initial text she sent to Blair, but since Blair never said anything about it, Erin felt uncomfortable bringing it up again. She clearly wasn’t interested, and Erin was just thankful she had her for four days a week. She could hopefully find a way to figure out how to make Fridays work. This was the first time trying to work from home with Nolan. It had to get easier, right?

It certainly didn’t feel easy when they left the pool three hours later, and Erin was completely exhausted. Luckily, if all of the yawning Nolan was doing on the walk

home was any indication, he was also tired. Maybe she could convince him to take a nap and she could finally get some work done.

Unfortunately, as soon as they walked into the house, Nolan ran to the couch and jumped up and down on it, “What now, Mommy?”

“Well, first, you’re going to stop jumping on the couch. Remember what happened the last time you did that?”

Nolan squinted his eyes and dramatically rubbed his head. “I hurt myself.”

“You did. So, is it a good idea to do it again?”

“I’ll be careful,” Nolan said as he continued to jump. His eyes closed and he honestly looked like he might fall asleep mid-air.

Erin gently grabbed ahold of his arm to stop him. “I have a better idea. You’re clearly tired. Why don’t you take a nap?”

“No!” Nolan yelled so loud it made Erin jump. “I’m a big boy. I don’t nap.”

Erin was about to give up completely when an idea popped into her head. Brilliant. She smiled. Absolutely brilliant. “How ’bout we go to the store and get a treat?”

Nolan’s eyes lit up. “Cupcakes?”

Erin shrugged. “Sure. Why not?” She really hoped this plan worked, or else she still wouldn’t have any work done, but would have a kid hopped up on sugar.

“Yay!” Nolan hopped off of the couch and ran toward the door. When he saw Erin grab her computer, he tilted his head at her and scrunched up his nose. “Why do you

need computer?”

“I just don’t want to leave it at the house by itself,” Erin lied. “It might get lonely.”

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Nolan giggled as if she had just told him a poop joke. “Computers don’t get lonely.”

Erin raised her eyebrows at him. “How do you know?”

Instead of answering, Nolan simply shrugged and opened the front door. Thank god this didn’t turn into a game of twenty questions.

Just as she’d hoped, five minutes into their car ride, Nolan passed out. Erin drove the rest of the way to the grocery store since she knew that once he woke up, he would expect his cupcakes. Instead of going inside, she opened her computer and set it on the center console. Erin connected it to the hotspot on her phone and opened up her email. She smiled at Nolan, who now looked like a complete angel, and prepared herself to respond to the emails that had been sitting stagnant all day.

As soon as she hit reply on the first email, a teenager pulled into the parking spot beside hers, with music playing so loud she could hear every word. The music continued to play as he opened his door, which caused the sounds to blast into her car.

She closed her eyes. Please don’t wake u-

“Mommy!” Nolan wailed from the backseat.

Erin squeezed her eyes shut as all of the ways she wished she could murder that teenager ran through her mind. Shoving the speakers right up his asshole might be nice.

“Mommy!” Nolan screamed once again. “Cupcakes. I want cupcakes.”

He continued to yell about cupcakes as Erin shut off the car and got out. When she noticed the teenage boy glaring at Nolan as if he was the one to blame, it took everything inside of Erin not to stick her middle finger up at him.

Instead, she plastered a smile onto her face and ignored the teenager as she opened Nolan’s car door. “Do you want cupcakes?” she joked. “I don’t think you do.”

“Cupcakes!” Nolan yelled even louder now, which caused the teenager to get back into his car and slam the door shut.

Sweet victory. “We could get broccoli instead. What d’ya think? Should we do that?”

Dramatic as always, Nolan made a sound like he was gagging just from the mention of a vegetable. “Broccoli is disgusting. I don’t eat vegetables.”

He’s not lying about that. “I guess we’ll just have to get cupcakes then, huh?”

“Yay!” Nolan did a little dance in his car seat that was so cute, it almost made Erin forget what a terror he had been the entire day. Almost.

Erin got him out of his car seat and grabbed his hand, which resulted in her getting pulled across the parking lot as he attempted to get to the cupcakes as quickly as possible. After a few minutes, they were back in the car and Nolan was happily eating one of his cupcakes, something that Erin normally wouldn’t allow in the car, but she was way too tired to fight him.

Once the cupcake was gone, Nolan passed out again. Erin considered pulling into the closest parking lot to make another attempt at getting work done, but she knew if he woke up, she would get irrationally angry, and it really wasn’t his fault. It was her

fault for somehow convincing herself she could actually get work done with him around.

Erin had to take a few deep breaths to keep from breaking into tears. Normally, she was okay at handling the whole single parenting thing. It wasn't easy, but she could do it. Today was one of those days that felt like it could destroy her. She needed help. As much as she hated to admit it, she couldn't do this on her own, especially if she ever wanted to get any work done.

She was barely thinking when she picked up her phone and hit Blair's name. If she had truly thought it through, she wouldn't have attempted to make a call while Nolan was sleeping. She also would've overthought whether she should call Blair instead of texting her. Erin hated talking on the phone, and she could only assume that Blair hated it even more than her.

She was about to hang up and act like it was an accident when Blair picked up. "Hello?" she asked, sounding just as confused about the call as Erin felt.

Erin cleared her throat a few times while she thought about what to say. "Hey. I'm... um... really sorry to call you on your day off, but, well, I actually had a question to ask you about that. Would you have any interest in working Fridays? Not today, of course, but for the rest of the summer. Or, at least, some Fridays. It doesn't have to be all of them if you don't want it to be, or it doesn't have to be any at all. I'm sure you have things you'd much rather do. Even if you could give me a few hours every now and then, I'd be so appreciative. I'll pay you the same as I do for the other days, no matter how long you work." Erin knew she was rambling, but she couldn't help herself. It's what she did when she was overwhelmed, and right now, she was extremely overwhelmed. "You can say no, though. Seriously, I'll figure it out. I don't want you to think that you need—"

"I'll do it," Blair said before Erin could even finish.

“You will?”

“Yeah. It’s not like I have anything else to do. If it’ll help make things easier on you, I’d be happy to do it.”

Erin could hear another voice in the background but couldn’t make out what they were saying. Clearly, whatever it was, Blair didn’t want to hear it, because she told the person to “Shut the fuck up.” She laughed as she said the words though, so Erin could tell it was obviously someone she was close to.

“Sorry about that. My friend, Marisol, thinks she’s funny. Hopefully I’m not on speaker.”

“Bluetooth, but don’t worry. Nolan is currently asleep.” Erin blew out a long breath. “Thank God.”

“Are you okay?” Blair asked, her tone making it seem like she actually cared about the answer. “Do you want me to come over now for a little bit?”

Erin shook her head. “I can’t make you do that.”

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“You’re not making me. I’m offering.”

The offer wastempting, but Erin couldn’t ask her to do that. She could make it through the rest of her day on her own. God knows she had a ton of practice at it. “No, seriously. You’re clearly with someone right now. I don’t want to interrupt.”

“You’re not.” There was laughter on the other end of the phone and Erin was pretty sure she heard Blair tell her friend to shut up again. “Marisol was just getting ready to leave. Give me a half hour and I’ll be over.”

Erin felt her throat constrict the way it did when she was about to cry. Between how tired she was and how sweet Blair was acting, Erin had to work very hard to not break down. “Thank you. You don’t know how much this means to me. Seriously.”

It was an hour later when Blair arrived, but Erin wasn’t bothered by her lack of timeliness. She was just excited to have her there. It had actually worked out perfectly since Nolan slept for fifty more minutes once she hung up the phone. She could have used that time to get work done, but she took advantage of the peace and quiet and laid her seat back and shut her eyes. She probably looked crazy to her neighbors, sleeping in her driveway like that, but she didn’t care. She woke up feeling refreshed and finally ready to get some work done.

“Thanks again for doing this,” she said as she opened the door for Blair, who looked unfairly good in her tight jean shorts and black t-shirt with a very low V-neck.

She immediately shook these thoughts from her head. She needed to stop thinking like that.

Blair grinned so widely that Erin was practically blinded by her pearly white teeth. “Don’t worry about it. Like I said, I have nothing going on until much later tonight. I’m good for as long as you need me.”

“Big plans later?” Erin knew it was none of her business, but Blair was most likely doing something fun and Erin needed to live vicariously through her.

Blair shrugged. “Just meeting up with some girl I met out at the bar last night.”

“That’s cool. What are you two doing?” As soon as the words were out of her mouth, Erin realized what a dumb question that was, and the way Blair looked from her to Nolan, confirmed that she was right. “Of course. Sorry. It’s been so long since I’ve met up with someone, I think I forgot what it meant.”

Now that she was thinking about it, her thoughts were betraying her, and she was picturing Nolan’s babysitter doing things she definitely should not be picturing her doing. She wondered if Blair took things fast or slow. If she led the girl to her bed or had her way with her right at the door. A fire burned inside of Erin as she pictured how each of these scenarios would look. Holy shit, what the hell is wrong with me?

She closed her eyes to try to clear these thoughts from her head, but it only made it worse. It only made the pictures that much more vivid. Why did she have to be blessed with such a great imagination?

She opened her eyes and immediately brought them to Nolan, which was all she needed. All of her dirty fantasies flew from her mind when she focused on her sweet, innocent child. Phew.

“I doubt that’s true.”

“Huh?” Erin couldn’t even remember the last thing Blair said, so she had no idea

what apparently wasn't true.

"I'm sure you don't have any trouble... you know."

Oh! That! Did Blair seriously believe what she was saying? She actually thought Erin had been with women since her ex? What a cute idea. Erin put her hands over Nolan's ears. "Bit hard to find the time."

"Well, if you ever need a babysitter..." Blair pointed to herself.

Erin shook her head. "I doubt I'll be needing you for that. It's been... very long. I don't think anyone is interested."

Blair smirked. "Now I know you're lying to me."

The wink she added made Erin wish she had someone to help take care of the need suddenly surging through her body. Was Blair actually hitting on her or was she just naturally flirty? It had to be the latter, because there was no way this hot twenty-two-year-old was hitting on her. And even if she was, it wouldn't matter, Erin reminded herself.

"Mommy, don't touch my ears." Nolan swatted Erin's hands away.

Blair squatted down in front of Nolan. "What do you want to do, buddy?"

Instead of returning Blair's smile, Nolan crossed his arms over his chest and glared at her. "Today is special day with Mommy. Not Bear."

"Nolan." Erin's voice was stern. "Be nice. Blair came here last minute just so she could hang out with you. Now, tell her you're sorry."

“Sorry,Bear.” He at least said the words, but the tone of his voice didn’t make it believable that he actually meant them.

It clearly didn’t bother Blair, though. She laughed and ruffled his hair. “It’s okay, dude. Your mommy is much cooler than me. I get it.Butwhat if I played with your dinosaurs with you? Then do you think it’d be okay if I stayed?”

Nolan furrowed his eyebrows as if he was actually considering his options, then slowly nodded. “Okay, but I get to be the T-Rex.”

Blair put both hands in the air. “Of course, he’s all yours.”

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As soon as Blair stood back up, Nolan took her hand and dragged her up to his bedroom. With Nolan occupied for the next two hours, Erin had no trouble getting the work done she needed to do. She thought about getting ahead on next week's work as well, but didn't want to keep Blair longer than necessary. She did have plans after all.

Plans that Erin definitely wasnotgoing to spend any time thinking about.

Chapter 6

Blair

"So, what are you doing tomorrow?" Marisol asked as she leaned on the bar at Ralph's and smiled at Blair knowingly.

Blair stuck her middle finger up at Marisol. "You know damn well what I'm doing tomorrow. It's Friday. I work again." Jackass.

Marisol tapped her chin. "Hm. That's funny. I didn't think you worked on Fridays." Her face lit up in exaggerated realization and she stuck her pointer finger in the air. "Wait. That's right. Miss I-Probably-Wouldn't-Even-Take-The-Extra-Day-If-She-Offered-It didn't even hesitate when her mom-crush called. Kicked me right out of her house and everything when you weresupposedto be telling me about your time with a different girl."

Blair glared at Marisol. "She sounded so desperate. She clearly needs me. How could I say no?"

“Oh, sheneedsyou, huh?” Marisol wiggled her eyebrows. “What is it she needs? Your body?”

Blair groaned and threw a french fry at Marisol. Why the hell was she not getting this? “She’s the mother of the child I babysit. She doesn’t want my body.”

A mischievous smile spread across Marisol’s face as she reached onto the bar to pick up (and eat) the french fry that had just hit her. “But you want her to want your body. Becauseyouwanthers.”

Blair was really starting to regret sharing that with Marisol. In the two weeks since she told her, Marisol had not let her live it down. “I’m over that.” She waved a hand to try to appear nonchalant, so Marisol would hopefully believe her and let it drop. “Do I need to remind you that I’ve had mind-blowing sex pretty much all of lastweekend with a woman who is definitelynotthe mother of the child I babysit?”

Of course, the part that made the sex so mind-blowing was that Blair thought about Erin the whole time. Was it wrong to pretend she was touching Erin every time she touched her latest hookup? Should she not imagine every sound coming from Erin’s mouth instead? Probably not. But picturing Erin’s face as her own climax built made the orgasm like nothing she had experienced before. Wrong? Probably. Really fucking amazing? One hundred percent.

“Uh-oh. You have that faraway look in your eyes. Which girl has you lost in your daydreams?”

“The one I’m sleeping with, obviously.”

“And which one is that again?”

The sarcasm in Marisol’s voice was infuriating, so Blair threw another fry at her.

“Tomorrow, I will babysit Nolan, because that’s what Erin needs from me, and then tomorrow night, I have dinner plans with the latest hookup.”

“You know the only thing I just heard in your rambling?”

Blair sighed. No, but I’m sure you’re going to tell me. “What did you hear?”

“You called Hot Mommy name, but didn’t call Latest Hookup by her name.” She made air quotes when she said the words Latest Hookup. “I just find that funny since the hookup is clearly the one you’re more into.”

“Whatever. We’ll see who’s laughing after I have the best sex of my life tomorrow night.”

Blair was surprised when she walked into the house and Nolan ran over to greet her. “Bear! Mommy says we are having special day, then I’m having special night with Mommy.”

Blair knelt down and held her hand out for a high five. “That’s so cool, buddy.”

When Nolan hit her hand hard with his own, a warmth spread throughout Blair’s body. In the two weeks she had been babysitting him, she really had grown to love him. Sure, he had his moments that made her want to rip her hair out, and he had conned her into taking him to McDonald’s three more times since the last trip, but he was also a huge sweetheart and incredibly funny. Well, as funny as a three-year-old could be. They always had fun together, but this was the first day Nolan had actually acted excited that she was there. Every other day, it had taken him time to warm up to her and get over the belief that she had stolen him from his mom. It might be strange how happy it made her that this three-year-old wanted to spend time with her, but

Blair didn't care. She was going to enjoy the moment.

"I'm happy you're excited to spend time with me."

Nolan scrunched up his nose and looked toward the kitchen counter where his mom was hunched over, intently focused on something on her computer. "I'm more excited about my time with Mommy, but we'll have fun too."

Ouch. Shot to the heart. That's okay, though. Blair would take what she could get.

"And guess what else?" Nolan jumped up and down in front of her as if he was on a pogo stick. "Mommy is going to eat lunch with us."

Blair inadvertently licked her lips. I'll definitely take that.

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Three hours after locking herself in a room upstairs, Erin came down to join them for lunch, as promised. “Who wants mac and cheese?” she asked, as she opened the door to the refrigerator.

Blair figured Erin was getting milk to make macaroni and cheese from a box, so she was shocked when Erin took out a Tupperware container and opened it to reveal homemade mac and cheese. Blair pointed to the container as though it were a fine piece of art. She was sure her mouth was hanging open in awe. “You made that?”

Erin nodded. “It was our dinner last night.”

“You came home from work last night and made homemade mac and cheese for dinner?” Who was this woman? Superwoman? She definitely wasn’t human. She was like no one Blair had ever met. That could also be because she was older and a fully functioning adult, but she had to assume not all single parents worked a long day, came home to their son, and still found the energy to make macaroni and cheese that wasn’t from a box.

“No. I made it after Nolan went to bed on Wednesday night, then reheated it for dinner last night. That kid is way too hungry by the time you leave to wait for me to bake something.” Erin laughed, but her face became serious when she looked at Blair, who was still staring at her with mouth wide open. “Are you okay with that? I promise it’s still good. It doesn’t go bad after two days.”

Blair shook her head and forced her mouth closed. “Oh, I’m not worried about that at all. I’m just amazed you made mac and cheese. I didn’t know anyone actually did that. I figured the people who say they make homemade mac and cheese just moved it

to another container to make it look that way.” She pointed to the macaroni and cheese sitting on the counter. “That is not from a box, though.”

Nolan weaved in and out of his mom’s legs. “Mommy makes the best macaroni and cheese. It’s so cheesy.” He moved his hands around while he said so cheesy to emphasize just how cheesy it was.

He wasn’t lying. Just one bite had Blair feeling like she was having an orgasm in her mouth. She didn’t speak a word the whole time she ate because she was so focused on shoving as much of this orgasmic cheesy masterpiece into her mouth as possible. Well, that, and she was enjoying watching Nolan and Erin interact with each other. It was no wonder he adored Erin so much. She really was the best mom. Blair loved the way Erin spoke to him like a real person and didn’t baby talk to him like she had seen so many parents do with their toddlers. Hell, she saw it happen to some of her friends through middle school and high school even.

“I take it you liked that?” Erin asked with a laugh as she pointed to Blair’s empty bowl.

“Liked it? I loved it! It was fucking amazing.” She put a hand over her mouth as soon as the words came out. She might not know a ton about kids, but she did know you were not supposed to just let the F-Word fly around them. “I’m so—”

She couldn’t finish her apology because she was cut off by Nolan holding his empty bowl up to show his mom. “Yeah, Mommy, this is fucking amazing.”

Shit. I’m definitely getting fired. It took Blair a few seconds to look over at Erin because she was afraid of what she would find there. She was convinced if looks could kill, the one Erin was most likely giving her would knock her dead on the spot, which was why she was so confused when she finally worked up the courage to look at her and found an amused look on her face. The small smirk and sparkling eyes

made Blair's stomach do somersaults.

She waved a hand at Blair. "Don't worry about it. I'm a single mom. Do you really think I've never let profanity slip out around my child?" She looked from Blair to Nolan. "Just remember, sweetie—that's one of those words that you can say at home, but not anywhere else."

Nolan looked at Blair, his face now serious. "Some people don't like those words, 'specially teachers. No one likes the S or H word though, so we never say those. Those are mean words."

Shit or hell? Blair didn't think that could actually be what he meant, because she didn't know many people who were okay with fuck, but weren't okay with shit or hell. Erin must have noticed her confusion because she mouthed the words Stupid and Hate at her. So this child can drop the F-bomb, but Erin has trained him not to say words that can hurt people's feelings? Just when I thought I couldn't like her more...

That night at dinner, Blair still couldn't get Erin off of her mind, which was bad since she was literally on a date with another woman.

"You should totally get the mac and cheese."

Latest-Hookup's words only distracted her for a millisecond since macaroni and cheese obviously made her think of Erin's delicious cooking. "I actually had mac and cheese for lunch."

Latest-Hookup pushed out her lower lip in a move that Blair would have found incredibly cute if she wasn't stuck on someone else. "That's too bad." Latest-Hookup reached her hand across the table and took Blair's. "Don't worry, though. I'll get it and you can try a bite of mine."

As soon as the food was placed in front of them, Latest-Hookup shoveled a big bite onto her fork and held it out in front of Blair. "Are you ready? You're about to eat the best macaroni and cheese of your life."

Blair accepted the bite and while it might have been the best if she had tried it yesterday, she couldn't feel that way after having Erin's. Still, she nodded politely. "This is a date after all. You're right. It's really great."

Latest-Hookup smiled in satisfaction, clearly unaware that Blair wasn't telling the whole truth. Blair forced herself to focus on the conversation (instead of other things) as they ate their meals. She did a good job of it until she felt her phone vibrate in her pocket. She snuck a peek and found that it was a text from Erin. That's weird. She never texts me after babysitting hours. She brought her phone into view so she could read the text more closely. Before opening it, she smiled at Latest-Hookup. "Sorry. I have to check this. It's about work." Since they had yet to discuss their careers, Latest-Hookup had no idea what that meant.

I'm really sorry to bother you on a Friday night, but I was just wondering if Nolan ate anything with you other than the macaroni and cheese today. He's claiming he didn't, but he's also thrown up twice.

Of course this kid chose to keep a secret when his health was on the line. He had an ice cream sandwich. I'm sorry. He's very persuasive. I had no idea it would make him sick. If I did, I wouldn't have given it to him. I promise.

Within seconds, Erin's reply came through. That's okay. I'm just happy to find out there's a reason for it. He gets sick if he has too much dairy in one day. After eating my mac and cheese, he really shouldn't have anything else, especially not an ice cream sandwich :-p. Not your fault though. I forgot to tell you.

Blair's heart dropped. Erin might not be blaming her, but she still felt bad. Her

favorite little boy was throwing up because of a mistake she made. Is there anything I can do?

Blair didn't even bother looking up as she waited for Erin's reply. Luckily, it didn't take very long to come through. Nope! You're good! He'll be fine by the morning.

"Everything okay?" Latest-Hookup asked, her face one of concern when Blair finally looked at her.

"Yeah. All good. Sorry." She shoved the phone into her pocket, but that didn't stop her from thinking about Nolan and Erin. They were probably going to have such a hard night, and even if Erin claimed it wasn't, it really was her fault. "Actually, no. I need to leave and take care of something. I'm sorry." She quickly stood up and threw more cash on the table than was necessary to pay for the meal. "I hate to run out on you like this, but it really can't wait. I had a great time though. Truly."

"Well, if you get done with whatever work thing you have to do and want to meet back up for some fun, just let me know. I'm also free tomorrow night for that."

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Blair felt bad (and a little worried if she was being honest) because sex was the last thing she wanted to think about right now. All she could think about was doing whatever she needed to do to make Nolan feel better, even if it took all weekend. “It’s probably not going to work. I’m sorry.”

Blair saw when the realization hit Latest-Hookup’s face, and the hurt in her eyes that she was clearly trying to mask made Blair feel even more guilty. “Be honest with me. Is this the end of whatever this is between us?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. I’m really sorry.”

“It’s all good.” Latest-Hookup shrugged and chuckled. “At least I got one weekend of amazing sex out of it. That’s really all I was looking for anyway.”

“Glad I could be of service,” Blair said with a wink before turning around to walk away.

She had no idea what she was getting there, but her first stop was at Walmart. After grabbing a bunch of stuff that definitely wouldn’t help an upset stomach, she drove to Erin’s house. When she pulled in the driveway, she realized this might not be the best idea. As far as she knew, Nolan could be asleep by now and she could make things even worse by knocking. She pulled out her phone. Are you two still awake?

She wondered how long she should wait for a reply before giving up and leaving. If she sat in the driveway too long, it would become super creepy. Luckily, she didn’t have to wonder for long, because after only a few minutes, a text came through from Erin. Yep! Just watching a movie together on the couch. Everything okay?

I bought some stuff for Nolan and am on the way to your house. Is it okay if I bring it now? If not, I can wait until Monday.

Another long minute passed before Erin replied. You really didn't have to get him anything, but of course you can come in. The front door is unlocked, so don't bother knocking.

Blair waited a few minutes before shutting off the car and walking to the front door, because she didn't want Erin to realize she had actually been there that whole time. Before opening the door, she took a deep breath as if she was walking into a classroom to give a major presentation.

When she walked inside, she found Nolan and Erin both sitting on the couch just as Erin had said they were. Nolan was curled up against his mom so tightly that if Blair hadn't been looking for him, she would have missed him lying there. On the floor in front of the couch sat a small trash can with a plastic bag inside, which she assumed was being used in case Nolan couldn't make it to the bathroom.

As she walked closer, she could see that Nolan's face was pale and his lips were turned down in a frown. It wasn't the exaggerated frown he did when he wanted to get his way, but instead, just the slightest pinch of his lips as if he was trying to act strong.

Erin placed a kiss on Nolan's forehead before focusing her attention on Blair. Her eyes went wide when they landed on all of the bags she was holding. "Somestuff, huh?" she asked with a laugh.

Blair shrugged. "I had no idea what to get a kid with a tummy ache. I know none of this is actually correct, but I was hoping I could maybe make him smile." She stared down at Nolan who had yet to look at her and could feel her lips turn into frown as well. "That might be harder than I thought, though."

She squatted down in front of the couch and put her hand on Nolan's arm. "I'm sorry you're not feeling well, bud. I shouldn't have let you have that ice cream sandwich." She held up the gifts. "I brought you some things to hopefully help you feel better, though. Do you want to see them?" She took his very slight nod as a yes and began to pull things out of the bags. "First, I got you these really cool Dino PJs." She pulled out another set of pajamas that looked only the slightest bit different. "And here is another pair in case you get the first ones messy." I.e. throw up on them. Next, Blair pulled out a dinosaur blanket and an assortment of dinosaur toys. "I kind of went with a theme. I hope that's okay."

Nolan nodded more quickly this time, his eyes lighting up as he looked at all of his new toys.

"And last, but certainly not least..." Blair pulled out a remote-control T-Rex that was more than half of Nolan's height. It definitely wasn't cheap, but it was more than worth it for the big smile it finally brought to Nolan's face. "Now, this one you need to wait to play with until you feel better, okay?"

Nolan's eyes shined as he smiled his usual big, toothy grin at Blair. Without saying anything, he wiggled away from his mom and held his arms out toward Blair. When she leaned closer to him, he pulled her into a tight hug and placed a big sloppy kiss on her cheek. "Thank you, Bear."

Blair couldn't stop the wide smile that took over her face as well. "You're welcome, dude. I hope this makes you feel better."

Nolan giggled. "It will." Unfortunately, the smile didn't stay for long. He put his hand on his stomach and looked at Erin. "Uh-oh. Mommy, it's coming again."

Erin quickly hopped from the couch and grabbed Nolan. She rushed him to the bathroom and a few seconds later, Blair heard throw-up hitting the toilet water.

Blair followed slowly behind and stopped a few feet away. “Is there anything I can do?” she asked softly.

Erin looked up while she rubbed Nolan’s back and gave Blair a small, tired smile. “No. You’ve done so much already. You should get back to your night. I’m sure you have much more fun things to do.”

“Are... are you sure?” Blair had no idea why, but she really didn’t want to leave. This was exactly how she wanted to spend her night, as weird as that seemed.

“Yes! Go!” Erin smiled as she said it, so Blair didn’t take it personally, but that didn’t stop her from feeling disappointed as she headed toward the door.

“Bear! Wait.” Nolan ran from the bathroom and wrapped his arms around her legs. “Don’t go.”

She was sure he only wanted her there because he wasn’t feeling well, but that did not stop her from feeling overcome with joy at his request. “Okay.” Blair looked at Erin for reassurance. “As long as that’s okay with your mommy.”

Erin looked from Blair to Nolan and back at Blair. When their eyes met, Erin stared at Blair for a long time, and everything seemed to disappear around them. The moment was charged, and Blair swore Erin’s throat moved in slow motion as she swallowed hard. “It’s fine with me,” she answered softly.

Her eyes were burning into Blair and Blair knew that if she didn’t break this contact, she wouldn’t be able to control what happened next. She might close the few feet separating them, wrap her arms around Erin’s hips, and pull her close so their lips had no choice but to crash into each other. Obviously she couldn’t do that, though. That wasn’t the nature of their relationship at all. At best, Erin would slap her. At worst, she’d be left without a job.

So, she forced her eyes away and looked at the little boy whowasthe reason for their relationship. “It looks like I’m staying, buddy.”

Chapter 7

Erin

Erin jumped when loud banging suddenly started on her bedroom door. In actuality, it probably wasn't that loud, but after being in the quiet of her room for the past two hours, anything seemed loud. "Mommy! Mommy! Lunch, Mommy!"

Erin groaned as she looked at the time on her computer. 12:30. She had made the mistake of telling Nolan they would go to the pool after she finished all of her work. It was a Friday, so she was working from home while Blair watched him. When she made that promise, she didn't realize a huge project would come up that suddenly had to be done as soon as possible. Even though her stomach was growling and yelling at her to eat, she knew if she wanted to keep her promise to Nolan, she needed to work through lunch.

Before she could get the words out to tell him that, Nolan burst into the room. He jumped up on her bed where she was sitting with her laptop open. "It's time for lunch, Mommy."

Erin pulled Nolan up against her and sighed. "I can't today. I'm sorry. If I want to have time to take you to the pool, I need to work through lunch."

Hearing that the pool was on the line was clearly all Nolan needed to know because he shrugged and jumped from the bed. "Okay, Mommy!"

Erin heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs, and a moment later Blair was

in her room. She put a hand on her hip and took a deep breath as if she had been running. “Dude. I thought we were playing hide-and-seek. Why are you up here?”

Nolan pointed his little thumb at Erin. “I was getting Mommy for lunch, but she can’t eat because she’s taking me to the pool.”

Blair looked at her with furrowed eyebrows. “You’re not eating lunch today?”

Erin looked at the computer sitting in front of her. Just in the time since Nolan walked in, she had received three more emails. There was no way she could take a break if she was ever going to finish. “Too much to do, sorry. Besides, I’m not even that hungry.” Her stomach betrayed her by letting out an obscenely loud growl at that very moment.

Blair chuckled. “Are you sure about that?”

Erin shook her head. “It really doesn’t matter. I promised Nolan the pool, so that’s more important than food.”

“Okay.”

Blair stared at Erin for longer than seemed necessary, and the whole time, Erin had to ignore how that stare made her feel. How being the center of Blair’s world, even for a few seconds, was like floating away in the clouds. I know it’s been a long time since you’ve had someone, but stop lusting over the babysitter. This was a reminder Erin had been forced to give herself way too much lately, especially after Blair dropped everything last week to come over and help Erin take care of Nolan. Blair had let Nolan snuggle up against her on the couch until he drifted into a deep sleep. It was only then that Erin was able to convince Blair it was okay for her to leave. When she walked her to the door, everything inside of Erin was screaming at her to kiss Blair, as if this had been a date and she was dropping Blair off at her front door. Instead, she

turned around and grabbed her purse to find cash to give to Blair. After all, this was the babysitter. And nothing else. But Blair had put her hand on top of Erin's and told her she didn't want the money. She just wanted to help. Blair's soft touch didn't make the urge to kiss her any easier to control, so Erin said a quick thank you and opened the door for her. She took a few deep breaths as soon as she closed the door behind Blair. It was like being near her had sucked all the oxygen from the room and Erin could finally breathe again. The problem was that she really didn't want to...

"Come on, dude. Let's let Mommy get work done."

The sound of Blair's voice snapped Erin out of her daydreams, but by the time she was able to look over to where Blair had been standing, she was gone. Erin sighed even though she knew it was for the best. She needed to get this work done.

Unfortunately, only forty-five minutes later, there was another knock on the door. "Honey, Mommy isn't done with work yet. I just need a little more uninterrupted time." She tried to keep her voice level, because she didn't want Nolan to know she was annoyed. It wasn't his fault. He was too young to understand.

He was clearly also too young to understand directions, because the door slowly creeped open. Only, the person standing there wasn't Nolan. It was Blair. Blair, who was currently holding a tray of food.

She held the tray in the air. "I'm really sorry to interrupt, but I figured you could use this."

When she set it down beside Erin, Erin began to laugh. "Ramen noodles and microwave pizza? It's been forever since I've had that. I didn't even know we had any in the house."

"You didn't." Blair chewed on her bottom lip as though she was nervous for some

reason. “I normally bring my own to make myself for lunch since it’s really all I can make.” She shrugged. “I also love it.” Now, she cringed. “I guess you probably have a much more refined palate than I do. You are an adult.”

Yes. She was an adult, ten years older than the girl standing next to her bed doing something sweeter than anything she could ever remember her ex doing for her. Ten years younger is the important part, Erin. Still, she needed to let Blair know how much the gesture meant to her. “I might be an adult, but who doesn’t love ramen noodles and microwave pizza?”

“Serial killers?” Blair asked with a laugh.

Erin laughed along with her. This was the first time all day she didn’t feel like she was on the edge of a panic attack. “They’d have to be to not like this meal.” She waited for her laughter to subside to say the next part, so Blair knew how sincere she was being. “This is seriously so nice, though. Thank you. You’ve gone above and beyond. Last week you helped when Nolan got sick. This week you’re making me lunch. I really don’t pay you enough.”

Blair shrugged. “It’s not about the money for me. You do so much for Nolan. I’m happy to help where I can.”

“Well, thank you. It means more to me than you’ll ever know.”

It really did. Blair was doing this for no reason other than the fact that she was a really fucking good person. Now if only she were ten years older and not Nolan’s babysitter...

Thanks to being fueled by ramen noodles and pizza, Erin was able to have her work

done by three, which gave her plenty of time to satisfy Nolan's pool itch.

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“Bear, you coming to the pool with us?” Nolan asked as Blair put on her shoes to leave.

Blair ruffled his hair. “Not today, buddy. I have tickets for a show.”

Nolan tilted his head at her. “What kind of show?” His eyes suddenly lit up. “Bluey?”

Blair laughed. “No. Definitely not Bluey, unfortunately. It’s music. EDM. Have you ever heard of that?” When Nolan shook his head, Blair laughed again. “I didn’t think so. EDM stands for Electronic Dance Music. It’s when people called DJs play really loud, awesome music.”

EDM music? Really? Even when Erin was younger, she was never into that kind of music. She liked her lyrics to have meaning, and so far, she hadn’t found a DJ that used meaningful lyrics (not that she’d been looking). “You mean it’s when people who call themselves musicians push buttons, right?” Erin joked. She just hoped Blair would see it that way and not be offended.

“Ouch.” Blair brought a hand to her chest as if she had just been shot there. “Skratch Sick is amazing and does so much more than just push buttons. Your lack of knowledge is hurting me.”

“Skratch Sick?” Erin couldn’t help but laugh. “Is that who you’re going to see?”

“Yep! Have you heard of him?”

Of course not. Erin was still listening to the same music she had been since she was a

teenager—mostly Taylor Swift. “I haven’t. It’s just a very interesting name.”

Blair scoffed. “If by interesting you mean slay, then yes, you’re right.” She looked down at the Apple Watch on her wrist. “I better go, though. I have to get my outfit ready. We’re getting dinner and then going to a bar while we wait for him to go on. I think he said his set starts at midnight, but I better check that again.”

Slay? Midnight? This whole conversation only confirmed even more that Erin’s fantasies would only ever be fantasies (and really shouldn’t even be that), because she and Blair had nothing in common. “I guess you better go if you’re going to make it there in...” Erin made a point of staring at the clock across the room. “Nine hours.”

“I promise I’m not making up an excuse to leave. We’re heading to dinner in three hours.”

“I’m just messing with you.” Erin waved a hand toward the door. “Go get ready to watch some man push buttons.”

Blair frowned at Nolan. “Your mommy isn’t being very nice to me right now.”

Erin expected Nolan to tell Blair that his mommy is always nice, but instead, he put his hands on his hips and stared at Erin with a scowl on his face. “Be nice to Bear.”

Blair mimicked the face Nolan was making as she looked at Erin as well. “Yeah. Be nice to me.”

Butterflies fluttered through her stomach at the sight of the two of them standing in front of her. Aside from her family, no one else had ever developed this type of relationship with Nolan. Not even her ex-wife. It probably had a lot to do with her having issues letting anyone in after what Bianca did to her, but it was still so nice to see. “Fine. Have fun watching this very talented musician.”

“That’s better.” Blair threw her a wink that totally didn’t make those butterflies in her stomach get even worse. Neither did the high five she gave Nolan right before she left. Nope. Definitely not.

“Ready to go to the pool?” Erin looked at Nolan who was staring at the door, his shoulders now hunched forward as if he was sad. “What’s wrong?” Erin reached out and squeezed his shoulder, but he didn’t look back at her.

“I wanted Bear to come to the pool.”

“I know, buddy, but Blair hung out with you all day. Now she has to go hang out with her other friends.” Was it her friends, though, or was it that girl she said she met at the bar a few weeks ago? Maybe it was another girl. The idea of Blair with other girls shouldn’t make Erin sick, so she decided to ignore the tug at her stomach from just the thought.

Nolan nodded slowly, but continued to stare at the door. A minute later, he finally turned around to look at Erin instead. “I really like Bear, Mommy.”

“Aw, sweetie, I really like her too.”

That was the problem. They both liked her way too much. What happened when this summer came to an end and Nolan went back to daycare and Blair found a new job? Would the two of them be okay?

Luckily, there was still a lot of time before she had to worry about that. They practically had the whole summer.

Chapter 8

Blair

“Are you feeling okay?” Erin asked as soon as she opened the door for Blair.

“I’m fine,” Blair said. It was a complete lie. She wastechnicallyfine. She was just exhausted. After going to a concert on Friday night, out to a bar on Saturday night, and lying in the sun all day on Sunday, she needed a day just to nap. Unfortunately, that would not be possible with the three-and-a-half-year-old she was spending today with.

“Long weekend, I take it?”

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Blair nodded, even though she wanted to lie. She didn't want Erin to think she was completely immature, even if that was the case.

"Did you see multiple DJs, or did you dedicate all of your energy to Scratch and Sniff?"

Blair coughed through a laugh. She was always surprised by how witty Erin was. "Excuse me. It's Skratch Sick."

"Oh yes, because that's so much better."

The sarcasm in Erin's voice made Blair laugh again. Instead of moving past her lush, it just kept getting worse, and this teasing certainly wasn't helping. "Don't you have somewhere to be?"

Erin waved her hand. "Nowhere important." The way she was staring at Blair, rather than walking out the door, made it seem like work actually wasn't important.

Why is this happening so often lately? Why did Erin seem to be getting lost in Blair just as much as Blair kept getting lost in her? Was it simply because she liked Blair's looks or was there something more there? If there was, Erin wasn't giving anything away. Aside from these emotionally charged moments, there was a definite wall between them; one that existed because she was the babysitter, not a friend.

Erin sighed. "You're right, though. I really do need to go."

As soon as Erin was out the door, Blair missed her. She didn't have time to harp on it,

though, because Nolan immediately began clawing at her legs. “Bear! Bear! Let’s go to the pool.”

Blair shut her eyes. Just thinking about the pool made her tired. She knew she would be stuck tossing Nolan into the water more times than she could handle. “Don’t you want to do something different today? We go to the pool all the time.”

Nolan shook his head back and forth multiple times. “You didn’t go last time.”

“Yeah, but you did.” Blair playfully poked Nolan in the side.

Nolan giggled and wiggled away from her. “I love the pool.”

“I’ll make you a deal. Let’s hang out here until lunchtime and if you still want to go to the pool after we eat, we can.” Hopefully I can make it fun enough to get him to forget about the pool.

“Pool time!” Nolan said as soon as he took the last bite of his peanut butter and jelly just three hours (that felt more like eight) later.

Blair closed her eyes and pushed air out through her nose. Clearly I failed at making this morning extra fun. “Okay. You win. Go grab your bathing suit.”

Nolan ran upstairs, and much too soon, came back down swinging his bathing suit over his head, already completely naked.

Shit. I’m way too tired for this.

Blair quickly put on his bathing suit then argued with him the whole time she got hers on, since she was apparently moving too slowly.

“Shoulders! Shoulders!” Nolan shouted as soon as they were outside.

Blair groaned internally. He was literally going to kill her today. That wasn’t going to stop her from giving her favorite little boy exactly what he wanted. She bent down and hoisted him onto her shoulders. Even though it wasn’t a long walk to the pool, Blair thought she might collapse by the time they got there. There was no time for that. As soon as she put him down, Nolan sprinted toward the water, yelling at Blair to grab his swimmy. She quickly ripped off her shirt, grabbed his swimmy, and chased after him. She caught up to him right before he hit the water and shoved the swimmy up his arms, then threw him in. He laughed hysterically as he hit the water which helped to bring the slightest bit of Blair’s energy back.

That slight bit of adrenaline was nothing compared to the energy the next few hours stole from her, though. Luckily, Nolan didn’t ask her to carry him on her shoulders on the way home, because even without him up there, she still felt like she could barely get her legs to move. Note to self: no more busy weekends.

They had just gotten out of their bathing suits and back into their clothes when Erin’s car pulled into the driveway. Since Erin was never one to waste time, she walked through the door less than a minute later.

Blair was so tired, she didn’t even notice the drink Erin was holding until she shook it in front of her face. “Graham Cracker iced latte with whipped cream is your drink of choice, right?”

Blair was flabbergasted. “Yes, it is, but how do you know that?”

“You mentioned it a week or two ago,” Erin said nonchalantly as if she hadn’t done the sweetest thing in the whole wide world.

“From Celestial Cafe, yes!” Be still my heart. “Have you been there often? The peanut

butter crepes are to die for.”

Erin shook her head. “I’ve never actually been there. I’m not a big coffee drinker. You just seemed like you could use this, and it’s not that far out of the way on my drive home, so I wanted to do it for you. You’ve done so much for us.”

This busy woman, who was already juggling so much, went out of her way to get something for Blair that she mentioned once in passing? Blair was pretty sure no one had ever done something so sweet for her. Maybe Marisol, but Marisol didn’t really count since they were pretty much family. She wanted to point that out, but she also didn’t want to make Erin feel like she was being too much, especially because, in Blair’s eyes, she was pretty close to perfect.

“You’re paying me to babysit. You don’t owe me anything else above that.”

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Erin gave her a pointed look. “Don’t act like you didn’t use your whole paycheck to buy Nolan gifts when he was sick.”

Blair was pretty sure she spent more than a week’s paycheck on those gifts, but she wasn’t going to admit that. It’s not like she actually needed the money, since just having a job was enough to convince her parents to keep giving her money from her trust fund every week.

“That was nothing. Also, it was kind of my fault he got sick, so it’s the least I could do.”

Erin held the drink out toward her. “Well, this is the least I can do when you spend every day entertaining my tiny demon.”

Since it would be rude to refuse such a kind gesture, Blair reached out to grab the drink. It should have been such a simple thing, but her fingers brushed Erin’s as she grabbed ahold of the cup. Their skin had barely grazed, but that didn’t stop Blair from becoming frozen in place.

Tingles started at the tips of her fingers and quickly spread throughout her body. She let out an almost inaudible gasp at the feeling. She couldn’t help herself. Blair hadn’t been shy throughout college. She came out her junior year of high school, and throughout college, she had many women in her bed. But no one had ever elicited the response she had when Erin’s fingers touched her. Her body often ached for relief when she was having sex and on the edge of an orgasm, but her body had never physically ached for a person the way she was aching for Erin right now, which was crazy because they had barely even touched. The contact was so slight, Erin probably

didn't even notice it. At least that's what Blair assumed until her eyes met Erin's, and they also looked like she had been shocked to life for the first time. Was it possible that Erin was feeling this too? Did the brush of Blair's fingers make her want to forget the world and get lost in Blair's body? Because, if Blair was being honest with herself, that's exactly what she wanted. She wanted to lead Erin upstairs to the bedroom where she looked unfairly cute doing her work on Fridays, and she wanted to trace her body with her fingers and her tongue until Erin screamed out her name. When Erin was still trying to catch her breath, she wanted to...

"Airplane!"

Every fantasy flew from her brain as a small, but mighty, human slammed into her back. The unexpected impact caused Blair to lose her balance, which in turn caused her drink to fumble from her hands right onto the front of Erin's blouse. Luckily, Erin had catlike reflexes which kept the whole drink from dousing her, but at least a third of the cold drink was now dripping down the front of her blouse.

"Oh shit." Blair quickly turned around to grab paper towels and bring them to Erin. Except, instead of handing the paper towels to Erin, like she should have, she did just about the dumbest thing ever—began wiping the drink from her blouse, from spots that really shouldn't be wiped by someone like, say, the babysitter.

She let the towels drop and slowly backed away, like someone about to be placed under arrest. "I'm so sorry."

Much to her surprise, Erin just laughed. "It's definitely not your fault." She looked at Nolan. "Honey, you can't just attack people without warning."

Nolan shook his head. "I didn't. I came to the airport. Bear is the airplane."

Erin shared a secret smile with Blair, and while this moment wasn't nearly as charged

as the last, it was still nice. It was as if they had their own language that only the two of them understood. Logically, she knew this wasn't actually the case. Adults always had looks they gave other adults that kids wouldn't notice, but with just the two of them and Nolan in the room, it really felt like it was something special just for them.

"I don't think Blair knew she was the airplane. Which is probably why she just lost half her drink on Mommy's shirt." She winked at Blair, then focused her attention on Nolan. "Could you please tell Blair that you're sorry? Mommy got her this drink to help her feel better after what I'm sure was a long day, and now she only gets a little bit of it."

Instead of looking at either of them, Nolan stared down at his feet. "I'm sorry, Bear."

Erin put her hand on Nolan's head and smiled at Blair once again. "I'm sorry too. I promise I'll make it up to you."

Blair chuckled. This woman was way too nice. "Make what up to me? Half of a drink is still more than you had to give me. You don't owe me anything."

"Since I created the thing that caused half of your drink to end up on my shirt, I feel like I do. And I will. I promise."

Erin wasn't lying. A day later, when she came home from work, she not only had a new latte for Blair, but also a peanut butter crepe. When Blair insisted she didn't have to do that, especially the crepe, Erin answered, "Consider it interest, accrued from yesterday's mishap."

After taking a big sip of her latte, Blair glanced at Erin. Since Erin was distracted by Nolan at that moment, Blair was able to take her in more without her noticing. Around Nolan, Erin always had a smile on her face, even when it was clear by her eyes that she was tired and maybe even a little bit sad. Obviously, Blair noticed that

Erin was not the first time she saw a picture of her, but it was so much more than just her looks. Erin was beautiful, but not just physically. She was one of those rare people who became better looking the more you got to know them, because she had such a beautiful soul. She had so much on her plate and still thought of Blair. Blair, who didn't deserve anything from this woman. Blair, whose life had been so easy thus far. Erin had to work so hard for what she had, and Blair had everything handed to her. It wasn't fair, but it also made Blair like her even more (which also wasn't fair since she knew she couldn't like Erin).

When Erin's eyes met hers, crinkled at the corners from her smile, Blair knew the truth. This was no longer a crush. It was a full-on, heart-pounding, can't-possibly-end-well crush.

Chapter 9

Blair

By the following Monday, Blair had it all figured out. She knew how to squash this crush before it became anything worse. She needed to stop blurring the lines between babysitter and something more. She couldn't show up in Erin's room on Fridays to bring her food when she was too busy to stop working. She couldn't stick around after Erin got home from work (even if Nolan asked her to). She needed to be Nolan's babysitter and nothing else, because she knew the heart crushing reality—that was all she could ever be.

She decided to spend the weekend relaxing, so she didn't look exhausted when she showed up at Erin's house on Monday. That way, Erin wouldn't feel tempted to stop and get her a drink again, something she had done one other day last week because she said Blair looked like she could use it. Today, that wasn't the case. Erin had actually made a comment about how chipper Blair looked for a Monday morning, which somehow made Blair feel even more energized.

Blair was so energized, she decided to put her and Nolan's lunches into a cooler and head to the pool early. They arrived only a few minutes after opening, which meant they would probably have the pool mostly to themselves for a little bit. As they got closer to the entrance, Blair's thoughts were confirmed. It didn't look like anyone was there.

When they made it to the gate, she figured out why. Pool closed for cleaning. We will be open again tomorrow, read the handwritten sign.

Blair threw her hands in the air. "For God's sake."

Nolan grabbed Blair's leg and rested his whole body up against her. "What's wrong, Bear?"

"The pool is closed."

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“B-but why?” Nolan’s eyes drifted to the ground and his lips turned down into a frown. Blair really thought he might start to cry.

“I don’t know, dude. Some little brat probably shit in the pool.” Okay, not her smoothest moment, but she was pissed off that Nolan was upset.

“B-but I thought we were going to spend all day swimming.” He sniffled, and Blair knew the tears were coming.

Shit. What the hell do I do? I don’t want him to be sad. Her heart tugged in her chest as she watched Nolan struggle to keep his tears in. Then an idea popped into her head. It was a terrible idea for someone who was trying to keep her professional and personal life separate, but she didn’t have another choice. She had promised Nolan the pool, and she refused to let him down.

Blair knelt down in front of Nolan and took his hand. “You know what? We might not be able to go swimming here, but I know where there’s another pool where we can swim.”

Nolan looked up at her, a sparkle to his eyes that wasn’t there a second before. “Where?”

“My house.”

Nolan’s body began to wiggle. “You have a pool?”

“Well, technically, it’s my parents’ pool, but I live with them, so it’s my pool for

now, too.”

Nolan tilted his head and wrinkled his eyebrows as if he was confused. “You live with your parents?” He stabbed his pointer finger into his own chest. “Like me? Adults don’t live with parents.”

Don’t I know it, kid. “Can I tell you a little secret?” When Nolan nodded, Blair ruffled his hair the way she always did. “I’m not really an adult.”

“You’re a kid?” Nolan pointed to himself once again. “Like me?”

Blair laughed. “Yes. Like you. I’m just a little bit bigger.”

Nolan held his arms out from his body. “You’re a lot bigger.”

“Hey, now, be nice or I might not take you to the pool.”

“No! Pool!” Nolan brought his hands together in a praying motion and pushed his bottom lip out. “Please.”

“I was just messing with you. Of course we’re going to the pool.” Blair cringed when she remembered one very important detail. She couldn’t really take Nolan somewhere without letting Erin know. Why didn’t I think of that before? “Just as long as your mom says it’s okay.”

Once they started their walk back to the house, Blair hit Erin’s name to call her. She hated to bother her while she was working, but she knew if she texted it could take longer to get an answer. Because she had already promised Nolan they could go, she didn’t want to make him wait.

Erin picked up after only two rings. “Blair. Hi. Is everything okay?”

Blair cringed again. She hadn't thought about the fact that calling Erin, something she had never done while babysitting, would scare her. "Oh yeah. Everything is fine. I'm sorry. We just walked to the pool, and it turns out it's closed."

"Yeah, Mommy. Someone shit in the pool!" Nolan shouted.

"Did he just say what I think he said?" Erin asked.

Shit, I am really messing this up. "Yes, he did. I don't actually know if that's what happened, but he might have heard that from me. I'm so sorry. Anyway, I was calling to ask if it would be okay to take him to my... parents' house to swim."

"Bear is a giant kid and lives with her parents," Nolan shouted once again.

Blair hoped Erin didn't hear that, but the fact that she started laughing right after he said it made it pretty clear that she had. "I'm sorry my son is so savage. But yes, that would be fine. I'll call before I leave work to see if you two are still there."

"I'm sure we won't be." "I will make sure we aren't. No crossing any more lines." "But that sounds good."

Blair said goodbye to Erin and continued the walk back to the house. After running inside to grab her car keys, they got into her car and headed in the direction of her house.

"Whoa," Nolan said when they pulled up to the gate in front of her neighborhood. "Are you a princess?"

Blair laughed as she entered the code to open the gate. "No. I wish I was, though."

After pulling into her parents' driveway, she turned around to find Nolan staring at

the house with wide eyes. “Are you sure you’re not a princess?”

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“Last time I checked I wasn’t.”

Until seeing his reaction, Blair hadn’t thought too much about the size of her house. Sure, it was bigger than most of her friends’ houses growing up, but it never mattered much to her. She liked having people come over, not because of the size, but because they could hang out in the pool. The only benefit to the size was her parents always slept through her and her friends sneaking alcohol into the basement.

Nolan pointed toward the house. “Who lives here?”

“Me, my mom, my dad, and my brother.”

“It’s huge.” Nolan spread his arms out dramatically as if to demonstrate just how big the house was.

“Just wait until you see the pool.”

“Let’s go!” Nolan tried, and failed, to get himself out of the car seat.

Blair hopped out of the car and helped Nolan, then tried to keep up as he sprinted to the front door and attempted to open it.

“Hold on, buddy.” Blair reached around him and typed in the code to unlock the door.

Nolan pushed past Blair and bounced inside the door. He continued to bounce up and down as he waited for Blair. “Can I see your room?”

“My room?”

“Yeah. You see my room.”

“But my room isn’t nearly as cool as yours.” Plus, I’m really trying my best not to blur lines right now.

“Please, Bear.” The big puppy dog eyes were too much for her to deny him.

“Okay. Fine.”

Blair walked toward the stairs and motioned for him to follow. After getting to the top of the stairs, she turned left and led him down the long hallway to her bedroom.

Nolan pointed to the sign hanging on her door that had been there since she was ten years old. “What’s that?”

“It says ‘Caution: Blair’s room. Enter at your own risk.’ It’s been there since I wasn’t much older than you.” She poked Nolan’s stomach, which made him giggle uncontrollably.

“I want a sign too!”

Blair laughed, but kept that idea in the back of her head in case she needed a future gift idea. Once again, Nolan squeezed past her as she pushed the door open.

“This room is huge!” he shouted as soon as he was inside. He looked around her room, then pointed to the posters on her wall, all of female celebrities. “Who are they?”

Blair shrugged. “Two of them are actresses, one is a singer, and one is a soccer

player.”

Nolan scrunched up his nose and stared at Blair. “Why are they on your wall?”

Blair shrugged once again. “Because they’re hot.” When Nolan continued to stare at her as if he had no idea what she was talking about, she decided to elaborate. The kid had two moms at one point. He had to understand that some people were gay, even if he didn’t know exactly what that meant. “I like other women.”

Nolan’s eyes lit up as if he finally understood. “So does my mommy!” The light faded from his eyes just as quickly as it had come. “But sometimes she’s sad.”

Shit. What the hell was Blair supposed to say to that? Also, for someone who was trying to keep her two lives separate, the thought of Erin being sad ripped her apart inside.

She sat down on her bed and patted the spot next to her. Nolan crawled onto the bed and pushed himself tight up against her.

Blair put her arm around him and held him close. “You know your mommy loves you more than anything in the world, right?”

Nolan nodded. “I know.”

“And if she ever seems sad, it’s not because of you. You make her really happy.”

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“I know.” Nolan nodded even faster this time. “She tells me that.”

“Good.” Blair kissed the top of Nolan’s head and tried to ignore all of the mixed emotions swirling through her body. “As long as you know that, that’s all that matters.” Enough of this sappy shit, though. Keeping my lives separate, Blair reminded herself once again. She hopped off of the bed and held her hand out toward Nolan. “Are you ready to go to the pool?”

She didn’t have to ask twice. Nolan was off of the bed and out the bedroom door before Blair could process what was happening. She caught up to him on the stairs and led him through the house and out of the sliding door in the dining room that led to the pool. Nolan’s reaction to the pool was about the same as it had been to the rest of the house, and Blair had to quickly take off her shirt and shorts to keep him from jumping in before she managed to put on his swim trunks.

After swimming for a few hours, they took a break to eat the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and chips she had packed for them. As soon as he took his last bite, Nolan jumped right back into the pool. They hadn’t been in there very long when Blair’s mom walked through the sliding door.

“Mom? What are you doing here?”

Her mom laughed. “This is my house.”

“I know, but shouldn’t you still be at work?”

“I get off early on Mondays. I have for years. You never realized that?”

Blair shrugged. Talk about worlds colliding. At least it was only Nolan with her and not a certain someone else.

“And who is this?” her mom asked as she knelt in front of the pool.

“I’m Nolan!” he answered with a giggle.

“Hi, Nolan. It’s very nice to meet you. Blair has told me so much about you.”

“Bear told you about me?”

Blair’s mom nodded. “She told me how much fun you two have together. But you know what? You’re even cuter than I thought you would be.”

“I know.” Nolan put his hand over his mouth and giggled again.

When her mom stood back up, she focused her attention on Blair. “What are you two doing here? I thought you normally went swimming at the public pool.”

“Bear said someone shit in it,” Nolan answered before she could.

“Blair Dallas Breckenridge, you do not use that sort of language around a young child, do you?”

Blair could feel her face turning red in response to her mom using her middle name.

“It slipped...?”

Her mom shook her head, but a small smile parted her lips. “I’m going to go get changed and figure out what I’m making for dinner, but you two have fun.”

Blair was having so much fun hanging out with Nolan in her parents’ pool that she

didn't realize how much time had passed until her phone started to ring. She hopped out of the pool, quickly wiped her hands, and picked up on speakerphone so she didn't get the phone too wet.

"Hey, Erin, what's up?"

"I actually got done with my work a little bit early, so I'm about to hop in my car now. I was just wondering if you and Nolan were still at your house or if you're back at ours'."

"We're still at mine, sorry. But I can get him dried off and bring him home. That way you don't have to go out of your way."

"It's really no big deal. I'm already driving anyway. No sense in you getting back in your car when you don't need to."

"No, really, I insist." Please. I'm begging you. Do not make this harder on me.

It turned out, Erin wasn't the one she had to worry about. "No! I'm not ready to get out!" Nolan shouted from the pool.

Erin laughed on the other end of the phone. "It appears the boss has spoken. Text me your address and I'll come get him. I'll fight him so you don't have to. I have no problem being the bad guy."

If Blair kept fighting with her, it was going to come across as though she were hiding something, so she said "Okay" and hung up the phone. She quickly typed out her address and the code to the gate, then jumped back in the pool.

This was fine. She would get out all of Nolan's energy now, and once Erin arrived, Blair would quickly usher them out of the house under the guise that she didn't want

Erin to waste any more of her night. In and out. No harm. No foul.

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At least that's how it should've gone if Blair's mom hadn't gotten to Erin first.

Chapter 10

Erin

Erin couldn't believe she needed a code to get into Blair's gated community. Her mouth hung open as she passed the houses that were all at least four times bigger than hers. So, this is how the other half lives, huh? Very interesting.

Erin knew her life could more closely resemble this if she wasn't a single mom paying for all of her child's things on her own, but that thought wasn't enough to make her regret her past. Without her ex-wife, she wouldn't have Nolan, and without Nolan, well, honestly, she wouldn't have much of anything. He was her whole world. Living in a modest townhouse was a more than fair trade-off for getting to be his mom.

Blair's house was just as big as the others in the neighborhood, if not even bigger. She pulled into the driveway and parked on the right side of it as Blair had instructed her to do, then walked to the front door.

Immediately after hitting the doorbell, a high-pitched voice that definitely didn't belong to Blair shouted, "Coming!"

A few seconds later, a woman with brown hair and blue eyes opened the door. Even though this woman was shorter than Blair and her eye color was different, it was still very obvious that she was Blair's mom.

Erin held out her hand. “You must be Mrs. Breckenridge. It’s very nice to meet you. Thank you for letting my son crash your pool today.”

Mrs. Breckenridge accepted Erin’s hand and gave it a firm shake. “Oh, it’s my pleasure. I’m just happy it’s getting used. With Blair and her brother, Blake, both having jobs this summer, the pool has been sitting vacant most days.” Mrs. Breckenridge stepped to the side so Erin could walk in. “Also, please call me Brandy. Being called Missus makes me feel old.”

“Of course,” Erin said with a laugh. “I completely understand.”

When Erin took the time to look around, she noticed the hallway she was in seemed to be half the size of her whole house. A few feet away was a staircase and to her left was a room with the door closed. To the right was what appeared to be a living room or family room (Erin had never quite understood the difference between those two and switched between both terms when referring to the TV room downstairs in her house).

Brandy led her past the stairs and down the hallway into what appeared to be the dining room. To the left of the dining room was the TV room and to the right, the kitchen. Everything was gorgeous and Erin loved the open layout of the house. It made the interior of the house appear even bigger than it already was, which would have been overwhelming if it didn’t have such a welcoming feel. Pictures were scattered all over the walls, along with quotes about love and family. The house wasn’t messy, per se, but you could definitely tell it was lived in, which Erin appreciated. She hated walking into a house that she felt like she could mess up just from breathing.

“You have a beautiful home,” she told Brandy, who was now opening the sliding door, which led to a pool that was almost as big as the public pool.

“Thank you so much. You’re so sweet.” Brandy’s eyes lit up as if an idea had just popped into her head. “What are you and Nolan doing for dinner tonight?”

“I’m not sure,” Erin answered honestly. “I didn’t have time to plan anything. I’ll probably just pick something up on the way home.”

“Nonsense.” Brandy waved a hand at her. “You two should stay here.”

“Oh my gosh, no. We couldn’t. I wouldn’t want to intrude on your family time.” Erin had to admit that a home-cooked meal she didn’t have to make sounded wonderful, but she also didn’t want to make Blair uncomfortable. Plus, she was sure Brandy was just being nice and didn’t actually want her to stay.

“You’d actually be doing me a favor. I made enough food for Blake and his girlfriend, and he just called to let me know they made other plans. I don’t want that food to go to waste.”

Erin looked toward the pool to see how Blair felt about her mother’s invite. If the deer-in-the-headlights look she was giving her mom was any indication, she definitely didn’t want Erin to accept her mom’s offer.

“We’d love to stay, but I don’t want to make Blair feel like she’s working overtime.” Even though she was addressing Brandy, Erin kept her eyes on Blair as if they were having a secret conversation.

“But I want to have dinner at Bear’s big house!” Nolan yelled.

Blair’s face softened as she reached out to grab ahold of Nolan. “Then I think you should stay.” Her eyes drifted back to Erin and a small smile parted her lips. “Hanging out with this dude never feels like work. I’d love it if you stayed.”

I'd love it if you stayed. The words echoed through Erin's brain as if there was a deeper meaning to them. For just a moment, she let herself believe there was. She stared at Blair, who was still smiling at her, and was transported to a different time and place that didn't actually exist. She pictured Blair standing at her front door and reaching out a hand when Erin turned to leave. She imagined Blair pulling her back into her arms and saying those exact words. As they both struggled to catch their breath, their lips were drawn together like magnets and...

"Mommy!" Nolan shouted. "I want to stay."

Erin shook all of the inappropriate thoughts from her head. Why was she even thinking of Blair this way? She especially shouldn't be having these thoughts when she was standing right by Blair's mother, who might honestly be closer in age to her than Erin was to Blair. That thought made her stomach twist into knots. She really needed to let go of this strange infatuation she had with the babysitter.

"Mommy!" Nolan shouted once again.

"Yes." Erin cleared her throat. "We can stay."

"Yay!" Nolan ran out of the pool and wrapped her in a very wet hug. "Thanks, Mommy."

Erin held Nolan up against her and stared down at the top of his head to keep herself from watching Blair get out of the pool.

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“Nolan’s dry clothes are in the backpack over there by the table,” Blair said as she walked past. “I’m going to change too, so I’ll be back down in a few minutes.”

Erin nodded in acknowledgment, but didn’t look up until she heard the sliding door open and close.

“Hey, Pops!” she heard Blair say through the thin glass.

A few seconds later, the door opened again, and a man walked out who also closely resembled Blair. His hair was lighter, but his eyes looked just like hers. It was clear that Blair was the perfect combination of her two parents. Emphasis on perfect. Erin once again shook these thoughts from her head.

She smiled at the man walking toward her, but as had tended to be the case since having a child, he was focused on someone other than her.

He stopped right in front of Nolan and put out his hand for a high five. “Hey, little man! What’s your name?”

Instead of hitting his hand, Nolan burrowed deeper into Erin’s legs. Erin ran her hand through his hair and smiled at the man again, who was now looking back at her. “This is Nolan. Sorry. He’s a bit shy.”

Mr. Breckenridge smiled and took a step back. “That’s okay. I understand. Blair told me it took him a bit to warm up to her, but now they’re best friends.”

Nolan shook his head at that. “My mommy is my best friend.” He held up two

fingers. “Bear is number two.”

Mr. Breckenridge chuckled. “That’s understandable.” His eyes met Erin’s again, and he held out his hand. “It’s nice to meet you. I’m Blaine.”

Erin accepted his handshake. “It’s very nice to meet you, Blaine. I’m Erin.”

“I’m happy to finally meet you after hearing so much about you from Blair.”

“Sh-she talks about me?” Play it cool, Erin.

Blaine chuckled once again. “All the time. This is definitely her favorite job she’s ever worked.” He squinted his eyes as his smile grew. “It certainly helps that it’s the only job she’s ever had, but between you and me, I think it’d be her favorite either way.”

Of course. Blair talks about her job and Nolan. She doesn’t actually talk about Erin, a fact that shouldn’t have hurt quite as much as it did.

Blaine waved a hand at her. “Did anyone show you where the pool bathroom is?” When Erin shook her head, he began to walk back in the direction of the house but veered to the left before he came to the sliding glass door. He opened the door to a bathroom that was bigger than the master bathroom in her house, complete with a shower. “You can help Nolan get changed here.” He pointed to the opposite wall. “That door over there goes into the garage, which then leads into the kitchen, so feel free to go through there once you’re done.”

After getting Nolan dressed in dry clothes, they walked through the garage and into the kitchen as instructed. As soon as she opened the door, the most amazing scent hit her nose. Erin had no idea what Brandy was cooking, but given the smell, it had to be amazing. She was so distracted by the wonderful aroma of a home-cooked meal, she

almost didn't notice Brandy setting the table.

"It smells wonderful in here. Thank you so much for having us." Erin motioned toward the table. "Could I help you with that?"

Brandy scoffed. "Absolutely not. You're our guest. Plus, you just got done with a long day of work."

"I don't mind. I'm sure you had a long day as well." Erin remembered Blair telling her that her mom was a pharmacist, so she was sure her job was far from easy. The fact that Brandy could come home and still find enough energy to cook for her family was very impressive.

"Today was my short day, which is why I am the one making dinner tonight. Most nights it's either Blaine or takeout." Brandy stopped sorting the dishes to smile brightly at Erin. "There is one thing you can do for me."

"Anything."

Brandy nodded down the hall. "Go upstairs and get that daughter of mine moving. I swear we can never start a meal on time when she's home. I don't know what she does up there."

Erin swallowed hard. This is why you never agree to anything before knowing what you're agreeing to. "Of course." She put her hand on Nolan's shoulder. "Let's go, sweetie."

Nolan shook his head. "I stay down here with Bear's Mommy."

Traitor. "She's trying to get everything ready for dinner. I don't want you to get in the way."

“No. I help.”

Brandy smiled “That would be great. I could definitely use the help of a strong little boy.”

Nolan smiled and tried to make muscles. “I’m a strongbigboy.”

Brandy chuckled. “Yes, you are. Would you like to help me finish setting the table?”

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Nolan nodded enthusiastically and Erin had to stop herself from rolling her eyes. Any other time, this kid would be attached to her hip all night. Of course, this is the time he decides to stop being shy.

“Go left at the top of the stairs. Her room is all the way at the end of the hall. Tell her if she’s late for dinner, I’m giving her portion to the dog,” Brandy said with another chuckle.

Erin hadn’t seen a dog since she walked in, but that was the last thing she was worried about right now. She had to go up to Blair’s room alone. It shouldn’t be a big deal, and it wouldn’t be if she could keep her feelings in check, but the problem was she couldn’t. Just the thought of seeing Blair’s room had her heart beating a mile a minute. She swore she could hear her heart beating in her ears as she made her way up the stairs and down the hall. The sound was so loud, she could barely hear herself knock.

A few seconds later, Blair opened the door. She tilted her head and scrunched her eyebrows, clearly surprised to see Erin standing there. Her wet hair was now down, and she was wearing loose gray sweatpants and a tight black tank top, an outfit that was unfairly sexy.

Erin cleared her throat as she tried to think of what to say. “Your... umm... your mom told me to come get you for dinner.”

Blair smirked and walked out of the room, closing the door behind her before Erin could get a peek, which was probably for the best. “Good to go.”

Instead of moving, Erin stared into those deep eyes that always seemed to hypnotize her. She could have continued to stare at them all day if the feeling of something brushing along her leg hadn't scared her. "Holy shit," she said as she instinctively jumped in the air.

Blair laughed as she bent down and petted the very fluffy medium-sized tan dog. "This is Moon."

"Moon? That's a different name. I don't think I've ever met a dog named Moon before."

"He's a rescue. His shitty previous owner gave it to him. At first, I tried to convince my parents we should change it, but it's grown on me."

Erin bent down so she could pet the dog too. "How long have you had him?"

"Eight years. He just turned nine last month. This little guy and I have been through so much together. I got him at the end of middle school, and he was my best bud through all of high school and anytime I came home from college, of course."

Eight years ago, Blair hadn't even started high school yet? Meanwhile, Erin was working a 9 to 5 job and moving in with the woman she ended up marrying. Very different points in life. It was a good reminder of how wrong it was for Erin to fantasize about Blair.

"I didn't see him when I came in," Erin said. Anything to keep my mind off of other things.

"That's because he went to work with my dad today. He must've come up to my room as soon as they got home, because he didn't realize I was already here. He waits on my bed for me to get back each day."

Well, that's the sweetest thing ever. "What kind of dog is he? I've never seen one that looked like him before."

"He's a mix between a chow and a collie." Blair rubbed his stomach and leaned in to give him a kiss on the nose. "And he's the best boy in the whole wide world."

Seeing hot women with children and dogs was a weakness for Erin, so this definitely wasn't helping to dampen the feelings she shouldn't be having. "He's really sweet," she said, focusing her attention on the dog so she didn't have to look at Blair.

"He really is." Blair quickly jumped to her feet, scaring both Erin and Moon. "We should probably get downstairs, though. My mom doesn't like when people are late for dinner."

Blair was halfway down the hall, with Moon on her heels, before Erin could even comprehend what had happened. So strange, she thought before standing to her feet and following after them.

Blair's parents were exactly as Erin would have expected them to be, having a daughter like Blair, which was to say, they were the nicest people in the world. They spent the whole meal asking her and Nolan questions about themselves, most of which Nolan insisted on answering.

"So, what are you two doing for the Fourth of July this weekend?" Brandy asked when they were all finishing up with their dinners.

"My mom and my sister and her family are coming down to visit."

Erin was thankful for the reminder since she had almost forgotten it was coming up in just a few days. She didn't even know what she was doing with them yet, aside from

maybe finding a local parade.

“That’s nice. What are you doing with them?” Brandy asked, pouring salt in the wound.

“That’s a wonderful question,” Erin answered with a laugh.

“I know what you’re doing!” Blaine said matter-of-factly. “You’re coming here!”

“Here?” As in back to Blair’s house once again? No, she absolutely could not do that.

“Of course! We’re having our annual Fourth of July party. A bunch of friends and neighbors come over and stay late into the night. It’s a really great time, and you’re welcome to invite anyone else you’d like. The more, the merrier.”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Erin stared down at her empty plate. She wasn’t sure if Blair’s parents were being so nice because that was the kind of people they were, or if they pitied her for being a single mom. She absolutely hated the thought of anyone pitying her, especially this family. “I don’t want you to feel like you have to invite us just because we happen to be here. We’ll find something to do. It’s no big deal.”

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“No.” Blair’s voice was so loud and stern it startled Erin. But when she looked up, the softness of Blair’s expression was in complete opposition to the intensity of her tone. Blair cleared her throat, as if she also noticed how intense she sounded. “We want you all to come. Seriously. Please? It’ll be fun.”

Erin knew she should say no. The fact that she couldn’t force that small word through her lips was reason enough for why she should say it. But that wasn’t what she said. Before she even realized she was talking, she heard her own voice say, “Okay. Thank you. There’s nothing we’d rather do.”

This is about to get very interesting.

Chapter 11

Blair

Blair paced back and forth in her room as she tried to sort out all of her thoughts. Since it was Friday, she’d normally be watching Nolan, but it was the Fourth of July, which meant Erin didn’t work. It probably would have been a relief to have the day off if Erin wasn’t coming back to her house today. How the hell did she get herself into this mess? She was supposed to be separating her personal and professional life, not bringing them together like two long-lost twins separated at birth.

“Would you please stop pacing and tell me what the hell has you so rattled?” Marisol asked.

Blair stopped and took a deep breath. She needed to tell Marisol now, so she wasn’t

shocked when Erin showed up in a few hours. “So, someone is coming today.”

“Okay. Who is it?” Marisol’s eyes lit up. “Is it the girl you were hooking up with? I figured things had fizzled out since you didn’t say anything else about her, but was that because things were becoming more serious?” Marisol wiggled her eyebrows.

“Nope.” Blair shook her head dramatically. “It’s Nolan. And Erin...” Blair hesitated for a moment. “And Erin’s family.”

Marisol’s eyes went wide in amusement, and she let out a low whistle. “Meeting the fams, huh? This is getting serious.” She waved her hand in a go on motion. “I need details. How did this happen? When did you invite her?”

“It happened on Monday, but I didn’t invite her. My dad did.”

“Hold up!What?” Marisol jumped from the bed and made a mind-blown sign over her head. “She already met your parents? And your dad invited her to the Fourth of July party just like that?”

Blair nodded. “I brought Nolan here on Monday, because the public pool was closed. When Erin came to pick him up, my mom invited her for dinner. Then, my dad proceeded to invite her and her whole family to our Fourth of July party. I think they are overcompensating since they know she’s a single mom. You know how my parents are. They mean well but take things too far sometimes.”

Marisol sat back down. “I guess I’m more shocked that she actually said yes.”

Blair hesitantly put one hand in the air. “That’s kind of on me. I told her I really wanted her to come. Practically begged her to say yes.”

Marisol laughed. “Of course you did.”

Blair sat down next to Marisol and petted Moon, who had followed her onto the bed and laid down right beside her. “It’s not like that. I got this strange feeling that she realized my parents had ulterior motives. Well-meaning motives, but still. The last thing I wanted was for her to feel like people were taking pity on her. I know she wouldn’t want that.”

“Okay. That actually makes sense. But why did you wait until today to tell me? We’ve texted every day this week and even hung out on Wednesday night. You didn’t say anything.”

“That’s because I was putting off hearing what I know you’re going to say next.”

“And what would that be? That this totally isn’t a crush anymore?”

Blair cringed. “Yep. That would be it.”

“Luckily, you didn’t need me to say it since you clearly already realized that.”

“I know.” Blair lay back on the bed and Moon moved with her, pushing against her side like a needy child. “What the hell am I supposed to do? I can’t have a crush on the mom of the kid I babysit for and clearly my original plan to distance myself isn’t working. So, what now?”

Marisol lay down beside her and took her hand. “I realize I’ve been teasing you about this all summer, but it’s really no big deal. It’s a crush. I know it’s all new to you since you never let yourself have them for whatever reason, but a crush doesn’t have to be the end of the world. Have fun with it. Picture her naked. When you masturbate, fantasize about her having her wicked way with you. After a while, you’ll get over it and you’ll move on to your next victim, who just might happen to be someone you actually have a chance with.” Marisol elbowed Blair playfully in the side.

Blair knew Marisol was teasing her, and it's not like she was wrong. Of course she didn't have a chance with Erin. Still, hearing the words spoken out loud definitely stung. She wanted all of those moments they shared to be more than just wishful thinking. She wanted to believe she wasn't just imagining the way Erin sometimes looked at her.

"So, just have fun with it, huh?" Blair asked, trying to keep her voice as level as possible to avoid showing Marisol just how deep this crush was.

"Exactly. Since you're the queen of fun, I'm sure you'll have no problem with that."

Maybe Marisol was right. Why couldn't Blair just have fun with this? Her boss was hot and fun, and Blair got to spend time with her outside of "work." What more could she ask for from her first job? Blair wasn't naive enough to think there was any chance they could ride off into the sunset together, so why not enjoy whatever ride they were on right now? Plus, Marisol wasn't wrong. This was the type of thing wet dreams were made of. If she wasn't going to get the girl (which she obviously wasn't), she might as well get a few orgasms out of the deal.

"You know what? You're right."

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“Of course I’m right. I’m always right.” Marisol rolled onto her side. “Now we just need to figure out what you’re wearing today.”

After much discussion, Blair and Marisol settled on a skimpy red bikini top and rainbow board shorts. Any questions Blair had about whether that was the right choice flew out the window when Erin arrived with her family.

As soon as Blair opened the door, Erin’s jaw dropped and there was no question what it was in response to. That was made obvious by the fact that she didn’t take her eyes off of Blair from the moment they walked through the door. Blair couldn’t help but smile as Erin’s eyes subtly moved up her body, slowing down when they scanned past her bikini. To anyone not paying close attention, it would have gone unnoticed, but Blair was very focused on Erin. Her blonde hair was in a messy bun on top of her head, right behind a pair of large sunglasses that she should have kept on if she wanted to hide her wandering eyes.

When those eyes met Blair’s, it felt like all of the air was sucked from the room. Blair could hardly breathe as all of the noise surrounding them faded away and time seemed to stop. She wanted to spend the whole day lost in Erin’s eyes, but she knew if she didn’t look away soon, someone might notice. As much as Erin clearly liked what she saw, Blair was sure the last thing she wanted was for anyone to think she had a crush on the young babysitter. Because she obviously didn’t. How could she? Erin was mature and sweet and a fucking amazing mom. She would never have time for someone like Blair, even if she did find her aesthetically pleasing.

She forced her eyes away and focused on the older woman standing next to Erin. She stuck a hand out toward her. “Hi. I’m Blair. You must be Erin’s sister.”

The woman’s face lit up just like Blair hoped it would. “Aren’t you a charmer?” she asked with a laugh. “I am obviously the mom.” She put her hand on Nolan’s head. “Or the grandma, depending on who you’re talking to.”

“Well, Mrs. Corcoran, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“It’s actually Mrs. Morrison, but it’s also fine if you call me Martha. Either one works for me.”

Of course. Erin probably changed her name when she got married. Why didn’t Blair think of that? Probably because I don’t want to think about her being with anyone else, even though she’s not actually with me.

“Sorry. Very nice to meet you, Mrs. Morrison.” Blair still felt like she was too young to get away with calling adults by their first names, even if they told her it was okay. She turned to the next person in line, who was another woman who looked very similar to both Erin and her mom. “And you must actually be the sister.”

“That I am. My name is April.”

After shaking hands, April introduced Blair to her husband, Wesley, and their kids, Sydney (who was fourteen), and Tanner (who was twelve).

After introductions were done, Nolan offered (or more so demanded) to show Erin’s family the pool, leaving Erin and Blair behind.

“So, I take it you still have your ex’s name?” Blair asked, internally reprimanding herself as soon as the question was out. That’s none of your business.

“No, actually. My mom switched back to her maiden name after my dad left us, but she kept our last names the same because she thought it would be too confusing for us if she changed them.” Erin clenched her jaw. “I really wish she had though. I hate sharing anything with that man.”

“I’m really sorry.” Blair didn’t actually know anything about Erin’s family. Before today, she didn’t even know their names, which made sense since she and Erin never really had personal conversations. The fact that Erin’s dad clearly left her and then her ex-wife did the same to Nolan, broke her heart.

Erin looked out into the distance as if she was trying to avoid looking at Blair. “It’s okay. I’m not even sure why I said that out loud. I don’t need to bore you with all of my past traumas.”

Before she could overthink it, Blair reached out and squeezed Erin’s hand. “You could never bore me.”

Her words caused Erin to turn her head, and when those eyes met Blair's, she was transported right back to that moment they were having when Erin first walked in. Blair swallowed hard as she watched Erin bite her bottom lip and bring her eyes to Blair’s lips, almost as if she was thinking about kissing them as much as Blair thought about kissing hers.

Unfortunately, that wasn’t the case, and as much fun as it was to imagine, there was a time and place to do it and standing by the front door at her parents’ house was not it. “Well, for what it’s worth, I think someone would have to be an idiot to leave you.”

“Yet people seem to have no trouble doing it,” Erin said with a strained laugh. She blinked her eyes in what looked like an effort to hold back tears.

Blair nodded toward the door. “Do you want to go for a walk?”

Erin shook her head. “You don’t need to do that. I’ll be fine, I promise.”

“I know I don’t need to. I want to.” She squeezed Erin’s arm, but this time, more playfully. “Come on. I’m sure Nolan is going to keep your family occupied for at least a few minutes giving his grand tour, so what do you say?”

Erin smiled, and for the first time in the past few minutes, it was a sincere smile that actually reached her eyes. “Okay, let’s go.”

Blair led her out the front door and onto the sidewalk that ran in a circle around her neighborhood. “Talk to me,” she said when she realized Erin wasn’t going to say anything without a little prompting.

“I’m seriously fine. I’m sorry. I don’t know why I was starting to get emotional. I think I’m getting my period or something.” Erin laughed and shook her head. “Not that you needed to know that.”

“Hey, we’re both women. It’s nothing I haven’t dealt with myself. You don’t need to apologize, though. I’m the one who should be apologizing. I shouldn’t have brought up your last name.”

Erin shrugged. “I’m sure it would’ve come up eventually. My dad left when I was two, which is really ironic since that’s the same age Nolan was when his other mom left. I can’t remember my dad, so all I know about him are the things I’ve heard. In reality, his leaving should be much harder on April since he left when she was ten, but it always felt like he left because of me. He was with my mom for seven years before my sister was born and then stayed around for ten years of her life, but couldn’t make it more than two years with me.”

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This was a lot for Blair to take in, and she wasn't sure what to say. She knew nothing she could say would make things better, but she wanted to say something. "Well, since I know he didn't actually leave because of you, do you know why he did?"

Erin gritted her teeth as she stared straight ahead. "He was having an affair. It apparently started right after I was born, and he left when his other woman got pregnant. He essentially exchanged his old family for a newer model. I only know that because I overheard my mom talking about it with one of her friends when she didn't think I was around. He paid child support and would send a birthday card to me every year. He never wrote anything in it. Just signed Dad and threw in a hundred-dollar bill, like that somehow made up for him not being in my life. That's why I told Bianca, my ex, that I didn't want anything from her when she left, not even child support. If she doesn't want to be part of Nolan's life, I want her completely out of it in every way."

Blair took a breath and blew it out. This was some deep shit, and nothing she said in response would make it better, but she also didn't want to make it worse. She stopped walking and turned to look at Erin. "I wish I knew what to say to all of that, but I know I can't make it better or change the effect it has on you. What I can tell you is even though I've only known you a month, I couldn't imagine ever walking away from you." Shit. That might've been a bit much. "I mean, I know I'm just the babysitter and that doesn't hold much weight, but I think you're pretty awesome."

Erin stared at Blair for a long time, her mouth opening and closing multiple times as if she couldn't think of what to say in response. The fourth time she snapped it shut, she squeezed her eyes closed as well. A few seconds later, tears started to stream down her face.

“Shit.” Unsure what to do, Blair wrapped Erin in an awkward loose hug and patted her on the back as if she was Nolan. “I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Much to her surprise, Erin held her tight and cried onto her shoulder.

“Shh, it’s okay,” Blair said softly. “Let it out. Everything is okay. I’m here. I’ve got you.”

Blair wasn’t sure how much time passed, but eventually, Erin pulled away and promptly wiped her eyes on her shirt as if she thought that would erase the past few minutes. “I’m so sorry about that. I think I’ve held it in for so long that it all just came flooding out at once. I try to be so strong for Nolan, and because of that, I haven’t really given myself a chance to feel. I shouldn’t have put that all on you though. It’s not fair.”

Blair reached out her hand and rubbed Erin’s arm. “Hey, I asked, didn’t I? I’m just sorry if I said something wrong.”

Erin shook her head. “You didn’t. It was the opposite, actually. I can’t remember the last time someone said something so sweet to me.”

Something so sweet? All Blair had done was tell her the truth. “If that’s truly the case, then I’m sorry more people in your life aren’t telling you how amazing you are. You’re like superwoman, and you deserve to be reminded of that every day.”

Erin chuckled as a few more tears ran down her cheeks. “God, I’m sorry I’m such a mess. Today is supposed to be a celebration, and here I am unloading all of my baggage on you from the past thirty-two years.”

Blair waved a hand at her. “Don’t sweat it. What are we even celebrating? In case you missed it, America kind of sucks right now. I think crying today is far more

logical than running around shouting 'Merica!"

Erin laughed again. "You're not wrong."

Blair smirked. "I never am."

If it were up to Blair, they would have spent the whole day out there, away from everyone else. Just the two of them. She didn't want a superficial relationship with Erin. Now that she had gotten a peek into her past, she wanted to know more. She wanted to know what made her laugh and exactly how she looked when she did. She wanted to know what made her the happiest, so she could give it to her. She wanted to know her, all of the best and the worst parts.

Unfortunately, less than a minute later, Erin pointed back toward the house. "We should probably get back to the party before my family realizes I'm missing and thinks I bailed on them."

Blair put her hands in her pockets and rocked back and forth on the heels of her feet. She wanted to think of any excuse to keep Erin out here with her, even if that was completely selfish. "I'm sure they're okay. My mom probably swept them up in some long-winded conversation about who knows what."

Erin stared back at the house as if she was watching for someone. "I don't want Nolan to get upset."

That was all Blair needed to hear. As much as she wanted to be selfish and try to take advantage of finally having alone time with Erin, she knew someone else needed Erin more, and she would never do anything to hurt the little boy who had quickly become her favorite person in the world.

Chapter 12

Erin

“Mommy!” Nolan yelled as soon as they walked through the sliding glass doors to the pool area. He hopped out of the pool where he had been playing with his cousin and wrapped Erin in a cold, wet hug.

Her emotions were still going haywire from earlier, so she had to work hard not to cry just from his hug. What the hell is wrong with me? Erin couldn’t believe she had word vomited all over Blair just a few minutes ago. Not only that, but she had actually cried on her shoulder. Correction—sobbed. It crossed so many lines, Erin didn’t want to think about it. The problem was, she couldn’t stop thinking about it. Blair had been so perfect and said all the right things. Erin wondered how much of what Blair had said was true.

I couldn’t imagine ever walking away from you. What did she mean by that? Why did she say it? Did she just want to make Erin feel better or did she actually feel that way? It couldn’t really be how she felt, right? She was Nolan’s babysitter. She barely knew Erin, aside from everything she had let slip out today. But was Blair just a babysitter? Because ever since those words slipped out of her mouth, Erin wanted to correct her and tell her that she was so much more than that. But if she was more than that, what was she? Erin shook all of this from her mind. She had too many questions, many of which would, and could, never be answered.

Nolan tugged on her hand. “Mommy! Mommy! Do you want to go in the pool?”

That’s the last thing I want to do. “Do you want me to?”

Nolan shrugged. “I don’t care. Bear does better throws.”

“Then it sounds like I better get in with you, huh?” Blair said, before flashing Erin a wide grin that made her heart race in ways it shouldn’t. “Is that okay, Mommy?”

“Go for it. I’d rather stay dry anyway.”

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“Perfect.” Blair picked up a giggling Nolan and started to run toward the pool. “I hope you’re ready for this.”

She jumped in with him and when they popped out of the water, they were both laughing together. It was a breathtaking sight that Erin couldn’t take her eyes off of.

“You found yourself a pretty good babysitter there.”

Erin looked beside her to find her sister standing there. How long had she been there?
“Yeah. She’s wonderful. Nolan loves her.”

“Oh yeah?” April gave her a mischievous grin. “I don’t think he’s the only one.”

Erin’s mouth immediately went dry, and she struggled to form any words. Her ears rang as what her sister said settled in. Was she trying to say that Erin loved Blair? That was ridiculous. Erin had a very strong appreciation for Blair and sometimes had thoughts she needed to push off to the side, but that didn’t actually mean anything.
“Wh-what are you talking about?”

April held both hands in the air. “I’m just saying. I haven’t seen you look at anyone like that since Bianca.”

Just the mention of that name broke any spell Erin was under. “You mean the woman who tore my whole world apart?” Erin scoffed. “Yeah, I’d rather not have another one of those in my life.”

“You should invite her to go on vacation with us,” April said as if she had ignored

everything out of Erin's mouth. "Blair. Not Bianca, obviously. Bianca is a bitch."

"Invite her to the beach? Why the hell would I do that?" And why does that idea sound so tempting?

"To help with Nolan, of course."

The sarcasm in her sister's voice wasn't lost on Erin. "I don't need help with Nolan. Especially not with you and Sydney there."

"Well, Sydney and I could watch him while you and Miss Babysitter go do something else."

Something else. Erin's body heated up at the implications of those words. Stop it! She turned to face her sister more fully. "Listen, I know you have good intentions, but just drop it. Nothing's happening. She's Nolan's babysitter and she's twenty-two-years-old. For all I know, I'm closer in age to her mom than her."

"Ah." Her sister smirked and Erin knew whatever came out of her mouth next was going to be something she didn't want to hear. "So, you've thought about this, huh?"

"What?" Erin shook her head more than was necessary. "Of course not."

"Well, for what it's worth, I already like her more than Bianca." And just like that, her sister walked away as though her words hadn't just blown Erin's mind.

She didn't have time to dwell on them though, as the glass door loudly opened behind her and a boisterous male voice shouted over all of the chatter of the guests. "I'm here! The party can start."

Erin turned around to find a young man, who appeared to be in his late teens, with

shaggy blonde hair and striking blue eyes, holding up a case of beer.

Brandy, who seemed to come out of nowhere, grabbed the case of beer out of the boy's hands. "Give me that. Why do you even have it?"

The teen shrugged. "Dad asked me to carry it out. For the adults, of course. Us under-twenty-oners totally won't be drinking it after all of the adults are too drunk to notice."

"Shut up, asshole," a very familiar voice said from right behind Erin's back.

A wet hand landed on her shoulder, and when Erin turned to look at Blair, she was pointing toward the boy. "Erin, this is my obnoxious, but sometimes lovable, brother, Blake."

Blake. Duh. Erin should have realized that from all of the pictures hanging around their house. The problem was his hair was much longer than it was in any of those pictures. He looked more like he belonged in California, not suburban Pennsylvania.

"It's very nice to meet you, Blake. I'm Erin."

Blake's smile grew with her introduction. "Oh, I know. My sister talks about you all the time."

"Remember what I said about shutting up?" Blair asked, but there wasn't quite as much of a joking tone to her voice this time. She pointed to the girl standing next to Blake, who Erin hadn't noticed. "This is the more important person to meet. My brother's amazing girlfriend, who is way too good for him, Trinity."

Trinity had red hair and freckles all over her face, which immediately developed a blush from Blair's introduction. She held her hand out toward Erin. "It's very nice to meet you. Blair tells us your son is the cutest kid in the world."

“Aw, thank you. He kind of has to be. Otherwise, I’d probably leave him outside with a sign that says ‘Free to a good home.’”Erin added a wink to make sure everyone who could hear her realized she was kidding.

Blake clapped his hands together. “Well, ladies, I’d love to stick around and chat, but as the man, I need to do some grilling.”

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“Ew. Please stop with that god-awful cis white male shit,” Blair said, sounding truly disgusted. “Also, don’t you dare go near that grill. Last year, you burned all of the hot dogs and hamburgers.”

“You’re right.” Blake bowed toward Blair. “It’s all yours, Grillmaster.”

Blair lifted her eyebrows at Erin and pointed back toward the grill. “Duty calls.”

Erin tried to keep her eyes off of Blair while she grilled, but it was nearly impossible, especially when she finished her first round of burgers and made conversation with every member of Erin’s family as she handed them plates of food. She looked away as Blair talked to her sister, to avoid April making a comment about her lingering gaze.

As soon as Blair was back at the grill, Erin couldn’t stop her eyes from shooting over there. Her sister might be wrong about the extent of Erin’s feelings for Blair, but Erin wasn’t blind. Blair was hot. Erin couldn’t deny that.

As if Blair could feel Erin’s eyes on her, she looked up from the grill and smiled over at her, winking before focusing her attention back on the burgers and hot dogs in front of her. Erin inadvertently licked her lips as she continued to watch.

God. Does it get any hotter than a sexy girl in board shorts and a bikini working the grill like it’s her job?

Just as she had that thought, Nolan walked up to Blair and tapped on her leg. The two talked for a minute before Blair reached down and lifted Nolan with one arm, resting

him against her hip as she flipped the burgers with her other hand.

Okay. I stand corrected. It does get hotter than that.

After a few minutes, Blair called her dad over and handed him the spatula. When Erin noticed she and Nolan were headed in her direction, she turned away so it didn't look like she had been staring.

"Mommy! Bear has a doggie!"

Erin turned back around at the sound of Nolan's voice. "I know. I met him the other day."

Nolan scrunched his nose at Blair. "Why didn't I met him?"

"He was tired from going to work with my dad, so he laid on the couch while we ate dinner and was too much of a lazy ass to get up when you were leaving. But you're going to meet him now, remember?"

Nolan nodded excitedly. "I'm going to met Moon!"

"Meet, buddy. You're going tomeethim," Erin said with a laugh.

"I know!" Nolan answered, clearly unaware that she was correcting him. "Wanna come?" Blair asked her.

"Sure." Erin looked around. "Where is he?"

"He's up in my room."

Shit. Going to Blair's room probably wasn't the best idea. At least the last time she

went up there, Blair was coming out, so it didn't feel quite so intimate. "Maybe you two should just go. I already met him."

Nolan reached his arms out toward her. "No, Mommy, I want you to come."

Erin took Nolan from Blair's arms and kissed his forehead. "Then it looks like I'm coming."

How intimate can it really be with a toddler and a dog there?

After only a few minutes, Nolan was completely smitten with Moon, and if all of his kisses were anything to go by, Moon was smitten with him too.

"Does Moon swim?" Nolan asked Blair as he rubbed his belly.

"He does. He loves swimming."

Nolan's eyes lit up and he jumped from the bed, causing Moon to sit up to check what was happening. "I go swimming with him now!"

Blair ruffled Nolan's hair. "I don't think he'll go down right now, buddy. Moon normally hides out when there are this many people at the house. That's why he's up in my room."

"Will he get in trouble if he goes down?"

Blair shook her head. "Not at all. My parents, brother, and I have all tried to get him to go down when there are people here, but he refuses. He always drags his feet and runs back to my room."

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“I can do it!” Nolan waved his hand at Moon. “Come, doggie!”

Going against everything Blair had just said, Moon jumped from the bed and followed Nolan to the door. When Erin stood to walk after them, Nolan stopped and held a hand up at her. “Not you. He wants me. I’m his best friend.”

Erin put her hand on her chest and feigned offense. “Can I come with you?”

Nolan shook his head. “Nope. You scare him.” He pointed at Blair. “You don’t come either.”

“Ouch.” Now Blair put her hand over her chest as well.

They both watched as Nolan left the room with Moon right behind him. Blair walked to the doorway and peeked her head around the side (probably to make sure Nolan didn’t notice).

“He got him down the steps,” she said after a moment. “Better than the rest of us have ever done.” She walked back into the room and sat down on the bed. “How long do you think we have to wait before we’re allowed to go downstairs?”

Erin laughed and sat down next to her. “We’re allowed to go down whenever, because we’re adults and he’s a kid. He can’t tell us what to do.” Says the woman who gets bossed around by this kid daily.

“You’re an adult. I’m a semi-functioning twenty-two-year-old. Plus, I don’t want to get yelled at.”

Erin ignored the comment about her age, because she didn't want to think about that right now. "Are you telling me you're scared of a three-year-old?"

"Hell yeah. That kid can get very sassy."

"Oh, I know. He totally gets that from his aunt, not me."

"Sure," Blair said sarcastically. After a moment, her face became more serious. "Your family is awesome by the way."

"They really are. Well, when they're not trying to convince me to move back home, they are." Or trying to talk to me about the feelings I may or may not have for a certain babysitter.

Blair studied Erin's face for a long time as though she were trying to find something there. "And where would home be?"

"About three hours from here in Middle-of-Nowhere Pennsylvania."

"Yikes. I can see why you wouldn't want to go back there."

"Right?" Erin slapped the bed, because it felt so good to hear someone agree with her for once. "I have no interest in moving back to a town that still thinks people who use the bathroom that aligns with their gender are sexual predators."

"I agree. I couldn't imagine. If I lived in a town like that, I don't know if I would've ever come out."

"That's probably why it took me until my last year in college to do it."

Blair's eyes went wide. "Oh, wow. You should probably go back and experience it as

an out-and-proud lesbian. Being out in college was ah-mazing.” She lay back on the bed and stared up at the ceiling wistfully. “Gay girls. Straight girls. Questioning girls. They’re all into it.”

Erin swallowed hard. “Yeah, I wouldn’t know anything about that. My ex was also my only.”

“Holy shit.” Blair shot back up into a sitting position. “Even since?”

Erin laughed. It was kind of adorable that Blair would think she actually found time to date over the past year. “Definitely not. My whole life is work and Nolan. That’s why my family wants me to move home so badly—to give me the extra help.”

Blair put her hand on Erin’s knee and squeezed, a simple touch that Erin felt throughout her whole body. “Well, now you have me. No need for small-minded hometowns.”

But how long do I have you? Erin had only hired Blair for the summer, and she couldn’t keep Nolan out of daycare in the fall (especially since she already enrolled him), but she hated the thought of Blair not being there when she got home from work.

Erin laid her hand on top of Blair’s. “Thank you. For everything.” There was more she wanted to say, but those were words she needed to keep locked up inside.

Chapter 13

Blair

Blair grew impatient as she stared at the clock, waiting for Erin to get home from work. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to spend time with Nolan, but she missed Erin. It

had been a little after a week since the Fourth of July party, and even though she saw Erin almost every day, it was mostly in passing. She had been so spoiled having her for the whole day on the Fourth of July that she could hardly stand the little bit of interaction she'd had with her since.

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Even Erin joining her and Nolan for lunch the past Friday hadn't been enough to scratch the itch she had for more time together.

"Bear! Your phone is singing."

Blair looked down at the phone she held in her hand, but somehow hadn't heard, and quickly picked up when she saw it was Erin calling. "Hey! What's up?" she asked smoothly, to keep from making it obvious she was literally just thinking about her.

"Hey! I really hate to do this, but a big project came up, and I'm stuck at work. Is there any chance you could stay late? It shouldn't be more than an hour. This usually only happens once or twice a year, so it really shouldn't happen again anytime soon." Even though it was clear Erin was stressed, Blair couldn't help but smile just from hearing her voice.

"Hey, take a breath. It's fine. I don't mind at all. I'm yours for as long as you need me."

"Thank you, thank you, thank you. I'm going to pick up food on the way home. Can I get you something?"

"Food sounds great." It was only partially a lie on Blair's part. Even though she was always down to eat, the real reason she said yes was because that meant more time with Erin. There was no way she was going to turn that down.

"Perfect! I'll text you once I know what I'm getting. Any preference?"

“Nope. Whatever you pick will be great.”

“Awesome. See you in a bit. Thanks again.”

“Was that my Mommy?” Nolan asked as soon as Blair hung up the phone.

“It was.”

“What she say?”

Blair knelt down in front of him. Even though she was currently brimming with excitement, she figured he probably wouldn’t feel the same way. “She’s going to be a little late, so you’re stuck with me longer.”

Nolan’s eyes went wide. For a moment, Blair thought he might cry, but instead, he threw his hands in the air and started to dance. “Yay! More time with Bear! More time with Bear!”

Blair’s heart felt like it might explode as she watched her favorite little boy dance around because he got to spend more time with her. Blair played tennis when she was in high school, but no victory was as sweet as this moment right here.

Blair danced with him and chanted, “More time with Nolan! More time with Nolan!” As the two of them laughed together, Blair couldn’t remember the last time she felt so happy.

About an hour later, Erin texted to ask if pizza would be okay, and both Blair and Nolan agreed it sounded amazing. Not too long after, Erin texted again to tell Blair she had picked up the pizza and would be home in about ten minutes.

Blair helped Nolan get his shoes on, and the two of them waited on the front porch

for Erin. As soon as Erin's car pulled into the neighborhood, Nolan began to jump up and down. "I see Mommy's car! I see Mommy's car!" he shouted as she drove down the street and pulled into the driveway.

As soon as she opened her car door, Nolan ran to her and wrapped her in a tight hug. "Mommy! Did you get us pizza?"

Erin laughed as he pulled away from her and started looking around as if he was searching for the food. "I get it. I'm not actually important when there's pizza."

"Ilovezpizza." Nolan rubbed his stomach dramatically. "Bear's having pizza too."

Blair stood from the porch and walked toward them. "That's right, buddy. But why don't you let your Mommy go get changed into something more comfortable." She let her eyes drift to Erin and tried not to do a double take at the pantsuit she was wearing. "I'll never get enough of this look." "I can grab the pizza and get everything set up. Just go take care of yourself."

"Are you sure? You've already done so much."

"Of course. I'd be happy to."

The tired, but sincere, smile on Erin's face was all Blair needed to see. She would do absolutely anything to make this woman smile like that.

After a few minutes, the kitchen table was set with a slice of pizza on each person's plate, Nolan's cut into small triangles at his request, so each bite could look like a "mini pizza."

As much as Blair loved Erin's work outfits, when she came back downstairs in sweatpants and an oversized t-shirt, Blair couldn't keep her jaw from going slack. It's

unfair for any woman to look that good in sweats that don't show off any of her curves.

“Like what you see?” Erin asked, sending Blair’s mind into a tailspin.

She noticed? Is she flirting? She didn’t sound mad, so she must be, right? “Wh-what?”

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Erin pointed to the table. “The pizza. You said you’ve never had it from this restaurant before. It looks amazing, doesn’t it?”

“Oh, yeah. The pizza. Of course.” Blair accidentally ran her eyes back across Erin’s body. “It looks good enough to eat.” Shit. Please let her think I’m talking about the pizza.

Erin laughed. “I’d sure hope so. I don’t know about you, but I definitely plan on eating it.” She licked her lips and smacked them together.

If this were any other woman, Blair would assume she was being a tease, but she could tell Erin had absolutely no idea what the hell she was doing to her. A hot woman who doesn’t even realize she’s hot... This scene alone is going to keep my fingers busy for hours tonight.

Blair clapped her hands together loudly in an effort to break her own trance. “Yes. Me too. Let’s eat.”

Once they sat down at the table, Erin asked about their day and Blair’s body chemistry returned to normal (at least as normal as it could be around Erin).

Nolan’s eyes lit up at the question, and Blair had a feeling she knew the first thing he would tell his mom. “Bear took me on her bike today!”

“On her bike? What do you mean, sweetie?”

“She has a bike with a big seat on the back.” Nolan spread his arms apart as if he was

demonstrating how big the seat was. “I sat in it, and she rode me all around.”

“He was wearing a helmet,” Blair added.

Erin gave Blair a look that could only be described as amused. “You have a bike with a child’s seat on it?”

“She does!” Nolan said before Blair could get a word out. “It’s a special seat for me.”

“I found it sitting around in my parents’ garage, so I tossed it on real quick,” Blair said with a shake of her hand.

She didn’t make lying a habit, but she didn’t want to tell Erin she went out and bought it just so she could take him for a ride. If Erin knew the truth, she would think Blair was completely pathetic or she’d offer to pay her back for it. Blair did not want either of those things.

“That’s amazing. I’ve been meaning to get one of those for so long, but I never did.”

Blair pointed in the direction of the garage. “I put my bike in the garage when we got back, because I didn’t want to deal with squeezing it back into my car while I was also watching Nolan. If you’re okay with it taking up extra space, I can just leave it here. That way we can both use it with him.”

Erin immediately shook her head at Blair’s offer. “It’s your bike. What if you decide you want to ride it and it’s over here so you can’t? I can get my own. Seriously.”

Blair knew for a fact the best bike seats weren’t cheap, and it wasn’t that she didn’t think Erin could afford it, but Erin had better things to spend her hard-earned money on. There was no reason for her to get another one when Blair had no use for that one, except with Nolan. Plus, Blair wasn’t exactly a cycling enthusiast.

She laughed as she thought about how long it had been since she last rode her bike before today. “Erin, I had to clean cobwebs off of my bike to bring it here today. Trust me when I tell you that it won’t be missed.”

Erin laughed along with her. “So, what you’re saying is that between the two of us it will get ridden about three more times this summer?”

“If we’re lucky.”

“Okay, but only if you’re sure.”

Blair was sure of anything that made Erin smile at her the way she was smiling in that moment. “I’m positive.”

“Yay! More bike rides!” Nolan shouted, which was probably for the best since Blair could feel herself slipping away into Erin’s vortex.

The rest of the dinner conversation was mostly led by Nolan. As he told his mom (for the fifth time) about what animals they saw on their bike ride, Blair cleared the dishes from the table and put the leftover pizza in the refrigerator.

“Okay, little man, it’s time to say goodbye to Blair so you can go to bed.” Erin picked Nolan up and rested him against her hip, a long yawn escaping his mouth as he leaned against her.

“But I don’t want Bear to go.”

The feeling is mutual, Blair thought to herself.

“I know, sweetie, but Bear has been here with you all day, and she’ll be back tomorrow. You have to let her go home and be with her own family.”

Nolan didn't seem satisfied with his mom's answer, and when he looked at Blair with wide eyes and lips dipped down into a frown, it was clear he wasn't. "But I just want Bear to put me to bed."

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Had Blair's heart just been cracked open and filled with rainbows and butterflies? That's exactly what it felt like. She never knew such a tiny little human could make her world so much brighter, but Nolan did it every single day. Blair didn't know who had her in knots more—Nolan or his mom.

"I would love to." Blair looked over at Erin for permission. "That is, if it's okay with your mom. I'm sure you guys have a routine, and I don't want to mess with that."

That beautiful blossoming smile was back on Erin's face once again. Are you sure? she mouthed at Blair. When Blair nodded, she addressed Nolan. "That's fine with me."

After they both helped Nolan get into his pajamas, he insisted that Erin leave so Blair could tuck him in and read a book to him. Once he was all tucked in and had picked out a book, he patted the spot next to him on the small bed. "Snuggle me."

Blair did as he asked and snuggled up close to him as she read him a book about a giraffe that couldn't dance.

When the book ended, Nolan pushed his body even tighter up against Blair's, clearly not ready for her to leave yet.

Fine by me. Blair was learning she loved the feeling of being needed like this.

"I love giraffes," Nolan said after letting out a long yawn.

"Me too." It wasn't a lie. They were actually one of Blair's favorite animals. She

found them to be gorgeous creatures. “I’ve always wanted to meet one in person.”

“You never meet a giraffe?” Nolan asked, sounding genuinely shocked. “Not even at the zoo?”

Blair shook her head. “I’ve actually never been to the zoo.” She felt pathetic saying it out loud, so she was thankful Erin wasn’t in the room with them.

“Never?”

“Nope.” Blair’s parents were always so busy with work when she was growing up that they didn’t have time for mundane things such as the zoo. They saved their time off for her and Blake’s activities and to go on long, elaborate vacations every summer. It wasn’t that she wasn’t thankful for those things, but it felt like she had missed out on normal childhood experiences, such as the zoo.

“Don’t worry, Bear, I take you there sometime.” Nolan grabbed her hand and kissed her knuckles as if he understood exactly what she needed at that moment.

Sometimes, this kid couldn’t figure out how to step into a pair of pants, but he could read her like a book. As pathetic as it might be, she had to force herself to hold back tears, because it was so fucking sweet that she could hardly handle it.

As if he hadn’t just restored Blair’s entire faith in humanity with one sentence, he rolled onto his side and immediately began to snore.

Blair slowly and carefully extracted herself from the bed. Her body jolted in surprise when she pushed open the door and found someone standing on the other side. She put her hand on her chest to try to calm her beating heart. “Shit, Erin. I didn’t know you were standing there.”

Even though the hallway was dark, Blair could see the slightest hint of red on Erin's cheeks. "Sorry. It was so adorable, I couldn't get myself to walk away."

"Did you, um, hear everything?"

"I did." Erin looked toward the ground. "You've really never been to the zoo?"

Blair shrugged. She was pretty sure her own face was turning red now. "Pretty pathetic, right? I've been to the top of the Eiffel Tower, but never to the zoo."

"As someone who will most likely never even see the Eiffel Tower, I don't find it pathetic at all. Who needs a zoo when you have Paris, right?"

"Honestly?" Blair pointed a finger at her own chest. "I wasn't lying when I told Nolan I've always wanted to go. There was one about an hour from where I went to college, and last year I asked my friends if they wanted to go. They must have thought I was joking, because they laughed hysterically. I guess a newly twenty-one-year-old being excited about going to see animals isn't exactly cool."

"Well, this might not mean much to you coming from me, but I think you're super cool."

Blair let her eyes meet Erin's for the first time since coming out of Nolan's room, and the intensity in them nearly knocked her over. She wasn't imagining it. There was something between them, and the walls surrounding the two of them were slowly closing in on her.

Blair's heartbeat picked up again as she let her eyes drift to Erin's lips. They were full and wet as if she had just licked them, and all Blair could think about was what they would taste like on hers. When she caught Erin's eyes quickly sneaking a peek at her lips as well, she couldn't take it anymore. She let her body have control and

didn't stop herself as she moved into Erin's space. The closer she got, the heavier Erin's breathing became and the more erratic Blair's heart beat.

This is happening. This is actually happening. It's not just my imagination. We're going to kiss.

"Mommy!" Nolan's voice caused the two of them to jump apart. "Don't stand outside my room."

"Sorry, bud," Erin said, the crack to her voice telling Blair that the last few seconds weren't just some elaborate dream. "Sleep tight."

Erin nodded toward the steps and Blair felt as if she was in a daze as she walked down and over to the front door. "So," she said as she rocked back and forth on the balls of her feet.

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“So.” Erin cleared her throat. “Thank you so much for doing that for him. I’m sure he’ll talk about it for days.”

“Yeah.” The moment from earlier was gone. If something was actually going to happen between them, that wasn’t the case anymore. Blair awkwardly pointed at the door. “I guess I better go.”

She grabbed her shoes and walked out before Erin could say anything else. She tossed and turned throughout the night, wondering if the next day would be awkward, given what almost happened between them. Blair thought about calling Erin and saying she was sick, but she didn’t want to lie. Plus, she knew calling out would put Erin in a horrible position for work, and Blair couldn’t do that to her.

Blair wanted a moment to gather her thoughts before she knocked on the door the next day, but that wasn’t going to happen. As soon as she parked out front and got out of her car, Nolan ran out of the house. He was holding something in his hands that he was clearly excited about, because he was waving it around.

“Bear! Bear! We going to the zoo!”

The zoo? What was he talking about? When he got close, she saw it was tickets that he had in his hands. She grabbed them from him and found that they were, indeed, two tickets to the local zoo.

“Surprise!” Erin said as she walked out of the house. “I thought you two could use a break from the pool today.”

Blair couldn't believe it. She had spent the whole night worried about this very moment, and now, she could barely even remember why she had been worried. All she could focus on was the zoo. If she had any reason to believe Erin actually wanted that kiss to happen last night and it wasn't a fleeting hormone-filled moment, she would've kissed her right there in the front yard. The joy she felt over her childhood dream being fulfilled was a pretty good consolation prize, though.

Chapter 14

Erin

Erin still couldn't believe she almost kissed Blair the night before. Or was it that she almost let Blair kiss her? Was there really a difference?

Okay, there definitely was. If she almost let Blair kiss her, that meant Blair wanted to kiss her, which meant the feelings she was trying so hard to suppress were not one-sided. Obviously, she didn't know the extent of Blair's feelings. Hell, she didn't know the extent of her own. All she knew was when they almost kissed, she couldn't think of anything in the world that she wanted more. Hell, she still couldn't. That was the problem. Blair made it so she couldn't think straight at all, and she needed to. Because her life was not her own. It was hers and Nolan's, and she had a responsibility to make sure she did not do anything that could cause him to get hurt.

If things became messy with Blair, he would get hurt. It was clear he was attached to her, and Erin refused to do anything to potentially ruin the bond that they had formed. All she wanted was for the two of them to be happy. Watching them chat animatedly about all the animals they were going to see as they got into Blair's car was so much better than a kiss. Getting the call from Blair asking if Erin would be upset if they got home a little bit after her because they were having so much fun was more fulfilling than having those lips on hers.

I can do this. I can keep my feelings under control. No big deal.

Blair certainly wasn't going to make it easier on her, though. As soon as those thoughts had run through Erin's head, she looked outside and found Blair carrying Nolan in her arms. He was tucked up against her, holding what appeared to be a stuffed giraffe. When Erin opened the door to let them inside, she realized Nolan was fast asleep.

"Do you realize you just broke the cardinal rule of all parents?" she asked with a laugh, because if she didn't tease Blair, she might be tempted to do something else instead.

"And what would that be?"

Erin nodded her head at Nolan. "Never let a child fall asleep this late in the day, because they're not going to bed that night if they do."

Blair visibly cringed. "Shit. I'm so sorry. He just fell asleep about five minutes ago. Do you want me to wake him?"

"Nah. That five minutes is going to give him enough energy to stay up for at least an hour past his bedtime, so might as well let him rest for now."

Blair looked toward the stairs. "Should I take him to his room?"

His room. The scene of the almost-crime. "No, that's okay. He'll get scared if he wakes up by himself after falling asleep in the car. Why don't you put him on the couch?"

After laying him down, Blair turned toward Erin and brought her hands up in a praying motion. "Please let me stay. It's the least I can do after messing with his sleep

schedule right after you surprised me with one of the best days of my life.”

“Today was one of the best days of your life?” Erin was sure Blair was just saying that to flatter her, but it worked. Erin wanted Blair to stay and tell her everything about the magical day she spent with Erin’s son.

“It really was. I had so much fun with that little rascal of yours. I can’t thank you enough for planning that for me.”

“And you’re willing to stay longer after spending the whole day chasing around that rascal of mine?” This whole not kissing thing is very hard.

“Is that so hard to believe?” Blair tilted her head and creased her eyebrows as if she was truly confused, but the smile that had been on her face since she walked in the door remained.

“After my ex, yes. I swear she couldn’t even spend an hour with Nolan before claiming that she needed time to herself.” Erin shook her head as she thought back on that time. “There were so many signs I didn’t see. That I should’ve seen.”

Blair took Erin’s hand and pulled her over to the loveseat, where they were forced to sit close together. “I think a lot of the time we only see the things we want to. That’s not your fault.”

That was nice of Blair to say, but Erin wasn’t so sure she agreed with her. “I don’t know. There were some pretty giant red flags.” Erin turned to face Blair more fully. Even though she told herself she shouldn’t make Blair listen to her drone on about Bianca again, she couldn’t help it. She felt comfortable with Blair in a way she didn’t with anyone else. “You know how I told you I’ve always hated my last name?”

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“Of course.” Blair squeezed Erin’s hand, reminding her that she had never let go of it after sitting down.

Instead of letting go now, she squeezed Blair’s hand in return and tried to ignore the shockwaves that the contact sent throughout her body. “I opened up to Bianca about that at some point during our first year together,” almost a year into dating, but Erin wasn’t going to admit that to the girl she had told after only a month. “And she always used to talk about how she couldn’t wait to give me her last name once we got married. Well, we got married, and life got in the way, and I just never did it. I always planned to. I just... I don’t know. That was on me.”

“So, what happened?”

“She kind of pulled a fast one on me after I gave birth. Even though we always talked about giving Nolan her last name and then actually getting my name changed, when they brought us the paperwork for his birth certificate, she said his last name should be mine. I was having some complications, so I wasn’t in the right frame of mind, plus there were other people in the room, so I just went with it. Looking back, I wonder if she already knew she would eventually leave us; like maybe that was some twisted way of trying to make it easier on us when she walked away. No connection, aside from a little boy who has her eyes.” If Erin didn’t love that little boy so much, those eyes would probably haunt her, but she was slowly getting to the point where all she saw when she looked at him was him. Thank god.

Blair sat in silence, looking completely dumbstruck, and Erin worried she had said too much.

“Shit,” Blair said finally. She looked over at the couch where Nolan slept, then back at Erin. “That’s really fucked up. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. You’re not her.”

“You’ve got that fucking right.” She then pointed at Nolan and said, “Anyone who could walk away from that little boy has serious issues.”

The intensity in Blair’s eyes made it clear how much she cared about Nolan, and it made the urge to kiss her come back all over again.

Instead of giving in to that desire, Erin pulled her hand away from Blair’s. “We should probably talk about what almost happened last night.” Erin didn’t want to, but if her past had taught her anything, it was that ignoring something that was right in front of your face only led to heartbreak.

“What almost happened last night?”

Erin was about to panic that she had made the whole thing up in her head until Blair smirked. “I’m just kidding. I know we almost kissed. I was there.”

Erin couldn’t help but laugh as she playfully hit Blair’s shoulder. “You’re such a jerk.”

Blair grabbed ahold of Erin’s arm and held it between them. “Maybe. But I’m the jerk that you almost kissed.”

It was so playful and fun, and in a different world, Erin would have made some comment about how they should turn that almost into the real thing. She would have leaned in and done what she refused to acknowledge she wanted to do since the first time she saw Blair. But this wasn’t a different world. This was the world where every

decision she made had an impact on someone else's life—a very important someone.

She took a deep breath because she knew the next words out of her mouth were going to be words that neither one of them wanted to hear. “I almost crossed a line last night that I shouldn't cross.”

The smile immediately dropped from Blair's face, and she let go of Erin's arm. “Because I'm the babysitter?”

“For so many reasons. I don't do casual. I can't. Not when I have Nolan.”

Blair appeared genuinely confused by this comment. “Whoever said that's what I want?”

“You're twenty-two, Blair.” Dating Erin involved elements Blair had probably never considered at her young age. Even people who were the same age as Erin often had no interest in dating a single mom.

“So? How old were you when you got into your relationship?”

“Twenty-two. But we both know how that turned out.”

“Listen, I know I can't promise you that nothing will go wrong, but—”

Erin put a hand up to stop Blair. It wasn't that she didn't want to hear what Blair had to say, but she was afraid if she did, she would end up letting go of all the rules she made for herself when Bianca left. “That's exactly the problem. For the last year, I told myself if I ever actually dated again, I wouldn't have the other person meet Nolan until I knew things were very serious between us. Nolan wasn't as cognizant of what was happening when Bianca left, so he bounced back somewhat quickly. He's already attached to you. I don't know what he would do if you ever left.” Erin

laughed as she said the words, because she couldn't believe how she sounded. Blair was supposed to only be his babysitter for the summer. She was putting a lot of pressure on the girl who had just been interested in a summer job. "You asked if this was because you're the babysitter, but that's not what it is. The problem is you're so much more than a babysitter, and if you want to, we'd love to have you in our lives, even after this summer."

"And I take it in your lives doesn't involve kissing."

Erin couldn't stop her eyes from drifting to Blair's lips just at the mention of kissing. She forced them back up and Blair smirked at her. "No. I wish it did, but it can't."

Blair shrugged. "Staying in your lives is definitely a good consolation prize. Nolan isn't the only one who's gotten attached."

Blair being so understanding didn't make it any easier for Erin to stay where she was sitting on the couch and not lean forward to finally find out what those lips tasted like. Luckily, these thoughts were interrupted by the sound of her phone ringing. When Erin took the phone out of her pocket, she saw it was her sister calling.

She held the phone up to show Blair. "Sorry. I need to take this."

"Of course. Take your time."

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Blair's body relaxed deeper into the loveseat and Erin stood to take her sister's call.

Erin walked upstairs before picking up. After her sister called her out at the Fourth of July party, she worried what she might say. "Hey, April! What's up?" she asked once she was in her bedroom.

"I have some bad news."

Even though nothing about her sister's tone made it sound like this was an emergency, Erin's heart rate still picked up from her words. "What's wrong?"

April chuckled. "Chill out. It's nothing that bad. We just can't go to the beach anymore. Sydney's travel softball team made it into some all-star tournament the weekend we were supposed to get back, but of course, now the coach wants to have practice every day that week. If she doesn't go to practice, she can't play, and you know how much this sport means to her."

"Of course. I completely understand." Erin's niece loved softball. She saw the way her eyes lit up whenever Erin talked to her about it. Even though it wasn't always easy, Erin made it a point to get to Sydney's bigger games, because she knew how happy it made her. "Give me the details for the tournament once you have them. We'll try our best to make it."

"Oh my gosh. You don't have to do that. I know how tough it would be after being away with Nolan for the week."

"Honestly, I don't even know if we'll go anymore." Erin still hadn't told Nolan they

were going, because the kid had no concept of time and would bother her about it every day until they finally left. With the trip still over a week away, she wasn't ready for his pestering yet.

"Why not? You already took off of work, right? You should go. You never let yourself relax."

Erin cackled. "There is nothing relaxing about taking a three-year-old on vacation by myself."

"Hmm. It looks like you'll have to take my original suggestion and ask the babysitter to go with you. That could be fun, right?"

Fun or absolute torture? "I can't ask her to do that."

"Can't or won't?" her sister asked with a teasing tone.

"Just send me the damn details of her all-star game, okay?"

"Fine, I will. But only if you consider my suggestion."

"Fine, I will," Erin said, mocking her sister more so than actually agreeing with her.

"Perfect. I'll talk to you later. Love you."

"Love you too. Tell Syd I said congrats on the all-star tournament."

"Will do. Bye!"

"Everything okay?" Blair asked as soon as Erin flopped onto the loveseat right beside her.

“Yeah, it’s fine. My sister and her daughter just had to bail on our beach trip, because Syd’s travel softball team made it into some all-star tournament.”

Blair sat up slightly. “Beach trip? When is that supposed to happen?”

Erin mentally slapped herself on the forehead. Did I really not tell Blair we wouldn’t be here? Shit. “The last week in July. I didn’t tell you about it?”

Blair shook her head. “Nope. Definitely not. That’s no big deal, though. I know you have a lot on your mind.”

Such as trying not to act on these feelings we are now very much aware that we both have. “Yeah. Sorry. I guess it’s good I didn’t say anything since it’s not happening anyway.”

“You don’t want to go without her?”

Erin explained the same thing to Blair as she had to her sister. Going to the beach alone with Nolan was a lot for her to take on solo.

Blair pointed to herself. “I could go with you. I figured I’d be babysitting that week anyway, so I’m free.”

Erin laughed. “Babysitting is a little different than being stuck in a hotel with us for a week. I couldn’t ask you to do that.”

“Technically, you didn’t ask. I offered.”

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Erin had to admit that the offer was tempting. The thought of a week away with Nolan and Blair sounded pretty damn amazing, which probably meant they shouldn't do it. How could she control herself under those circumstances? "I don't know if that's the best idea. Given our... situation."

Blair smirked that trademark smirk of hers and it definitely did not help the butterflies taking flight in Erin's stomach. "Our situation being how kissable my lips are?"

Erin couldn't help but laugh. Blair, somehow, made everything feel lighter and less stressful. "I don't know. I might not be able to find them anyway with how big your head is becoming."

Blair put her hand over her chest as if she was offended. "Ouch. That hurts. I have feelings too, you know." She elbowed Erin in the side. "Come on. What do you say? It could be fun."

It really did sound fun in theory. And maybe this was good. If they were going to be friends, they needed to be able to hang out without the constant longing. This could actually be therapeutic for Erin. "You know what? You're right. Let's do it. Nolan would love it if you came."

Blair's smirk returned once again. "Just Nolan?"

Damn her. "Okay. I might like it just a little bit too."

Chapter 15

Blair

“Bear! Bear! It’s time for the beach, Bear!”

Even from her bedroom, Blair could hear Nolan loud and clear as soon as her mom let him and Erin in the front door, and that high-pitched voice made a wide grin spread across her face.

“Just a minute, bud.” She rushed around her room throwing things into the bag she hadn’t started packing until about fifteen minutes earlier.

Even though she wasn’t quite sure what she was saying, she could hear her mom speaking animatedly to Erin and Nolan. Her mom had been so proud when Blair told her she was going on this trip to help out with Nolan that Blair actually felt a little bit guilty. It’s not like she had lied to her mom, per se, but her reasons for going might not have been completely selfless.

She was not going to worry about that now, though. She was about to go on vacation with two of her favorite people in the world, and nothing could ruin her good mood. She whistled as she shoved the last of her things into her suitcase, slammed it shut, and continued to whistle as she made her way downstairs.

Her mom lifted an eyebrow at her as she skipped over to them. “Someone’s excited.”

Excited was an understatement, but Blair wasn’t going to actually let on to her mom why. “Well, someone didn’t plan a family vacation this summer because she thought I needed to get a job and learn how to be responsible. Now, I get both.”

“Bear, what’s ’sponsible?”

Before Blair could answer, her mom replied. “It’s something Blair had a lot of trouble

with before this summer.”

It took everything in Blair not to glare at her mother. Erin clearly thought Blair was too immature to date. She didn't need her thinking she wasn't even mature enough to form a real friendship.

Instead of addressing her mom's comment, Blair focused her attention on Erin. “We should probably get going before the traffic gets too bad.”

All three of them said goodbye to Blair's mom, before Blair quickly shut the door to avoid any more embarrassment.

“Bear! Sit with me!” Nolan said as he grabbed her hand and ran toward the car.

Blair looked back at Erin. “Only if it's okay with your mommy. If she needs a copilot, I'll have to sit up front with her.”

She couldn't decide if she'd rather help Erin navigate or goof off with Nolan, so she figured it would be best to let them fight over it.

Erin waved a hand at them. “You two have fun. The map on my phone will be a great copilot.”

Blair bent down to put up the hand Nolan wasn't holding for a high five. “It looks like it's you and me, buddy.”

“Yay!” Nolan hit her hand so hard he made it tingle, then pulled her the rest of the way to the car.

After everyone settled in their seats, Erin turned on the map and some music and they were on their way. With Nolan's nonstop chatter and entertainment, the hour-and-a-

half ride went by in no time. Blair couldn't believe it when they pulled into the parking lot of their hotel that was just two blocks from the beach.

As soon as Erin parked, Blair jumped out of the car and ran around to the other side to get Nolan out. She put him on her shoulders, then went around to the trunk to grab the bags.

She pulled all three bags out and stacked Nolan's smaller bag on top of her suitcase, so she could clumsily take them all. "You go check in. I got this," she yelled to Erin.

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Was Blair trying to show off for her? Well, yes, actually. That was one hundred percent what she was trying to do. Knowing Erin felt the same way she did, even if this couldn't actually go anywhere, made their relationship that much more fun. Sure, knowing Erin also wanted to kiss her didn't make it any easier not to do it, but it was kind of like nonstop foreplay. Foreplay for something that was never going to happen, but whatever.

Instead of going into the hotel, Erin walked around to the back of the car. "Are you sure?"

Blair didn't miss the big smile that took over Erin's face in response to the scene in front of her, and it made Blair's smile grow as well. "We're sure. We've got this." Blair stuck her hand up for Nolan to give it a fist bump. "Right, dude?"

Nolan giggled as he fist-bumped her. "Yeah. We got this!"

Blair raised an eyebrow at Erin, who simply shook her head at the two of them and walked away toward the entrance of the hotel. Blair struggled to hold the bags and keep Nolan balanced on her shoulders, but after a few steps, she got used to it.

There was a line for the front desk, but by the time Blair made it over there, Erin was next in line to be checked in. When the woman at the front desk called Erin up, Blair walked over and stood beside her, Nolan still excitedly bouncing up and down on her shoulders.

"Reservation for Erin Corcoran."

The woman nodded before furiously tapping the keyboard as if the keys were on fire. “Ah, yes, right here. That was a king room, right?”

Only one bed? That sounds fun.

Erin’s face immediately turned red, and she fumbled over her words in the cutest way. “Um, no, actually, it... uh... it should be Queen.” She shook her head and held up two fingers. “Two queens.”

The woman typed some more and nodded again. “Oh yeah. I’m sorry. I see it now. The two queens for five nights.”

“Yes!” Erin practically screamed. She cleared her throat. “I mean, yes, that’s right. Sorry.”

The woman looked from Erin to Nolan then back to Erin again. “It’s okay. I completely understand. I never wanted to bedshare either. Those little bodies sure can take up a lot of space.”

For a moment, Blair wasn’t sure where that comment came from, but when she saw the blush that had spread across Erin’s face, she understood. She thinks the extra bed is for Nolan, not me. “Right?” Blair said with a laugh. “Two of us in the bed is already more than enough.” She nodded at Erin. “Especially with how much space this one takes up.”

Erin flashed her a look that was somewhere between anger and confusion, or maybe it was just a warning glance telling her she should shut the hell up. Blair wasn’t sure, but she wasn’t going to push her luck, so she didn’t say anything else.

The woman went back to typing on the computer and after a minute or so, smiled back up at them. “All set. I upgraded you to the two-queen suite with an ocean view

at no extra cost. You'll be in room 918. Breakfast is every morning from 6 to 10 a.m. We also have a restaurant that offers room service that's open twenty-four hours a day."

When the woman held the key cards out toward Erin, instead of grabbing them, Erin stood there as if she was shellshocked. Blair kicked Erin's foot because it was really all she could do since she didn't have any available hands.

Erin shook her head and reached for the key cards. "Sorry. Thank you. That's amazing."

"It's my pleasure. You have a beautiful family," the woman said with a wink.

Something strange bubbled in Blair's chest at the sound of Nolan and Erin being referred to as her family. She loved the sound of it, and if that was what this woman thought, there was no reason she shouldn't play along. "Thank you so much. I totally agree, but I might be just a little bit biased."

"As you should be," the woman said with a laugh. "Enjoy your stay."

"Let's go, sweetie." Blair encouraged Erin to move by using her foot again.

Erin grabbed one of the bags (thank god, honestly) and led them toward the elevator. It wasn't until they were inside that she turned to face Blair and Nolan, her face still the slightest shade of red. "I feel a little bad that we got an upgrade by lying."

Blair shrugged. "We didn't lie. She assumed." As much as Blair normally didn't like to see Erin losing her shit, it was pretty adorable in this situation, especially because she knew Erin was at least partially thrown off because of the feelings she had for Blair. "Just enjoy it, shnookums."

Nolan shook on Blair's shoulders as he giggled. "Why you call Mommy that?"

"You mean, that isn't her name?" Blair asked sarcastically.

She could tell by all the movement on her shoulders that Nolan was shaking his head. "No. Her name is Mommy. Or sometimes, Erin."

"Oh, that's right. Sorry. My mistake."

When Blair winked at her, Erin moved her eyes toward the ground, but Blair didn't miss the small smile that parted her lips. Blair's heart warmed at the sight. That smile had the power to make even her worst day better. Not that this was one of those days. As far as days went, this one was already pretty fucking awesome.

As soon as they got into the hotel room, Nolan began trying to wiggle off of Blair's shoulders. When Blair put him down, he immediately ran to the big sliding door that led to the balcony. He pointed out the window, eyes wide when he looked back at Blair and Erin. "Look at the big pool!"

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“That’s the ocean, sweetie,” Erin said with a laugh.

“Wait. Is this his first time at the beach?” Blair asked. For some reason, she just assumed they had been here before.

Erin’s face turned red again. “It is. I’ve wanted to bring him for a long time, but, well, things have been a little crazy.”

“That makes sense.” Blair walked over to Erin and squeezed her hand in reassurance. The last thing she needed was for Erin to feel like she wasn’t the world’s greatest mom, because she obviously was. “And, hey, he’s here now. That’s the important part, right?”

Erin squeezed Blair’s hand back and gave her a small, but sincere, smile before focusing her attention on Nolan. “Do you want to go out onto the balcony so you can see it better?”

Instead of answering, Nolan attempted to open the door by himself, a task he was luckily unable to accomplish.

“Let me get that, bud.” Blair undid the latch and slid the door open. As soon as she did, Nolan squeezed past her onto the balcony.

Nolan stood at the edge of the balcony, his eyes darting from one spot to another as though he couldn’t decide what to focus on. He pointed down at the large pool that was part of their hotel. “Whoa! ’Nother pool.”

Erin rested her hand on his head. “That’s our pool, buddy. Do you want to go in there first or do you want to go down to the beach and put your feet in the ocean?”

Nolan jumped up and down as he pointed to something that Blair couldn’t see from where she was standing. “Slide! Slide!”

Erin ruffled his hair then smiled up at Blair, the sun shining over her causing her body to have the most perfect glow. “It appears the pool has won since it has a slide. Are you okay with that?”

“Whatever you two want to do is perfect.” Honestly, they could stay in the hotel room watching movies all week and Blair would be happy as long as she was spending time with these two.

Nolan grabbed Blair’s hand and jumped up and down. “Pool! Pool! I want to go down that huge slide.”

Blair couldn’t help but laugh at his excitement. It was contagious, and now all she wanted to do was go down that huge slide as well. “Well, what the hell are we waiting for? Let’s go!”

“Let’s go!” Nolan repeated.

After spending hours at the pool (and going down the slide more times than she could count), Blair could barely keep her eyes open, and it wasn’t even dinner time yet. Luckily, if their yawns were anything to go by, it appeared Erin and Nolan were just as tired.

“I have an idea,” Blair said as the three of them walked toward the elevators. “What if

we order room service and eat dinner in bed tonight?” When Blair saw the hesitation on Erin’s face, she added, “It’s on me, and we can eat in my bed.”

“Yay! Dinner in Bear’s bed.”

It took them way too long to decide what they each wanted so by the time the food arrived, Blair was starving. She set the food up on her bed and motioned for Nolan and Erin to sit next to her. Nolan pressed right up against her and Erin sat on the other side of him. As soon as Nolan started to eat, Blair was reminded why Erin had a rule that he wasn’t allowed to eat on furniture at home. At this rate, she would not be surprised to wake up in the middle of the night and find herself snuggling with a chicken finger.

A while later when Nolan announced he was too full to eat anything else, Blair wasn’t sure how that could be true since there was definitely more food in her bed than in his stomach.

Blair dramatically patted her own stomach. “I’m super full too.”

Nolan poked at Blair’s stomach and giggled. “Squishy belly.”

Blair laughed along with him. She couldn’t actually be offended by anything said by someone who believed Baby Shark was a good song.

Erin clearly didn’t feel the same way, because she used what Blair could only describe as her mom’s voice when she said, “Nolan Patrick! Blair does not have a squishy belly. You need to tell her you’re sorry.”

Nolan stuck his lower lip out at Blair. “I’m sorry, Bear.”

Blair poked him in the side. “It’s okay, little dude. I know you were just being silly.”

“All right, buddy,” Erin said while reaching for Nolan. “Let’s get you cleaned up and ready for bed and give Blair some space to finally relax.”

“No!” Instead of letting Erin lift him, Nolan snuggled closer to Blair. “I want to sleep in Bear’s bed.”

“Honey, you can’t-”

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Blair put a hand up to stop Erin. “I don’t mind if you don’t mind.”

“Are you sure?” Erin asked, looking legitimately surprised that Blair would offer to do something that honestly felt like a minor request to Blair. “For a small human, he definitely knows how to take up a ton of space.”

“I’m sure. It’s no big deal at all.” And Blair meant that. The bigger deal to her was the fact that Nolan wanted to snuggle in her bed with her. It made her heart feel like it was growing inside of her chest. This little boy had crawled inside of her heart and was burrowing himself deeper and deeper with every day that passed.

The smile Erin shared with her cracked Blair open even more. Clearly, Nolan wasn’t the only one who had made it into her heart. The scary part was, Erin didn’t really have to try. Every little thing she did made Blair like her more.

When Erin looked away from her to focus her attention on Nolan, Blair could still feel the effects of that smile throughout her whole body. “Since Blair said it’s okay, then that’s fine with me, but you need to brush your teeth and get your pajamas on first.”

“Okay.” Nolan quickly jumped out of the bed and ran toward the bathroom.

While Erin and Nolan were occupied in the bathroom, Blair took the time to clean up their food and put on her own pajamas, which were really just a tank top and a pair of boxer shorts.

Erin must have approved, because as soon as she walked out of the bathroom, her

eyes burned a path up Blair's body. When her eyes met Blair's, she swallowed hard. "You're all ready for bed."

"Almost." Blair couldn't stop herself from smirking. She loved that she had this effect on Erin, even if Erin was trying her damndest not to let it show. "Just need to brush my teeth."

"Of course." Erin limply pointed toward the bathroom. "It's all yours."

After brushing her teeth and going to the bathroom one more time, Blair walked back out of the bathroom to find Nolan and Erin sitting in her bed, reading a book together. She leaned against the doorway and let herself enjoy the scene in front of her. How couldn't she? It was so fucking cute the way Erin did different voices as she read, and Nolan laughed hysterically at each one as if it was the greatest thing in the world. And in that moment, to Blair, it kind of felt like it was.

"And that was a nice story," Erin said as she closed the book.

"Night night, Mommy." Nolan yawned and snuggled into Erin's side.

"Night, buddy." Erin kissed Nolan's forehead and tried to move away from him, but he grabbed her even tighter. "I thought you wanted to snuggle with Blair tonight, sweetie. You have to let Mommy go to her own bed so Blair can get in here."

Nolan shook his head. "I want to snuggle both of you."

The blush that had taken over Erin's cheeks when the front desk woman assumed they were a family came back with a vengeance. "Oh, honey, the bed isn't big enough for all three of us."

"Yes, it is." Nolan nodded matter-of-factly. "We all ate on the bed."

The kiddid have a point. Blair wasn't sure how Erin was going to argue with that logic. Instead of arguing with him, Erin looked to Blair for backup, which Blair was sure she was going to find was a mistake because Blair couldn't care less about sharing her bed. "He has a point. I'm cool with sharing. We're all small. We can make it work."

Erin squinted her eyes and furrowed her eyebrows at Blair, and Blair could tell exactly what she was silently saying to her. This is a terrible idea. Blair didn't disagree, but it also kind of felt like a terribly wonderful idea, so she simply shrugged and threw Erin her most charming smile to soften the blow.

Erin shook her head at Blair, and even though Blair could tell she was trying not to, her lips curled up into the slightest smile. Blair took that as permission to get back into bed and situated herself on the other side of Nolan. Nolan immediately grabbed her arm and wrapped it around himself. Within a few minutes, his breathing had leveled out, indicating that he was asleep.

"I'm really sorry about this," Erin whispered into the quiet room. "I would offer to go back to my own bed now, but if he wakes up and I'm not right here, it'll only make the night that much longer."

"Don't worry about it," Blair whispered back. "This isn't exactly what I normally mean when I say I want to get a girl in my bed, but I can't say I hate it."

That was the understatement of the century. Blair secretly wished Nolan would ask them to share a bed every night so she could lie this close to Erin. Even with Nolan in between them, she could still feel Erin's presence, and it made her feel safe. In the darkness of this hotel room, with these two by her side, it felt like nothing and no one could ever hurt her. Blair always loved her life, but nothing had ever felt as perfect as this moment.

At least, she thought it couldn't get any more perfect until she woke up in the middle of the night and felt a hand on top of hers. At first, in her half-asleep state, she assumed it was Nolan's hand, but she quickly realized it was way too big for a child's hand. When she cracked her eyes open, she found Erin lying close to Nolan with one hand on his back and the other on top of Blair's. Blair closed her eyes and wished this moment could last forever. She might not know what job she would get once the summer ended or where she saw herself over the next year, but if she was being completely honest with herself, she was pretty sure this right here was all she wanted for the rest of her life. Even the next morning, when she woke up to a tiny finger shoved up her nose, she still felt the exact same way.

Chapter 16

Erin

"Ouch. Stop picking my nose, dude."

Erin opened her eyes to find Nolan rolling around on the bed while Blair tickled him.

"Be quiet, or we're going to wake your mommy," Blair told him as she continued her attack.

"Too late," Erin said with a yawn. "I'm awake."

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“Told you.” Blair playfully poked Nolan on his side and looked up at Erin. “Sorry. I woke up to this little dude’s finger up my nose.”

Erin couldn’t help but laugh, because the same had definitely happened to her when she was forced to share a bed with Nolan in the past. “Been there.”

“The worst.” Blair scrunched up her nose as if she was disgusted, but the wide grin never left her face. “So, how’d you sleep last night?”

Erin had to think about how to answer that, because it was a very loaded question. Last night had been both the best and worst sleep of her life. She had no clue how that was possible, but it was definitely the case. Every time she drifted off to sleep, she slept more soundly than she had in a very long time, but she found herself awake multiple times throughout the night just watching Blair. No matter how hard Erin tried, she couldn’t take her eyes off Blair snuggled close to Nolan. Each time, she stared at them until her eyes could not stay open any longer and she drifted back to sleep. At one point, she woke up to find her hand had somehow ended up on top of Blair’s. She told herself to move it, but she couldn’t. Touching Blair felt safe. It felt right. It made her feel like maybe all of the bad things that had happened during her life really weren’t so bad because they had brought her to this moment.

Erin squeezed her eyes shut. She couldn’t think that way. Thinking like that would result in her and Nolan getting hurt, and she refused to let that happen again.

“I slept pretty well, actually,” Erin answered when she finally remembered the question Blair had asked her.

Blair laughed. “Honestly? Aside from the whole finger in the nose incident, so did I.”

“You were snoring,” Nolan said with a shrug, as if that was a logical reason to shove his finger up someone’s nostril.

Blair crossed her arms and (very fakely with a big shit-eating grin on her face) glared at Nolan. “Ido notsnore.”

“Actually, you do.” It was something Erin had noticed when she was (totallynotcreepily) watching Blair sleep. She wasn’t a loud snorer. The little noises that left her nose were super adorable.

“Really? You’re going to gang up on me now, too?” Blair looked from Erin to Nolan. “Should we show Mommy what happens to people who do things I don’t like?”

Nolan nodded and laughed maniacally, then held up his hands and lunged his whole body at Erin. “Tickle attack.”

Before Erin could comprehend what was coming, both Nolan and Blair were tickling her. Blair definitely knew one of her weaknesses now. Erin was insanely ticklish and tried her best to escape while she laughed uncontrollably at their attack.

“Please. Stop. Can’t breathe,” she said while she swatted at them.

She was finally able to grab one of Blair’s hands and held it away from herself to stop her tickles. Unfortunately, the ticklish feeling was quickly replaced with tingles that darted through her whole body in response to this one touch. Erin wasn’t sure which was worse. Or was it better? Better in the worst way?

She let go of Blair’s hand and jumped out of the bed before Blair could get to her again. “Who wants to go to the beach today?” she asked, while raising her own hand.

Nolan jumped off of the bed and waved his hand in the air as well. “Me! Me! Me!”

After getting changed and fighting with Nolan to eat breakfast, they finally made their way down to the beach. As soon as Nolan’s feet hit the sand, he began to run toward the water. Erin had no idea how she was supposed to catch him with her hands full, but before she could start running after him, Blair dropped the few things she was holding and ran after him. It only took a few seconds for Blair to catch him and scoop him up in her arms.

Erin watched as Blair put him back down onto the sand and held his hand. The two of them slowly walked toward the ocean and stopped right on the edge of where the dry sand turned to wet sand. Blair pointed toward the ocean and spoke to Nolan who appeared to be hanging on to every word she said. Erin wanted to join them, but she was too distracted watching their interaction to get her feet to move. Aside from her family, which didn’t really count, Erin had never seen Nolan take to someone as quickly as he had with Blair. It really was like he had known her forever. That fact kind of made her want to throw caution to the wind, but it also made her want to bury Nolan in the sand to make sure he didn’t get hurt. Not that she actually believed Blair would ever hurt him. At least, not intentionally. But she worried Blair was oblivious to how special she was.

A big wave crashed in the ocean, causing water to reach where Blair and Nolan were standing. As soon as it touched his feet, Nolan jumped in the air and ran back toward Erin.

When he reached her, there were tears running down his cheeks. He pointed out toward the ocean. “I don’t like that water. It’s scary.”

Erin bent down and wrapped Nolan in a hug. Even when he was being dramatic, she still hated to see him cry. “Aw, buddy, there’s nothing to be scared of. I promise. Mommy would never let anything hurt you.”

“Yeah, neither would I, buddy.”

Erin looked up to find Blair crouched down behind Nolan rubbing circles across his back. “I’m really sorry,” she said when her eyes met Erin’s. “I wouldn’t have taken him so close if I knew it would scare him so badly.”

“It’s seriously no big deal. I would’ve done the exact same thing.” Erin pulled away from Nolan but kept her eyes on his. “What do you say we stay back here away from the water? We can play in the sand and make sandcastles.”

Nolan took a few deep breaths and nodded slowly. “Okay.”

They found an empty spot and put down their towels. Blair volunteered to walk back down to the ocean to put water in a bucket so they could have wet sand to build with. Once she was back, the three of them got to work and Nolan quickly forgot about his fight with the ocean waves. They had only been at the beach for a few hours when Erin noticed Nolan could barely keep his eyes open.

“Are you tired, buddy?” Erin asked him.

Nolan shook his head, but he wiped a sandy hand over his eyes, which made him have a complete meltdown because his eyes hurt. While Erin helped Nolan wipe the sand off of his face and out of his eyes, Blair gathered their towels and beach toys back into bags without even being asked.

When Nolan let them know he couldn’t possibly walk all the way back to the hotel, Blair offered to carry him, which made Erin have to fight to hold back tears because she was so thankful. She wouldn’t have been able to do any of this without Blair, and she wished she knew how to properly thank her. They weren’t even halfway back to the hotel before Nolan passed out in Blair’s arms. He was so tired he didn’t even wake up when she laid him down on the bed. Erin pointed out the door toward the

other room of their suite and she and Blair tiptoed out, shutting the door behind them as quietly as possible.

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Erin squeezed her eyes shut as she waited for the inevitable “Mommy,” but it never came. She took a deep breath and blew it out then threw herself onto the small couch that took up a big portion of the extra room of their suite.

Blair flopped down beside her and laid her head against the back of the couch. “No wonder my parents were always tired when I was growing up. I don’t know how you do this by yourself most days.”

Erin sighed. She had gotten so used to having Blair around so much of the time she almost forgot she was doing this alone. “It’s not easy, but I also don’t have a choice.”

Blair turned her head and stared at Erin for a long time before she said anything. “For what it’s worth, I think you’re fucking amazing. Nolan’s the luckiest little boy in the entire world to have you as his mom.”

With just a few words, the urge to kiss Blair was back. Except, it wasn’t even an urge anymore. It was more of a need. Like if she didn’t kiss her soon, she might run out of oxygen. But she couldn’t. One taste of those lips was not worth the years of heartache that getting attached to someone can leave you with, especially when there is a risk of that heartache affecting and hurting this innocent little boy.

Erin reached out and grabbed Blair’s hand, because she had to touch her in some way. Blair had become her safety net, and that touch reminded her Blair was still there. She squeezed Blair’s hand as she intertwined their fingers, “Thank you for saying that. You don’t know how many times I question whether or not I’m doing a good enough job with him.”

Blair stared at their interlocked hands before moving her gaze onto Erin's face again. "The fact that you could even question yourself is crazy to me. Anyone with eyes can see what a good mom you are. Hell, you probably don't even need eyes to see that. You literally radiate love. It's..." Blair took a long, deep breath and blew it out. "It's beautiful."

Being called beautiful by Blair was like being called a guiding light by the North Star. Because Blair was the most beautiful woman in the world. And it wasn't just skin deep. Everything about Blair was beautiful.

Even though she knew she should hold in these thoughts, Erin couldn't. She had to let Blair know. "You're beautiful."

A small smile parted Blair's lips as she continued to stare into Erin's eyes. "Do you know how hard you make it not to kiss you?"

Blair slowly moved closer to her, and Erin's breath caught in her throat, because she was pretty sure this was it. Blair was going to kiss her, and Erin had no power to stop her. Instead of bringing their lips together, though, Blair brought her face to Erin's neck and took a deep breath, breathing Erin in. Even though she hadn't touched her, there was something so sensual about it. Her hands might as well have been all over Erin, because that's what it felt like. She placed the lightest kiss right on Erin's pulse point and it sent a bolt of electricity into her body and straight to her core. Erin needed Blair. God, did she need her.

Blair must have realized this, because she continued to place kisses across Erin's neck, each time getting closer and closer to her lips. If Erin moved her face the slightest bit, their lips could finally touch, but she couldn't move. She was frozen in place by all the magnificent feelings pulsing through her body, stemming from just a few light kisses. Blair continued her kisses across Erin's jaw until she finally placed one on her chin, barely a quiver away from her lips.

When Blair pulled away slightly, Erin was sure it was because the kiss she needed more than air was finally coming. Instead, Blair stared at her for a long time, both of their chests heaving, and then she whispered, “I’m so sorry,” before moving to rest her head on Erin’s shoulder.

Erin wanted to tell her she had nothing to be sorry for. She wanted to beg her to please finish what she had started. But she couldn’t find the words. She couldn’t find her voice at all.

When more time passed without Erin saying anything, Blair spoke again. “Is this okay? Can we stay like this for just a little while?”

Erin was able to find her voice to push out a barely audible, “Yes,” as she rested her head against Blair’s as well.

Chapter 17

Blair

Instead of waking up to the sun shining through their hotel window like she had the past two days, Blair awoke to the sound of thunder. It took her a moment to get her bearings, but once she did, she realized Nolan and Erin were lying in bed next to her—a sleeping arrangement that Nolan had insisted on again last night. Blair had kind of expected Erin to refuse after what had happened between them earlier that day, but she didn’t.

Blair pinched her eyes shut. She still couldn’t believe she let herself get so carried away yesterday. When Erin called her beautiful, she lost all control. Not having her lips on Erin in one way or another just didn’t seem like an option. Luckily, she somehow found the strength to stop herself before she made things completely awkward between them. When they awoke from their impromptu nap about an hour

later, it was as if nothing had happened. It was a relief but also kind of strange. In fact, the rest of the night was so normal that it had Blair wondering if she had dreamed the whole thing. The tingling of her lips whenever she thought of Erin's skin beneath them was enough to tell her she hadn't.

Shit. She would give anything to taste that skin just one more time. Blair squeezed her eyes shut and bit her bottom lip. She really shouldn't be thinking about this when there was no way for her to get release.

Unless there is. Now that she had the idea in her head, Blair had to make it happen or she might literally burst. She slowly and carefully extracted herself from the bed and was extremely relieved when neither Erin nor Nolan woke up. She looked outside and noticed the rain coming down hard, but since she hadn't heard any thunder since the boom that woke her up, she figured it couldn't be that dangerous to take a shower. Plus, it was worth the risk to not feel like she was going to explode.

She went into the bathroom and immediately started the shower. It was only a matter of time before Nolan and Erin woke up, so she didn't have any time to waste. She stripped out of her clothes and hopped into the shower, only allowing herself a few seconds to bask in the warm water before she moved her hand between her legs. She closed her eyes and pictured Erin's face as she said the words, "You're beautiful." She remembered the feeling of Erin's skin beneath her lips and the way her whole body had reacted to that littlest bit of contact.

She imagined it was Erin's hand touching her instead of her own. She pretended it was Erin's fingers that were making her wet, because honestly, it might as well have been. She was the real reason Blair was so turned on. When she brought a finger to her entrance, it took all her willpower not to scream out. She slapped one hand against the side of the shower to hold herself upright while her other hand continued its work.

All she saw in front of her was Erin. Erin's eyes. Erin's lips. Erin's perfect body with those amazing curves. It didn't take her any time at all to completely fall apart. She came all over her own fingers and slid down the shower when her legs completely gave out.

She wasn't sure how long she sat there with the shower water pouring over her. It could've been seconds or it could've been hours. She was suspended in a place of absolute ecstasy. Well, that was, until a knock came on the door and a little voice shocked her back to reality.

"Bear! Are you okay? Bear! I have to peeEEEE!"

Shit. Blair jumped out of the shower and quickly wrapped herself in a towel. When she opened the door, Nolan ran past her, pants already down at his ankles as he ran to the toilet. He immediately started to pee while Blair struggled to catch her breath.

Once he was done, he awkwardly pulled up his pants then smiled over at her. "You almost made me pee my pants."

"I'm sorry, bud. I didn't hear you out there at first." Blair felt guilty even if it wasn't actually a lie. She hadn't heard him. The reason why she hadn't heard Nolan might not have been her best decision, though.

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“Yeah.” Nolan nodded as if he understood. “You were being really loud.”

“I... umm...” Shit. Shit. Shit. Think, Blair. “Sorry. I tripped.”

“You tripped in the shower? Are you okay?” Erin asked as she joined them in the bathroom as well.

Is this a fucking party? Blair could feel her face turning red as Erin watched her, waiting for an answer. “Yeah. I’m... I’m good.”

Erin wrinkled her eyebrows as she studied Blair’s face. “Are you sure? You look frazzled. Did you hurt your—”

Blair saw the exact moment realization hit Erin’s face. Erin knew she was lying, and she also knew exactly why Blair was lying. Shit. Why did this woman have the ability to see right through her?

Erin’s eyes went wide, and her face turned even more red than Blair’s felt. “Oh.”

Blair swallowed hard then gave her a guilty smile. “Yeah.” No sense in lying at this point.

Erin put her hand on Nolan’s shoulder and ushered him out of the bathroom. “Let’s give Blair some privacy while she recovers from her fall.”

After Nolan was out of the bathroom, Erin walked back in and leaned close to Blair. “You’re making this really fucking hard on me right now,” she said in a breathy

whisper that made Blair want to jump right back into the shower.

As soon as Erin left the bathroom, Blair closed the door and stared at herself in the mirror as she tried to regain some semblance of control. “You got this, Blair,” she spoke aloud. “You’ve been around sexy women before. You’re not a dude. You can totally keep your hormones under control.”

She laughed at her reflection. She was being ridiculous right now.

“Bear?” Nolan called from the other side of the door. “Are you okay?”

Blair tried to answer, but no sound came out. She cleared her throat to try to find her voice. “Yep. I’m good. Are you okay?”

“I’m okay. Who were you talking to?”

Busted. Again. Blair rolled her eyes at herself, then stretched her arms as she tried to think of yet another lie. “I was, um, just singing.”

Luckily, Nolan didn’t question her again, so she brushed her teeth, threw on an outfit, and gathered herself together enough to head back into the hotel room.

“Feeling better?” Erin asked as soon as she walked out.

When Blair looked at her, she found her staring at her with a shit-eating grin. Oh, she’s loving this. Blair could see the glee written all over Erin’s face. She finally felt like she had the upper hand, and she was definitely going to milk it for all its worth.

Two can play this game. Blair smirked right back at Erin, crossed her arms over her chest, and lifted one eyebrow. “I’m doing very well, thank you. Feeling nice and satisfied.”

Erin's smile slipped momentarily when she swallowed hard in response to Blair's choice of words, but she quickly recovered. "Glad to hear the showers satisfied you so well."

Holy shit. This woman is trying to kill me.

Before Blair could think of what to say in return, Nolan interrupted their moment. "It's raining!" he screamed as if he had somehow just noticed it. "No! What are we supposed to do?"

Blair watched Erin snap out of their naughty little game at the exact same time she did, both of them turning their attention to Nolan.

"Don't worry," Erin said gently. "There are plenty of fun things we can do inside today."

"What fun things?" Nolan asked between deep breaths.

Erin opened her mouth as if she was going to answer, then gave Blair a look that showed she actually had no idea.

Blair knelt down next to Nolan and took his tiny hand in hers. "When we were walking on the boardwalk last night, I happened to notice that there is an arcade right next to our hotel. I don't know about you, but I love arcades."

Nolan's face lit up and he began to bounce up and down. "I love arcades too!"

It hit Blair at that moment that there was one slight problem. The arcade wasn't open yet. How was she supposed to tell Nolan he had to wait after she had gotten him so excited?

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“You know what, buddy?” Erin said from across the room. “You’re going to need some energy to play all of those games. I think we should go downstairs and have breakfast first. What do you say?”

Blair breathed a sigh of relief that Erin had managed to read her mind. “Your mom is right. You can’t play games when you’re hungry. You won’t do as well, and then we won’t get as many tickets, which means we won’t get as many prizes.”

Nolan nodded a bunch of times, then gave Blair a thumbs up. “I wantlotsof prizes.”

After getting dressed, Nolan skipped out of the room in front of Erin and Blair to go get breakfast.

“We make a pretty good team, don’t we?” Blair whispered to Erin as she watched Nolan run toward the elevator.

Erin looked completely relaxed as she smiled at Nolan as well. “We really do.” Erin’s smile turned into a smirk and she added, “Well, that is, whenyou’re not too busy having fun with yourself in the shower.” She lifted an eyebrow at Blair, then ran down the hallway toward Nolan before Blair could think of a rebuttal.

Damn.Blair had no idea where Erin’s newfound confidence had come from, but it was sexy as hell, and she hoped it stayed around.

“Mommy! We need to play more games.” Nolan clawed at his mom’s legs while he

whined.

“Yeah, Mommy!” Blair said, copying the tone of Nolan’s voice. “There’re so many games in here we haven’t even played yet. How are we going to get a bunch of pointless prizes if we don’t play them all?”

“Seriously?” Erin rolled her eyes at both Blair and Nolan. “I think we’ve spent enough time and money here already.”

“How about this?” Blair pulled the fifty dollar bill out of her pocket that she had been saving for this very moment. “The rest of the games are on me.”

“You are not seriously thinking about getting fifty dollars worth of tokens, are you? We’ll never leave.”

Blair laughed at the fact that Erin was using the same tone of voice to speak to her as she used with Nolan. It was fitting because Blair was acting about as mature as Nolan right now, but she was having way too much fun to care. “That’s kind of the point.” She flashed Erin her most charming smile. “Come on. What else is there to do?”

Erin rolled her eyes again. “Fine. But only because we really don’t have any other choice.”

“Yes!” Blair held her hand out toward Nolan and he jumped in the air to give her a high five.

After getting more tokens, Nolan grabbed a handful and ran toward a racing game. “I’m going to win!” he said as he sat in a seat too tall for him to reach the pedal.

“I have an idea.” Blair picked him up and sat him on her lap. “How about you and I race your mommy? You can steer and I’ll push the pedal.”

Nolan threw a fist in the air. “Yeah! And we’ll win!”

Erin laughed as she sat down beside them and held out her hand for tokens. “I don’t doubt you will.”

Even though it was touch-and-go for a bit due to Nolan’s questionable steering skills, Blair and Nolan did end up beating Erin in the end.

Blair threw both hands in the air. “Yes! Sweet victory!”

“I want to play basketball next!” Nolan jumped off of Blair’s lap and ran toward the big electronic basketball hoops.

“Wait for me, and I’ll put you on my shoulders,” Blair shouted after him, feeling like a little kid herself after spending all afternoon in the arcade.

“You really love this, don’t you?” Erin asked with a laugh. Her tone wasn’t judgmental, just amused.

“Hell yeah. Arcades are the best.”

“Arcades and deejays. Got it.”

“Taking notes?” Blair teased, although it was kind of sweet because it seemed like Erin was actually doing just that.

Erin shrugged. “I figured if we’re going to be friends, I should know what you like to do for fun.”

It turned out, Blair was the one who should have been taking notes. “In that case, what do you like to do for fun?”

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Erin blew out a long breath as though Blair had just asked her the hardest question in the world. “I don’t know. Read books to Nolan? Go to the pool?”

“Those are great things, but what else?” Blair wanted to know more about Erin. She wanted to know everything. “What do you like to do that doesn’t involve Nolan?”

Erin shrugged again. “Sometimes I read adult books after Nolan goes to bed. I’m a big fan of psychological thrillers. Honestly, I don’t spend much time without Nolan. It’s not really possible as a single mom.”

“Well, if you ever want to go out with friends after work or something, I can watch him longer. I really don’t mind.”

Erin laughed as though Blair had told a joke. “That’s the thing. I’ve dedicated so much of my life to Nolan, especially after Bianca left, I kind of lost touch with all of my friends. Even if I had the time to hang out, I really don’t have the people anymore.”

It broke Blair’s heart to hear Erin had given up so much for Nolan. She knew Erin would do it again without a second thought, but she shouldn’t have to. She should have help. Fucking Bianca. Just thinking about her made Blair’s blood boil. She couldn’t waste her energy on that bitch right now, though.

She reached out and squeezed Erin’s hand, trying her best to ignore the sensation it sent throughout her body. “Well, now you have me.” And Blair’s head was already spinning with ideas of how she could prove to Erin just how much she meant those words.

“Aren’t you at the beach with your girlfriend right now?” Marisol asked as soon as she picked up Blair’s call.

Blair looked around the room as if Erin was somehow going to hear Marisol from the other room of their suite where she was napping with Nolan. “Yes, I am at the beach with Erin and Nolan right now. They’re asleep, and I have a huge favor to ask you.”

“Okay, I’m intrigued. Go on.”

“You’re done with work now, right?” Blair already knew the answer to that question, but it seemed like a logical place to start.

“You know I am. Remember? I gave you a hard time when I found out you were leaving me the first week I actually had time off this summer.”

Blair rolled her eyes. Of course Marisol wouldn’t let her get away with asking dumb questions. “Yeah, yeah. Okay. Anyway, are you still dating your camp boyfriend?” This was another question Blair was pretty sure she knew the answer to due to the recap Marisol had given in excruciating detail about how they snuck off for a quickie in the woods the week prior.

Marisol laughed. “Yes, we’re still dating, because we’re not ten. He wasn’t my camp boyfriend. We’re two adults who met while working at a children’s summer camp together.”

“And how many times did you two adults sneak off to have sex while working at said summer camp?”

Marisol was quiet for a few seconds before she finally spoke again, this time her

voice not nearly as cocky. “Touché.”

“Perfect. I have a proposition for you.”

“Could you please stop dragging this out and just tell me what the fuck you want?”

Blair laughed at her friend’s attitude. She loved this bitch so much. “I would like to offer you a long weekend at the beach in exchange for one little favor.”

“I’m listening...”

“Come down tomorrow and watch Nolan for a few hours, and I’ll get you a hotel room for you and your boy toy through the weekend.”

“You want me to watch the kid you’re supposed to be babysitting while you take his mom on a date?”

“It’s not...” Blair lowered her voice to a whisper in case Erin woke up. “It’s not a date. I just want to do something nice for her. She never gets the chance to hang out with other adults, because she’s too busy being the world’s best fucking mom. I want to give her a few hours to have fun with someone who isn’t a child.”

Much to Blair’s surprise, Marisol cackled in response. “Sorry. Sorry. I just find it hilarious that you think hanging out with you doesn’t mean she’ll be hanging out with a child.”

“Whatever. I’m twenty-two.” Blair was trying not to let Marisol’s words sting. She knew Marisol was just joking, but the age difference between her and Erin was one of the glaringly obvious obstacles standing in the way of them ever becoming more than friends.

“Twenty-two going on thirteen,” Marisol said between more laughter.

She wasn’t exactly wrong, but Blair wasn’t in the mood for her teasing right now.

“Are you going to do it or not?”

“Ouch. For someone asking for a favor, you’re not being very nice right now.”

Blair sighed. Marisol wasn’t wrong. “I know. I’m sorry. I just really want to do something nice for her.”

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“Dude, you’ve got it so bad, which is exactly why I’m going to do this for you. Let me make sure Damien is down for a last minute, impromptu trip to the beach.”

“Ah! You’re the best!” Blair was so excited she could have screamed. She didn’t, of course, since that would’ve woken Erin up and ruined the amazing surprise she had planned for the next day.

Chapter 18

Erin

When Erin awoke on the fourth day of their beach vacation, she was surprised to find Blair not only awake, but also staring at her. As soon as Blair noticed Erin had opened her eyes, she snapped her own shut. Erin giggled because Blair was so unsmooth.

“I know you’re awake,” she whispered. “I saw you watching me, creep.”

“Was not,” Blair said, her eyes still forced shut.

This made Erin laugh even harder. “If you weren’t watching me, then how do you know I was talking to you? I could’ve been talking to Nolan.”

Blair opened her eyes and looked at Nolan who was miraculously still fast asleep between them. “Anyway, what’s the plan for today?”

Erin shrugged. Why was Blair suddenly worried about their plan? She was normally

all about going wherever the day took them. “Beach? Pool? I don’t know.” She looked at Nolan. “Dowereally have a choice?”

Blair laughed. “Good point.”

As if he sensed they were talking about him, Nolan’s eyes popped open at that very moment. “Is it done raining?”

“It is, which means today is going to be a very special day!” Blair said, sounding way too excited. She jumped out of the bed and held her hand out toward Nolan. “Speaking of which, will you come with me, buddy?”

“Secrets?” Nolan asked excitedly as he took Blair’s hand and jumped out of the bed as well.

“What am I? Chopped liver?” Erin asked jokingly. Although, she was extremely curious what the hell Blair was up to.

“Don’t worry about it,” Blair said with a devious smile.

“Yeah, Mommy. Don’t worry about it,” Nolan repeated.

The two of them walked out of the room before Erin could ask any more questions. It’s fine. Nolan can’t keep a secret to save his life. He’ll tell me as soon as he walks back in.

Erin waited for what seemed like forever, but in reality, was probably just a few minutes. When Blair and Nolan finally came back into the room, Nolan had his hand over his mouth and was giggling.

“What’s so funny?” Erin asked him.

“We have a special day,” he said between giggles.

What the hell does that even mean? Erin looked from Nolan to Blair. “What’s going on?”

Blair smirked and crossed her arms over her chest. “Don’t worry. You’ll find out soon enough.”

Nolan stared at Blair for a few seconds then copied her stance. “Yeah, Mommy. You find out enough.”

The rest of the morning and into the afternoon was spent with Nolan and Blair whispering to each other while Erin tried to figure out what the hell they were planning. A mission she had failed at so far. After they spent most of the day at the pool and managed to coax Nolan to at least go onto the sand, Blair announced it was time to go back to the hotel.

“And why are we going back to the hotel?” Erin asked. She had been waiting hours to find out what was happening. Blair had to finally tell her.

Apparently, she was wrong. Blair’s only response was to shrug and pack up their beach bags. As they walked to the hotel, Erin tried to think of what Blair could possibly have planned, but she kept coming up blank.

As soon as they walked into the hotel lobby, Blair shouted, “There they are!”

Erin looked across the lobby to find Blair’s best friend, Marisol, standing beside a guy, waving to them. That was strange. Erin had enjoyed Marisol when she met her at the Fourth of July party, and Nolan had also taken to her quicker than he usually took to most people, but was this the surprise? Blair invited her friends to hang out with them? Erin didn’t care, of course. She just didn’t understand why it had to be such a

big secret.

“Have fun, Mommy!” Nolan said, before skipping away from them right over to Marisol.

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“What is he talking about?” Erin whispered to Blair as they walked after him. She still wasn’t following at all.

Blair smiled proudly. “Marisol and Damien are going to watch Nolan for the next few hours.” She looked over at Erin and became more serious. “Don’t worry. They both worked at a camp for six weeks this summer and are great with kids. You can trust them way more than you probably should’ve trusted me at the beginning of the summer. I also asked Nolan if he was comfortable with spending some time with them.” Blair pointed to where Nolan was already chatting animatedly to their new guests. “As you can see, he is.”

“Okay. But why—” Erin halted to a stop when she realized why Blair had done all of this. It was for her. It was because of their conversation yesterday. “Y-you did this for me?”

Blair stopped beside her, put her hands in her pockets, and rocked back and forth on the balls of her feet, looking not quite as sure of herself anymore. “Of course. It sounded like you could use some adult time, and I figured since I’m the closest thing to an adult here, we could spend it together. It’s completely up to you what we do, but we do have dinner reservations at seven. I figured that would get us back in time to grab Nolan from Marisol and Damien to put him down for an only somewhat-delayed bedtime.”

“You really thought all of this through, didn’t you?” Erin felt tears threatening to fall. No one had ever done something this sweet for her. And Blair had put it all together so quickly without missing a single detail.

“Of course. You deserve all the best things in the world. It’s not much, but it’s the least I can do.”

Not much? Erin wanted to forget all about her worries and kiss Blair right there in the lobby. She wanted to drag Blair back to their hotel room and... well... do a lot more than kissing. Of course, she wasn’t going to do any of that, but god, this woman really might be perfect. “It’s everything, Blair. It’s everything.” Her voice cracked when she said the words because she was still on the verge of tears.

Blair started walking again and motioned for Erin to follow and soon they were standing in front of Marisol and the guy who was, apparently, named Damien.

Nolan jumped up and down once they reached them. “Mommy! Guess what? I’m going on rides! So many rides.”

“Ah yes.” Blair reached into her pocket and pulled something out. “Three all-you-can ride wristbands. Go crazy.”

Marisol snatched the wristbands from Blair. “Don’t worry. We’re going to have so much fun.” Marisol looked from Blair to Erin. “And don’t you worry either. We are much more responsible than Blair. He’s in good hands.”

Erin didn’t doubt he would be well taken care of, but before she did anything, she needed to make sure Nolan was actually okay with all of this. She knelt down in front of him. “Are you going to be okay without Mommy for a few hours?” she asked.

Nolan nodded an excessive amount of times. “I’m a big boy. I need big boy time without you!”

Erin laughed as she stood back up. That answers that. “The man has spoken. I’m not needed.”

After saying goodbye to Nolan, Erin found she had a hard time walking away. She was excited about her time with Blair, but she had gotten so used to not having time to herself and she felt guilty for finally taking some.

“You know, we don’t have to do this if you don’t want to,” Blair whispered to her.

“I want to. I really do.” Erin took a deep breath and forced a smile. “I’m sorry. It’s just such a weird concept for me to actually have time to myself. I can’t help but feel guilty.”

Blair pointed to where Nolan was skipping away from them, not bothering to give them a second look as he held both Marisol’s and Damien’s hands. “Don’t worry. I don’t think you have anything to feel guilty about.”

“I think you’re right.” Erin focused her attention on Blair, who was already smiling at her. “So, what’s the plan?”

“Like I said, dinner reservations are at seven, so I figure we should start getting ready around 5 or 5:30.” Blair pulled her phone out of her pocket. “That gives us about two hours to do whatever you want.”

“WhateverIwant?” That was the problem. Erin had no idea what she wanted. Well, aside from the forbidden fruit standing beside her she absolutely couldnothave, no matter how freaking sweet she was.

“Yep. The sky’s the limit.”

Blair probably expected Erin to have some elaborate idea of what she wanted to do, but the wonderful idea that popped into her head was far from elaborate. “Can we go back to the beach and lay in silence?” Being at the beach without someone throwing sand and yelling at her to build more sandcastles sounded glorious.

Blair laughed. “That works for me. I’ll do my best to keep my mouth shut.”

Erin playfully elbowed Blair in the side. “I guess you can talk a little bit.”

Blair put a hand on her chest. “Wow. Thank you so much. I feel so special.”

Once they were laying out on the beach, Erin realized how tired she was. She tried her best to stifle her yawn, but failed miserably.

“You can take a nap if you want to. I won’t be offended.”

“No, I’m good.” Another yawn. “Seriously. You were nice enough to plan this all out for me. I’m not going to ignore you while I rest.”

“Tonight is all about you. If you need rest, then get some. You deserve it.”

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“Thank you.” Erin got herself into a comfortable position on her towel and shut her eyes. She honestly couldn’t remember the last time she felt this relaxed. She listened to the sounds of the ocean and enjoyed the laughter of the children that didn’t belong to her. “You know I love Nolan more than anything in the world, but oh my god, this is wonderful.”

“I’m really glad you’re happy,” Blair said softly.

Erin opened her eyes to find Blair watching her with complete awe. It was as though Blair actually saw her as something magnificent. When Blair looked at her that way, it made Erin believe that she was special. For the first time in much too long, it felt like she was important to someone other than just Nolan. It felt like floating. “Blair, I...” Erin cut herself off because she had no idea what she was about to say and nothing good could come of whatever was about to come out of her mouth.

Blair nodded as though she understood every word Erin was holding inside. “I know. Just get some rest, okay?”

Erin listened to Blair and drifted off to sleep feeling as though nothing in the world could hurt her. It felt like she had just fallen asleep when there was a tap on her arm. Erin struggled to open her eyes as the bright sun shined down on her. “Did... did I fall asleep?”

Blair laughed. “Yeah. You’ve been out for over an hour. I was just wondering if you wanted to keep resting or if there is anything else you want to do before we start getting ready for dinner.”

Erin definitely didn't need more rest. She felt amazing right now. But she also didn't have any sort of idea what to do next. "What if we... go back to the hotel and get ready now, then once we are, we can go for a walk on the boardwalk until it's time for dinner."

"I love that idea."

They gathered up their beach supplies, then headed back to the hotel where they both took showers to wash off the sand. It took all of Erin's willpower to not touch herself in the shower the way Blair clearly had the day before, because she knew Blair would somehow figure out what she was doing and it would make things very tense at dinner.

"Want me to put on some music?" Blair asked as soon as Erin, wrapped only in a towel, came out of the bathroom.

Much to Erin's surprise, Blair was still in her own towel as well. Knowing the only thing separating their naked bodies was two thin pieces of fabric made Erin's heart race. Calm down. Nothing is going to happen. Control yourself.

"How about you put on that deejay you like? What's his name again? Scratch and Sniff?" Erin knew that wasn't actually his name, but she loved to tease Blair about her horrible taste in music. Still, she was willing to listen to it if it would make Blair happy.

Blair rolled her eyes at Erin. "It's Skratch Sick. And are you sure? His music is a little loud."

Erin put her hands on her hips to try to act as if she was offended. "You think I can't handle a little volume to my music? I might be older than you, but I'm not that old."

“Fine. You win. I’ll put on the best music in the world.”

Blair hit a few buttons on her phone before noise that Erin would never in a million years refer to as the best music in the world started to scream from the speakers. After a few beats, the song grew on her the slightest bit, so she decided to make the most of it. She danced around the room in her towel, something she had forgotten she used to do all the time before... well, before life got so damn hard. It was fun and freeing to let her body move openly like this, so much so she didn’t even care she probably looked like a complete idiot.

“No, please.” Blair stepped in front of her and grabbed her hands. “Please tell me you’re not doing finger guns right now.”

“I’m—” Erin looked down at her fingers that were, indeed, still in the shape of tiny guns. “What? Are finger guns not rizz enough for you?” Erin was sure she wasn’t using that word correctly, but she had heard it on TikTok so many times, she figured she could use it to take the attention off of her terrible dancing.

Blair chuckled. “Please never say that again.”

Erin laughed along with her but stopped abruptly once she realized the position they were in. She and Blair were standing face to face, just inches apart, both in towels, while Blair continued to hold her hands tightly. Erin struggled to catch her breath as her heart beat out of her chest. She had done such a good job controlling herself around Blair, but what the hell was she supposed to do now? She couldn’t even form a coherent thought. Blair was essentially naked and standing right in front of her, looking at her as if she wanted to eat her up. And that was exactly what Erin wanted.

“I can’t ever stop thinking about kissing you,” Erin whispered between deep breaths. It sounded so sultry, she barely recognized her own voice.

Blair moved her gaze to Erin's lips before looking deeply into her eyes again. She felt like she was crashing through every layer Erin had tried to put between them and staring right into her soul. "Then do it."

"I can't. We can't. It's—" Erin tried to think of all the reasons why this was a bad idea, but right now, all she could think about was finally having Blair the way she had been dreaming about.

"Just this once. It doesn't have to mean anything. We'll get it out of our systems and then maybe we can move on."

Erin wasn't sure moving on was a possibility when it came to Blair Breckenridge, but she was too far gone to stop where this was clearly going.

Blair moved closer, so her lips were just a breath away from Erin's. "Tell me to stop and I will."

Erin shook her head. "I can't tell you that. I don't want you to stop. I... I need..."

Instead of finishing her sentence, Erin closed the little bit of distance left between them and finally... finally...finallykissed Blair. It was everything she had dreamed of, plus so much more. Blair kissed the same way she did everything else in life, with a passion that made Erin feel like they were the only two people who existed in the entire world. Her kisses were soft and slow, as if she was worried that if she moved too fast, Erin might break.

Erin wasn't sure who opened their mouth to the other first, but when their tongues met for the first time, her body sprang to life. It was as though she had lost all power, and someone finally flipped the switch to turn her back on. Even though Blair was barely touching her, Erin could feel her everywhere. But she wanted more. She needed more.

When Erin pulled away to tell Blair that, it was too late. Blair already knew. She always knew. Blair brought her fingers to the spot where Erin's towel was tied together. The only thing keeping her covered. Safe. But she didn't want to be safe. Not right now.

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“Is... is this okay?” Blair asked as she teased the loose knot.

Erin nodded. There was so much she wanted to say, but she couldn't get the words out. “Please,” she finally pushed out in a breathless whisper. “I need you. I needallof you.”

Blair's lips tilted into the most perfect smile before she moved her fingers to free the towel from Erin's body. Erin always figured that when she was finally naked around someone, her immediate reaction would be to cover up, but she didn't bother to reach for the towel as it drifted toward the ground between them. Because this wasn't scary. This was Blair. Blair, who had proven time and time again that she would take care of her.

Blair's eyes ran over Erin's body so slowly, Erin thought she might lose all function from that stare alone. She felt seen for the first time in... honestly, maybe ever. When their eyes met, Blair swallowed hard, her throat appearing to move in slow motion as Erin watched her every move. Blair pushed a piece of hair behind Erin's ear as she continued to stare. “I've dreamed about your body and even the best dream could never do you justice. You're perfect.”

Could someone come from words alone? Because Blair's words made Erin's body thrum, like she could tip over the precipice at any moment. “You've dreamed about me?”

“Every single day since the moment I met you.”

Erin crashed her mouth back into Blair's. She was too perfect. This moment was too

perfect. Erin needed somewhere to put all of her extra energy, and Blair's lips seemed like the perfect spot for that. Blair's hands rested on Erin's hips and Erin's skin burned underneath them. She wanted those hands all over her. But first, she wanted something else.

As she continued to enjoy the taste of Blair's tongue, she brought her hand up to remove Blair's towel. When she felt the towel hit her feet, she forced herself to pull away from the kiss so she could take in the woman standing in front of her. Except Blair was no woman. She was an absolute goddess. Erin was pretty sure Blair didn't have any flaws.

Blair growled, and in one fluid motion, she lifted Erin off of the ground. Erin wrapped her legs around Blair's waist while Blair carried her through their hotel room and over to the bed that had gone mostly unused all week. Blair gently laid Erin down on the bed and crawled on top of her. Their bare chests touched as they both took deep, heaving breaths.

Blair watched Erin as though she were seeing her for the first time. "There are so many things I want to do with you, and I plan to get to all of that, but first, I want to worship you." Blair peppered kisses down Erin's jaw and across her neck. "Because you deserve to be worshipped like the queen you are."

Erin had never felt like much of a queen until that moment, but as Blair continued her path of kisses, Erin actually believed everything she was saying. When Blair kissed across the tops of Erin's breasts, she truly thought it couldn't get any better, but then she ran her tongue across Erin's nipple before bringing it into her mouth. As her mouth satisfied the one nipple, her fingers worked on the other. Erin clawed at Blair's back, desperate to touch any part of her.

Blair pulled away and smiled down at Erin. "Not yet. You'll have your turn. I promise. But first, you need to let me take care of you." Blair kissed across Erin's

chest again and whispered, “You don’t let people take care of you enough.”

Her kisses moved lower, and she continued to use her hands to tease Erin’s nipples while she kissed down her stomach. When she reached the spot between Erin’s legs, she stopped and looked up. “And you’re sure you’re okay with this, right?”

Her question only served to turn Erin on even more and even though she couldn’t form words, her vigorous nodding must have been good enough for Blair, because, without hesitation, she licked a long trail up Erin’s center.

Holy shit. Erin was seeing stars already.

Instead of staying in that spot, Blair moved her kisses to Erin’s leg and slowly made her way down it, tracing the spots she kissed with her fingers and leaving a trail of goosebumps behind. When she made it to Erin’s foot, she took it in her hand and massaged it as if she was a professional masseuse. Erin had no idea a foot massage could be foreplay, but fucking hell, it was.

She switched from one foot to the other, then kissed her way back up Erin’s other leg. When she reached the spot where Erin needed her, her tongue stroked her center as before. Blair then took Erin’s legs and placed them over her shoulders, putting her mouth even tighter up against Erin. Her tongue was so busy, Erin was sure Blair would have licked her dry if it was not for the pleasure coursing through her body, causing her to get more and more wet. Blair sucked Erin’s clit into her mouth as if she was sucking water from a bottle in the middle of the desert. It was as if she might actually die if she didn’t drink all of Erin up, and Erin felt the exact same way. She wanted Blair to use her until she had nothing left to give. And Blair must have known, because she did.

Blair replaced her mouth with her fingers and played with Erin’s clit while she moved her tongue closer and closer to Erin’s opening. Erin was just about to beg, but she

didn't need to. As Blair's fingers worked their magic, she fucked Erin with her tongue. Every push of her tongue sent Erin closer and closer to the edge, and she knew it was only a matter of time before she toppled over it. Her hands moved into Blair's hair, and she held Blair up against her center.

Erin's hips started to move on their own, pushing into Blair's tongue and causing it to go even deeper inside of her. She tried to hold the orgasm off as long as she could, but when Blair curled her tongue perfectly inside of her and hit just the right spot, she was a goner.

Erin's eyes slammed shut and she was pretty sure she screamed, "Fuck," but she was having such an out-of-body experience that she honestly had no idea.

She was still seeing stars when Blair pulled away and kissed her way back up Erin's body. She placed a long hard kiss on Erin's lips before pulling back to look into her eyes.

Blair studied Erin's face while she ran a hand through Erin's hair. "I know you probably feel like you can't handle more right now, but trust me, you can. If you're willing, we're going to come together now. You don't have to do anything. I'll do all the work."

Blair could have asked her to fly to the moon at that moment and Erin would have said yes. "Do it. Fuck me."

Blair swallowed hard, clearly just as surprised by Erin's words as Erin was. Then she situated her body so her center was lined up with Erin's. When their centers touched for the first time, Erin was shocked at how wet Blair was already without Erin even touching her.

"You don't know what a turn-on it was to finally taste you," Blair said, as if she

could read Erin's mind.

"Fuuuuuck," Erin moaned. Blair's dirty talk was so fucking sexy.

When Blair pushed into Erin, Erin had no doubt she would come again. The mixing of their pleasures was a new level of paradise that Erin had never experienced before. The faster Blair moved, the closer Erin came to the edge. Blair was unquestionably getting closer as well because her movements were becoming more erratic. She was losing control as she rode Erin, and it was the sexiest fucking thing Erin had ever seen. Blair squeezed her eyes shut and bit her bottom lip as she ground into Erin. Erin pushed her hips up and watched as the orgasm hit Blair. Blair's mouth flew open, and her head shot back as the sexiest moan escaped from the back of her throat. That was all Erin needed to come as well, her orgasm hitting as Blair's finished.

Before Erin could comprehend what was happening, Blair shoved a finger deep inside of her. Holy shit. Is she going for round three already?

"Blair... I... I don't think I can come again so soon."

"Is it okay if I try?" The look of determination on Blair's face was so incredibly hot, Erin was immediately rethinking her hesitation.

“Yes. Fuck. Yes.”

Blair didn't just try. She succeeded. She moved her finger in and out of Erin with such intensity, Erin couldn't tell which way was up anymore. The world had completely turned on its axis. Then Blair added a second finger and curled them inside of Erin until a warm liquid poured out of her, soaking Blair's hand. Until that moment, she didn't even know it was possible for anyone, especially her, to come that hard.

“Fuck,” she said once again.

Blair removed her fingers from Erin and licked them clean, a move that would have had Erin turned on all over again if she could function at all, then laid down beside her. “Yeah?” she asked with a satisfied smile.

“Yes.” Erin put her hand on her chest as she struggled to catch her breath. “Just wait. Once I can breathe again, it's your turn.”

She just hoped she was capable of achieving half of what Blair did to her.

Chapter 19

Blair

Blair had not given Erin a chance to touch her yet, and this had already been the best sex of her life. Erin was vocal and reactive and oh so sexy. Blair wanted to spend the whole night worshipping her, but they didn't have the whole night so she would make

it her mission to take advantage of the time they did have. Especially if Erin had taken her seriously when she said it could be a one-time thing. That was the last thing Blair wanted, but she was not going to harp on that right now.

“Is it okay if I get something?” Erin asked between deep breaths.

“Something? What kind of something?” Blair asked, even though she had a pretty good idea what kind of something it might be, and the fact that Erin had some sort of sex toy with her had Blair extremely turned on.

“You’ll see.” Erin smirked and stood from the bed, her naked body fully on display for Blair to see, and holy fuck, what a sight it was.

Erin went through her bag and pulled out what appeared to be a small vibrator. Blair could barely breathe as she stared at the object in Erin’s hand. Still, she couldn’t resist the urge to tease her after what Erin had put her through the other day.

“So, you made fun of me for masturbating in the shower, when you brought a vibrator along on this trip?”

“I may have brought it, but I didn’t actually use it. From the sounds of it, you did actually masturbate in the shower, though.”

“Can you blame me?” Blair asked with a laugh. “You’re so fucking hot. How was I supposed to make it through a whole week sharing a bed with you and not touch myself while picturing your face.”

Erin’s smile dropped and she swallowed hard. “You were picturing me?”

Blair laughed. “Of course I was. I was so turned on just from kissing your neck, I thought I might explode. I had to get it out.”

Erin dropped the toy on the nightstand, but didn't make a move to get back in the bed. "Show me."

"Show you what?" The air was thick between them and Blair was ready to come just from all of this sexual tension.

Erin nodded her head toward the bathroom. "Go in the shower and show me how you got yourself off. Tell me what you were thinking about while you did it. I promise I'll finally get you off after you show me, but I need to see this first. Please?" Erin added as if it would actually take any convincing to get Blair to do that.

Blair hopped out of the bed and practically ran to the bathroom, turning on the shower as soon as she got inside. She kept the water cool hoping it would chill her out a bit, but it was no use. When Erin licked her lips as Blair stepped into the shower, Blair knew she was completely done for.

Just like that morning in the shower, she wasted no time moving her hand between her legs. "I touched myself like this while I closed my eyes and pictured you." Instead of closing her eyes this time, Blair stared straight into Erin's as she ran her fingers over herself. "I pictured those eyes and that smile and that fucking sexy body." Watching Erin was such a turn-on that she was already getting close. She moved her hips against her hand as her fingers went to work. She moved to her opening and shoved two deep inside of herself. "I pretended it was you touching me like this and, I... I..." Fuck, I'm so close. "And it was these thoughts that made me come all over my hand. The..." Blair struggled to catch her breath as her fingers moved faster of their own volition. "The same way I'm going to right now." As if she had planned it, Blair's orgasm shot through her at that very moment. She closed her eyes and bit her bottom lip as she tried to come down from this high.

She was so distracted by her own orgasm she didn't even realize Erin had gotten into the shower with her until she felt a tongue on her clit. Holy shit! She's going right

in. Blair moved her hands into Erin's hair because she was ready for her.

When Erin pulled away from her, Blair wanted to scream in frustration, but the words that left Erin's lips took all of that frustration away. "You taste even better than I expected. I want to suck you dry."

Blair would've never expected Erin to be someone who talked dirty during sex, and the shock value made it that much sexier. Erin moved her head back between Blair's legs and immediately sucked Blair's clit into her mouth.

"Fuuuuck," Blair groaned as Erin fulfilled her dirty promise.

Erin's tongue remained on Blair's clit while she penetrated her with one finger, followed by another, and then finally, a third. She moved her fingers in and out of Blair while she continued to lap at her clit with her tongue. She sucked Blair's clit back into her mouth at the same time she curled her fingers inside of Blair, and Blair fell apart all over again.

As Blair held on to the side of the shower and tried to recover, Erin stood up and turned off the water. She took Blair's hands and held them above her head as she pushed her against the back of the shower and kissed her in a way she had never been kissed before. It was hard, yet somehow also soft. It was rushed without being sloppy.

Erin let go of Blair's hands then brought hers over Blair's chest and squeezed her breasts so hard it caused a pain that Blair loved. "Wanna get back in bed, so my vibrator can actually get a bit of action on this trip?"

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Blair chuckled between deep breaths. “Definitely. Wouldn’t want it to feel left out.”

The alarm went off on Blair’s phone as she struggled to catch her breath from yet another amazing orgasm. “Shit. I set that as a reminder of our dinner reservations. We’re supposed to be there in a half hour.” But I really don’t want to get out of this bed.

“Can I be honest?” Erin asked with a laugh. “It’s super sweet you made those reservations, but the last thing I want to do right now is leave this room.”

“Oh, thank god.” Blair burst into laughter as well. She couldn’t help it. She was so fucking happy right now. “I don’t want to either.”

“Room service?”

Blair held up her pointer finger. “One condition.” She made a point of running her eyes up and down Erin’s body, which was not a hard task, becausefuck, this woman was hot. “You have to eat naked.”

Erin smirked and lifted her eyebrows. “I will if you will.”

Blair laughed again. “Oh, you don’t have to worry about that. I have no plans of putting my clothes on.”

After ordering almost everything on the menu, Blair and Erin made small talk while

they waited for the food to arrive. It was so normal and mundane and everything Blair wanted for the rest of her life. Speaking of which... "I kind of lied earlier," Blair said hesitantly. She hated to burst this sex haze they were in, but she needed to say this before she chickened out.

Erin sat up in the bed, a look of concern overtaking her face. "What do you mean? About what?"

Blair took Erin's hand and held it between hers. "It's nothing bad. I promise." Blair took a deep breath through her nose and blew it out through her mouth. This was definitely the most vulnerable she had ever been with a woman. "I just... I didn't actually want that to be a one-time thing. I know you said it would never work, but I want more than just sex. I want sleepy good mornings and goodnight kisses and yeah, I want more sex, but I want the big messy feelings that come along with it."

Blair could see it written all over Erin's face the moment the words left her mouth. Whatever Erin had to say was not going to lead to their happily ever after. "Listen, what just happened between us was the most magical experience of my entire life, but it can't happen again. I wish I could open my heart to you completely, but it's too big of a risk."

"Why is it such a risk?"

"Blair, when I interviewed you for this babysitting position, you made it sound like you really never wanted children. When you date a single mom, you're not just dating her."

"I know." Blair squeezed Erin's hand and scooted closer to her. "I don't just want a relationship with you. I'm in this for both of you."

"I'm just..." Blair wasn't expecting Erin to burst into tears, but that was exactly what

happened. “I’m too scared. I’m not ready.”

Blair used one hand to rub Erin’s back. “It’s okay. I’m willing to wait until you are, until then we can be strictly friends. No funny business until you’re ready.”

“But what if I can’t get there? What if I’m never ready?”

Blair shrugged. It was getting harder to keep a smile on her face. “Then at least I can say that I tried.”

Erin threw her hands in the air. “You shouldn’t have to. It’s not fair to you. My past shouldn’t shape your future.”

Blair was losing her and needed to do something to bring her back down to earth. “Shh. It’s okay.” She wrapped both arms around Erin and held her tight. “How ’bout this? Let’s take it one day at a time and see what happens. Just don’t count me out, okay?”

“One day at a time?” Erin asked, sounding more hopeful now.

Blair nodded slowly. “One day at a time.”

Erin nodded too. “Okay. I can do that.”

Hopefully I can too, Blair thought to herself.

After two more hours of eating and chatting over much lighter topics, Blair decided they should probably relieve Marisol. They both reluctantly got dressed, then Blair texted Marisol to say they were done eating and back at their hotel room.

Perfect timing, Marisol texted back, We were just heading that way.

Less than five minutes later, there was a knock at the hotel room door. “Mommy? Bear?”

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Blair didn't realize how much she had missed Nolan these past few hours until she heard his sweet little voice. She jumped out of bed to run to the door and greet him. "Coming, buddy!"

As soon as she opened the door, Nolan jumped into her arms. "Bear! I missed you."

Blair chuckled and held him tightly. "I missed you too."

"Did you have a good time?" Erin asked as she walked up behind Blair and Nolan and placed a hand on Blair's shoulder.

"I had the best time!" Nolan wiggled out of Blair's arms and jumped into his mom's arms. "We went on so many rides."

"That's amazing." Blair focused her attention on Marisol and Damien, who were still standing in the doorway. "I can't thank you two enough for doing that for us."

Marisol crinkled her eyebrows as she stared at Blair, studying her face as if she was looking for the answer to a question she hadn't asked. "Did you two have fun?" She looked between Blair and Erin. Blair could hardly stand still under the heat of her stare.

"We had a really nice time," Erin answered before Blair could. "It was very refreshing."

"Refreshing. Huh." Marisol nodded and looked at Blair. "Can we talk out here really quick?" She now moved her gaze to Erin. "Just a quick bestie chat. I won't keep her

for long, I promise.”

Erin waved a hand at them. “Take your time. After keeping my son entertained these past few hours, the least I can do is give you a few minutes with your best friend.”

Blair nodded and followed Marisol out into the hallway. Marisol took a few dollar bills out of her pocket and handed them to Damien. “Sweetie, could you go get me a soda from the vending machine?”

“You got it.” Damien snatched the money from her and walked down the hall.

Marisol watched him retreat, and as soon as he was out of view, she turned on her heels to stare at Blair. She crossed her arms over her chest and lifted one eyebrow. “I thought you said this wasn’t a date.”

“It... it wasn’t.”

“Oh yeah?” Marisol smirked. “If it wasn’t a date, why did you have sex with her?”

“I didn’t ha—” Blair sighed. There was no sense in lying to her best friend. She clearly already knew the truth. “How do you know we had sex?”

Marisol laughed and clapped her hands together. “We’ve been best friends forever. It’s written all over your face.”

Blair shrugged. “It just kind of happened, I guess.”

“You just happened to take her clothes off and give her an orgasm?” Marisol asked sarcastically.

“Technically, all she was wearing at the time was a towel. And also, there wasn’t

justoneorgasm.” Blair smiled proudly as she thought about Erin’s face as she fell apart beneath her. God, that woman is sexy.

“So, what does this mean?” Marisol asked. “Are you two, like, together?”

Blair shook her head. “It’s not like that.” Even if I really wish it was.

Marisol wiggled her eyebrows, clearly ready for some hot gossip Blair wasn’t able to give her. “So, this was just a hot babysitter hook up?”

Blair cringed. She hated the beautiful thing that had happened between them being equated to a random hook up. “No, it was definitely more than that.”

“Okay.” Marisol moved her hand in a go on motion, prompting Blair to tell her more. “You’re really slacking on the details here.”

Blair sighed. Clearly Marisol wasn’t going to let her get away with giving the bare minimum. “I want this to be more, but Erin isn’t ready. She’s been burned by multiple people in the past, and she’s worried I’m going to do the same.”

Marisol’s eyes went wide as she softened her tone a bit. “I mean I can’t say I blame her there.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Blair didn’t mean to get defensive, but if her own best friend wasn’t on her side, who would be?

Marisol shrugged. “You know I love you more than anything in the world, Blair, but you went from never dating to suddenly wanting to date someone with a child. I can’t help but wonder if you’ve really thought this through, or if you’re just being impulsive. You do have a tendency of doing that.”

She wasn't wrong. Blair often had the tendency to jump into decisions without thinking them through. But this was different. Right? Shit. Now, Blair was questioning herself too. If both Erin and Marisol thought she wasn't ready to take this on, there must be some validity to it. Blair didn't want to admit that though, so she crossed her arms over her chest. "I'm going to prove you wrong. Both of you."

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Marisol smirked. “Good. I hope you do.” She reached out and squeezed Blair’s hand. “But please do me a favor and protect your heart in the process. You could end up getting really hurt.”

It was too late for that. Blair had already given her heart away, and in the end, if Erin didn’t want her, Blair knew it would shatter her. “I will. I’ll protect it,” Blair said, knowing she had just lied to her best friend for the very first time.

“Good.” Marisol leaned in and gave Blair a kiss on the cheek. “Go have fun with those two. You were right about Nolan. That kid is completely feral, but he’s also the most amazing child in the entire world.”

“Right?” Blair couldn’t help but smile because she knew exactly who he got that from.

The smile didn’t leave her face as she said goodbye to Marisol and went back into the hotel room. “Someone looks happy,” Erin said as soon as she walked back in the door.

“I am happy. I’m very happy.”

“Bear!” Nolan bounced over to her and hugged her legs. “Mommy told me you guys had so much fun.”

“She said that, huh?” Blair smirked and lifted an eyebrow at Erin, who flipped her off behind Nolan’s back.

“Yep.” Nolan brought a hand up to his mouth and yawned loudly. “I’m really tired. Can we go to bed?”

“You’re asking to go to bed?” Erin looked from Nolan to Blair. “We need to have Marisol watch him more often. This never happens.”

We. Blair loved the sound of that, but she also knew she couldn’t allow herself to read into it too much. Erin had been very honest about not being ready for anything.

After getting themselves and Nolan ready for bed, all three of them climbed into the one that hadn’t been used for the night’s earlier activities. Within minutes of laying down, Nolan was fast asleep.

Blair reached her arm over his head and wiggled her fingers on the off-chance Erin felt comfortable holding her hand. “I had a lot of fun on this trip,” Blair whispered to her.

Erin intertwined their fingers and squeezed Blair’s hand. “I’m sure you did.”

Blair chuckled at her tone. “Don’t get me wrong, tonight was amazing, but I meant the whole trip. It’s been wonderful, and I really don’t want it to end.”

Erin watched Blair for a long time without saying a word, and when she finally spoke, her voice was more serious. “Nolan and I were planning on leaving for my niece’s softball tournament as soon as we dropped you off on Saturday morning. Please don’t feel like you have to, but you’re welcome to come with us if you want.”

“Really? Back in your hometown? With your family?” Even though she was sure Erin didn’t see it that way, this was a huge step.

“Technically, she’s playing about an hour from my hometown, but yes, we’d be

staying in my hometown on Saturday night between games.”

“Count me in.”

Erin’s face lit up as if Blair had just told her she won the lottery. “Really?”

“Really. Let’s do it.”

Chapter 20

Erin

“Have I mentioned how excited I am to see where you grew up?” Blair asked, as she bounced up and down in the passenger’s seat.

Erin couldn’t help but laugh at her. She looked so much like a child, fidgeting around like she was way too excited to sit still. “Only about a million times.”

“Well, good, because it’s true. I can’t wait.”

“Don’t get too excited. You have to sit through three long softball games first.”

Blair shrugged. “That’s okay. I’m excited for that too.”

Erin had to admit, the older her niece got, the more interesting her softball games were, but that still didn’t mean she was overly hyped about spending the day watching inning after inning of the same thing. Especially when most of the day was going to be spent chasing a restless Nolan around. “We’ll see how you feel once Nolan is crawling all over you asking when we can leave and it’s only one inning into the first game.”

“I don’t do that!” Nolan shouted from the back seat.

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Erin had no doubt that was exactly what would happen, but she didn't want to argue with Nolan right now. This weekend was already going to be crazy enough since Erin invited the woman she had sex with and then told it couldn't be more than a one-time thing. As much as she had meant what she said to Blair about not being ready, she also didn't want to stop spending time with her. It was the complete opposite, actually. She wanted nothing more than to spend all of her time with Blair and frankly, that feeling scared the shit out of her.

With all of these thoughts keeping Erin's mind occupied, the drive from the beach to the softball field went by in no time. As soon as she stepped out of her car, she heard her sister's voice.

"There they are," April said as she walked over to the car to greet them. "How are you guys? How was the beach? I'm so jealous we couldn't go."

"It was wonderful," Erin said, pulling her sister in for a tight hug once she was close enough.

"When we can sneak away later, I want to hear all about what made it so wonderful," her sister whispered, as if she could already tell Erin's good mood was not only from the sun and sand.

Erin hoped April was mature enough not to act strange in front of Blair. She would find out shortly because April had already pulled away from her and was heading to the other side of the car.

"It's great to see you again," April said as she pulled Blair into her arms like they

were old friends.

“It’s great to see you too,” Blair said cheerfully. “I’m excited for some softball today.”

April laughed. “That makes one of us. I’ve already watched enough softball games to be set for a lifetime, but it looks like we’re just getting started with Sydney.” She walked past Blair and opened the back door of Erin’s car. “There’s my favorite nephew in the whole wide world. How was the beach, buddy?”

“It was so much fun,” Nolan said as April unhooked him from his car seat and he hopped out. “We went on the sand and in the pool and played in an arcade. I don’t like the ocean. It’s scary. But I loved everything else. And Da-men and Mar-sol took me on all the rides while Mommy and Bear had special time.”

Erin squeezed her eyes shut. Shit. Nolan really had no idea how right he was about their special time, but April was going to have a field day with this. When she walked around the front of the car holding Nolan’s hand, she looked at Erin with a raised eyebrow. “Special time?”

As Erin had a brief internal panic attack over how to respond, Blair spoke up. “I thought Erin could use some time with an adult, and since I was the closest thing to one, I decided to surprise her by having my friend Marisol and her boyfriend, Damien, come down the shore to watch Nolan for a few hours.”

“Aw, isn’t that the sweetest thing ever?” April asked before mouthing the words I really like her at Erin.

Erin simply smiled back at her sister because she wasn’t going to have this conversation right in front of Blair. It turned out she couldn’t avoid the conversation forever, and as soon as Sydney’s first game ended, April asked if she could walk to

the car with her to get an extra water bottle for Sydney.

“So, tell me more about this special time,” April said, once they were far enough away that Blair couldn’t possibly hear them. Thank god.

Erin shrugged. “It was nice. We hung out and... relaxed.” She could feel her face warming from the thought of what they had actually done. God, Erin wished she could get out of her own head so she could allow that to happen again.

“So, are you going to tell me the truth about what happened or am I going to have to keep making assumptions?” April looked at Erin and wiggled her eyebrows. “My assumptions are pretty damn fun, so I’m fine making them.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be my older, more mature sister?” Erin asked, trying to skirt around April’s question.

“Older, yes. I never claimed to be more mature.”

“Hmm. I thought the eight extra years you had on me would make that happen naturally.”

“I have a teenager now. She’s caused me to revert back to her level of maturity.” April shrugged. “Now, stop avoiding my questions and tell me what the hell happened. You know I’m going to get it out of you eventually, so you might as well just tell me now.”

Erin knew that was true. April had a way of always getting her to open up. It must have been included in the big sister handbook or something. “Fine. We had sex. You happy?”

April smiled in satisfaction. “Very. How was it?”

Erin groaned. Was April really going to make her go into excruciating detail about what happened? “It was seriously perfect.” Erin couldn’t help but get an extra skip to her step just from the thought of how gentle and caring Blair had been with her. In all the years she and Bianca were together, she had never felt that cared for. “Blair is... god, she’s seriously indescribable. But,” Erin felt like she was crashing back down to earth as she thought about the conversation that followed the most amazing sex of her life. “that’s exactly why it can’t happen again.”

“Okay. I’m confused. You look like you’re floating up into the clouds just from thinking about it, yet you’re saying it’s not going to happen again? Why not? Shit, Blair isn’t a fuck boy, is she? Did she have sex with you then blow it off as if it was nothing? Because, if that’s the case, I need to stop being so nice to her.”

Okay. Erin needed to just tell her sister the whole story, because this was getting out of control. “No, no. It’s not like that at all. Blair is perfect. She wasn’t trying to just have sex with me. If it was up to her, we would be dating.”

April stared at her, wide-eyed. “So, you’re the fuck boy?”

“No!” Erin practically shouted, gaining the attention of a few other people in the parking lot. “I’m just... I’m not ready to date yet. It’s barely over a year since Bianca left. I can’t do it.”

“Exactly,” her sister said as if she hadn’t listened to a word Erin just said. “Bianca left over a year ago after barely being present from the time Nolan was born. If you’re not ready now, when a young, sexy, cool woman is interested in you, when are you going to be ready?”

“That’s just the thing. I don’t think I ever will be.”

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April stopped to lean against the side of her car and sighed. “Well, you better figure that out because a girl like Blair isn’t going to wait around forever.”

“You’re right. And she shouldn’t. I’m not worth it.”

“You’re more than worth it, but until you realize that, nothing is ever going to work.”

Erin knew her sister was right, but she also didn’t know what to do about it. She couldn’t silence the voices in her head telling her no one would ever stay. “I know. I just... I think I’m broken.”

“You know the best part about things that are broken?” When Erin shook her head, her sister poked her in the chest. “They can be fixed.”

April grabbed the water bottle out of her car and a comfortable silence settled between the two of them as they walked back toward the softball field. Thank god. Erin wasn’t in the mood for any more lectures, even if they were completely warranted.

As they got closer to the bleachers, Erin spotted Blair at the exact moment Blair noticed her. Blair’s face lit up as she held two plastic bags in the air. “Guess what I got?”

Seeing as how they were at a softball tournament and not the mall, Erin had literally no idea. “A bunch of hot dogs?”

“Nope.” Blair pulled three T-shirts out of one of the bags, one by one. “Tournament

T-shirts. They have all the players' names listed on the back! How cool is that? Also," she pulled a hat out of the other bag and put it on her head, then pointed to it proudly. "I got hats for you and I that Sydney's team was selling."

"Wow. That's awesome," Erin said, trying to muster up as much excitement as possible. She could see Blair was clearly very proud of herself. The shirts and hats might not have been anything special, but Blair being this excited over them was fucking adorable.

"I know, right?" Blair picked up Nolan and rested his body against her hip. "I'm going to take Nolan to the bathroom so we can change into these. Feel free to join us if you want to put yours on too." Blair pretty much skipped away before Erin could answer.

"Okay, that's it," April whispered in her ear as they both watched Blair go. "If you don't date that girl, I might."

After a day full of softball and Nolan asking when they were leaving, they were finally back in the car. "So, anything I need to know about your hometown before we get there?" Blair asked, sounding just as excited as she had been hours before.

Does this girl ever get tired? Erin shook her head. "Not really. It's exactly what you'd expect from a small town in the middle of Pennsylvania. Not much to it."

"Awesome. Can't wait," Blair said, bouncing in her seat as if she was going to Disney World for the first time.

Erin couldn't help but laugh at her. "Why are you so excited? I just told you there was nothing to it."

Blair shrugged. “It’s where you grew up. Part of what made you you. I think that’s really cool and can’t wait to learn more about this part of your life.”

Every time Erin thought Blair couldn’t possibly get any sweeter, she proved her wrong. She wasn’t sure what to say, so she reached over and squeezed Blair’s hand. Just one touch of Blair’s fingers against hers made her want to hold Blair’s hand for the rest of their drive, but she also didn’t want to give her the wrong idea, so she forced herself to let go.

As soon as they arrived at the small, single-family home where Erin grew up, which wasn’t much bigger than the townhouse she shared with Nolan, she saw Nolan in the rearview mirror throwing his hands in the air. “Yay! Grandma’s house! I love grandma’s house!”

“So, there are two guest rooms,” Erin explained to Blair. “One has a twin-size bed and the other has a queen.”

She was about to say that she and Nolan could squeeze into the twin-size bed when Blair raised her hand. “I’ll take the twin.”

“Are you sure?” Erin asked. She knew it wasn’t the most comfortable bed. It was hers growing up, after all.

“Of course. I’m used to small beds from college.” She pointed a thumb back at Nolan. “Plus, I just shared a bed with that kid for the past week. I know how much space he takes up. I’m not making you squeeze into a small-ass bed with him.”

Erin laughed. “I really appreciate that.”

“Let’s go see grandma!” Nolan shouted from the backseat, clearly losing his patience.

Blair turned around and put her hand up for a high five. “Let’s do it.”

She jumped out of the car before Erin had a chance to unbuckle, and immediately opened Nolan’s door and helped him out of his car seat. By the time Erin got out of the car, Nolan and Blair were already walking toward the house hand in hand. She stood by the car and took a moment to appreciate the scene in front of her. Seeing Nolan and Blair together made Erin’s heart dance. It almost made her forget why she couldn’t just jump into things with Blair. Somehow, it simultaneously reminded her why she couldn’t. Nolan was so attached to Blair. If Erin did something to make her walk away, she could never forgive herself for how much that would hurt Nolan.

God, my emotions are all over the place.

The front door opened, and Erin’s mom walked out with her arms outstretched. “There’s my favorite little boy.”

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“Grandma!” Nolan dropped Blair’s hand and ran into his grandma’s arms.

Since Nolan was no longer having a moment with Blair, Erin could use her brain again and remembered their bags were still in the car. She opened the back door and grabbed her bag and Blair’s backpack before walking to the house.

“How was the beach?” her mom asked as she wrapped her in a tight hug.

The beach. Erin’s mind immediately went to Blair snuggling close to her, both of them completely naked. Then she remembered the way Blair took care of her while they had sex, not missing one inch of skin on Erin’s body. Erin heated up at the thought, all of the feelings running through her body going straight to her core. Great. “Great.” She cleared her throat. “It was a great trip.”

“That’s awesome. Blair and Nolan were just telling me how much fun you had.”

“We did!” Nolan bounced up and down for a few seconds, but when he stopped, a big yawn escaped from his mouth. He looked up at Erin with big, blinking eyes. “I’m really tired, Mommy.”

Erin put her hand on top of Nolan’s head. “I’m sure, buddy. It’s been a really long week. How ’bout we go to bed?”

Nolan shook his head back and forth. “No. I want to play with Grandma.”

Erin’s mom put her hand up to her mouth and let out an exaggerated yawn Erin had no doubt was fake. “You know what? I’m really tired too, so what do you say we get

a good night's sleep, then tomorrow we'll get breakfast and play before we go to Sydney's softball games?"

Nolan's face lit up. "Can I ride with you to the softball games?"

"As long as it's okay with your mommy, I don't see why that would be a problem." Erin's mom looked up at her as if silently asking for her permission.

"That's fine with me." It's one hour alone with Blair where I have to find a way to control myself, but I'm a grown adult. I can do it. Plus, I'll be driving. Even if I'm tempted to do something reckless, it won't be possible.

"Grandma, you read me story and tuck me in bed?" Nolan asked, distracting Erin from her internal pep talk.

When Erin's mom nodded, Erin pushed Nolan toward the door. "Let's go."

Instead of moving, Nolan put his hands on his hips and glared up at her. "Not you, Mommy. Grandma is tucking me in."

Erin laughed. She loved how this kid's whole world revolved around her one minute and the next, she was chopped liver. "She can tuck both of us in since we're sharing a bed."

Nolan shook his head back and forth vehemently. "No, we're not. I have my own room at Grandma's house. You sleep in your room."

Damnit. Why did Erin have to work so hard to convince Nolan the room with the twin-sized bed was all his the last time they were here? That plan had definitely backfired. "Well, Blair is with us this time, sweetheart, which means she needs to use your room."

“No!” Nolan screamed. “It’s my room. Not Bear’s. Bear can sleep with you.”

Nolan’s choice of words caused Erin to choke on her own saliva. “I don’t think Blair wants to do that.” Okay. Maybe she does. The problem is, so do I. Erin knew this was a losing battle, so she looked at Blair and shrugged. “I’m sorry. Technically, that is his room while we’re here, so I’ll just sleep on the couch.”

“Nonsense.” Blair looked way too happy about the direction this conversation had taken. “It’s a queen-size bed, right? We’re two small women. I’m sure we can sleep in it without... incidence.”

Blair’s choice of words didn’t go unnoticed by Erin, but if Blair truly thought they could control themselves while sleeping feet apart, who was Erin to argue with her? “Only if you’re sure,” she said hesitantly.

“I’m very sure.” Blair’s confidence didn’t do anything to make Erin feel better considering Erin found her confidence to be such a turn-on.

A little while later, after Nolan fell asleep and Erin and Blair got themselves ready, they crawled into bed together.

“Bet you didn’t think I’d end up in your bed again so soon, huh?” Blair asked with a laugh.

Erin rolled her eyes. This woman was incorrigible. The problem was she was also extremely hot and much too close to Erin right now. It was almost impossible to keep her hands to herself. “I can’t believe you only have three more weeks of babysitting left,” she said, desperate to talk about anything that would keep her mind off of how much she wanted to touch Blair right now. “Have you thought about what you want to do?”

Much to Erin's surprise, Blair nodded in response. "I already have a job lined up once I'm done watching Nolan."

"Seriously?" Erin really thought Blair would have mentioned that to her and felt a little bit hurt she hadn't. "I didn't even know you had any interviews."

Blair scooted a little bit closer to Erin, then reached out and grabbed her hand. "Yeah, sorry. I was worried I wouldn't get the job, and then I'd have to admit that I'm a complete fuck up. They offered me the position right before we went to the beach, and then, well, everything happened, so I wasn't sure if I should say anything."

Now Erin was really confused. Why would the two of them having sex make Blair think she couldn't tell Erin about her job? "I don't get it. You didn't think you should say anything because we had sex?"

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Blair squeezed Erin's hand as if she realized she needed the reassurance she didn't have anything to worry about. "I got a job at a daycare. Not Nolan's. As much as I would love that, I don't think I'd be able to treat him the same as every other kid, so I figured working there wasn't the best idea." Blair shook her head and turned her body more fully toward Erin. "Anyway, I didn't want to tell you about the daycare job because I didn't want you to think I only applied for it to prove something to you. It's not like that at all. Watching Nolan this summer showed me how much I enjoy children. Then, I saw an ad for a daycare that was hiring. It's within walking distance from my parents' house, so it almost seemed like fate or something."

"Wow. That's..." Erin lost all of her words as her gaze drifted from Blair's eyes, which had a look so sincere it made her lose her breath, down to her lips. Lips that somehow looked even more inviting after Blair's confession. This woman became more and more perfect every single day, and Erin could hardly stand it. Erin laughed and shook her head at herself. "God. Why is you telling me you got a job at a daycare such a turn-on? It's taking all of my self-control not to kiss you right now."

"I wouldn't stop you." Blair smirked and wiggled her eyebrows, and the move was so sexy it definitely did not make the urge to kiss her any less.

"I just... I can't." In three weeks, Blair would be done watching Nolan and they would no longer see each other every day. Blair would get busy with her own life, and it probably would not take her long to get over the crush she had on Erin. If Erin stayed strong now, it wouldn't hurt as badly when that inevitably happened. At least, she hoped it wouldn't. She couldn't go through another heartbreak.

"I figured." Blair's smile dropped as her eyes also dropped down toward the bed.

When she looked back up, her smile came back, but it didn't reach her eyes this time. "You know, there is something I wish we could've done that night at the beach that we didn't." Erin swallowed hard as her mind raced with all of the things Blair could be talking about, and Blair must have noticed because she chuckled in response. "Get your mind out of the gutter. It's nothing sexual. I was going to say that I wished I could've fallen asleep with you in my arms."

Be still my heart. Blair's words were too perfect, and the little smile on her face was way too cute. Even if Erin should say no, even if it was the smartest way to protect her heart, she couldn't do it. "I guess it couldn't hurt, right?"

Blair's smile grew. "I mean, I've never heard any reports of nighttime snuggles killing anyone, so I think we're safe." She held out her arm, and Erin easily fell into her as if that spot was made just for her.

Chapter 21

Blair

Blair sighed as she got into her car. Even though it was only Tuesday, it was her first week not babysitting Nolan, and she missed him and Erin already. She had thought about calling Erin when she was walking home from work on Monday to ask her if she wanted to do something, but she didn't want Erin to think she was overbearing.

She had chosen to drive today because she thought driving two minutes instead of walking ten would keep her from calling. The only problem was now that she was in her car, her internal autopilot didn't drive to her house. Instead, she headed straight to Erin's. When she pulled into Erin's neighborhood and saw her house in the distance, she thought about just turning around. Because, really, who just shows up at someone's house completely uninvited?

Unfortunately, she was about to turn around when Erin's front door opened, and Nolan came running out. Of course, Nolan was great with cars and recognized Blair's right away. He jumped up and down and pointed at her car while he said something to Erin that Blair couldn't hear.

Well, no turning back now.

Blair pulled into the driveway and waved to Nolan, who now stood right beside her car. She kept the car on and rolled down her window, because she didn't want to assume that Erin would want her to stay. "I just happened to be in the neighborhood..." She let her voice trail off as soon as she realized what a terrible lie that was.

"In the neighborhood, huh?" Erin asked with a laugh, clearly not buying it. "Funny. I didn't realize our neighborhood was a thoroughfare to get anywhere."

"Okay, you caught me. I missed you two."

Erin looked like she wanted to say something in response, but before she could, Nolan answered. "We missed you too, Bear! So, so much. I missed you lots, and Mommy missed you more."

"She did, huh?" Blair asked as she looked from Nolan to Erin. She loved the way Erin's cheeks immediately turned red in embarrassment. It was so fucking cute Blair could hardly stand it.

"It appears I've been called out as well." Erin smiled and it made the rest of the world disappear. All that existed was the two of them, and Blair could've spent all night staring at the beautiful woman standing outside of her car. Erin put her hand on the car and leaned closer to Blair's open window, almost looking like she might kiss her. Unfortunately, she stopped before their lips were close enough to meet. "Since you're

here, do you want to come in? Nolan was just about to go for a ride on his scooter, and then I'm going to make something for dinner. You're welcome to stay for both if you'd like."

"Are you sure? I don't want to intrude." Blair really hoped Erin was sure because there was nothing she wanted to do more than spend time with these two. Honestly, she would stay forever if Erin would let her.

"Of course. Nolan would love it." Erin leaned even closer and lowered her eyes. "I would love it too."

Blair didn't need to hear anything else. She turned off her car and hopped out without another word.

After doing a lap around the neighborhood, chasing after Nolan on his scooter, they went inside to make dinner. Blair took a deep breath as she entered the house, taking in the smell she had become so accustomed to. Even though it had only been a few days, walking into Erin and Nolan's house felt like coming home after a long trip.

"So, what are we making for dinner?" Blair asked as she followed Erin into the kitchen.

"We?" Erin asked with a laugh. "You're the guest, which means I'm doing the cooking."

"I'm the guest who essentially invited herself over, so I feel like it's only right if I help out."

"You know what would actually be a huge help?" Erin pointed toward the family room where Nolan was standing on his head on the couch. "Make sure he doesn't kill himself while I'm making dinner."

“I can do that!”

Blair walked into the other room, grabbed Nolan, and held him over her shoulder. He giggled as he kicked his legs and tried to break free. “Oh, I’m sorry. Did you want down?” Blair asked as Nolan continued to laugh and kick at her.

“Yes. Put me down, poopy butt.”

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Blair gently threw Nolan back onto the couch and pointed a finger at him. “Excuse me. Did you just call me a pooppy butt?”

Nolan laughed and nodded. “You’re a big smelly pooppy butt.”

Blair had no idea why a kid calling her names was making her so happy, but she couldn’t stop smiling as she attacked Nolan with tickles and enjoyed his laughter in response. She could really get used to this being her life—coming home from work to Nolan and Erin. One of them making dinner while the other entertained the kid. It sounded pretty damn perfect. It was also nothing but a fantasy because Erin hadn’t mentioned anything else about their beach rendezvous. It was actually the opposite. The last few weeks of babysitting had been kept completely professional, and Blair hated it. She wanted to flirt with Erin. She wanted to feel Erin’s skin underneath her fingertips, even if it was only for a few seconds. She wanted so much more than what Erin was willing to give her, and she was really trying to be okay with that even though it was extremely hard.

“Can we play dinosaurs?” Nolan asked, saving Blair from a complete spiral.

“Let’s do it!” She spent the next hour in an imaginary dinosaur world with Nolan until Erin announced dinner was ready.

Blair carried Nolan into the kitchen and found that Erin had made baked potatoes with cheese and chicken fingers.

“I know it’s not the healthiest meal, but it’s what we had,” Erin said, as if she were embarrassed.

“Are you kidding me? My parents aren’t home tonight. If I wasn’t here, I’d be eating ramen noodles. This is much better.”

“Ah, so that’s why you came, huh? For my amazing home-cooked meal.”

“You caught me.” Blair set Nolan on the ground, then walked over to Erin and had to stop herself from putting her hands on Erin’s hips. “It has absolutely nothing to do with the company.”

After filling their plates, the three of them sat at the kitchen table and talked about Nolan’s day at school, the new projects Erin was doing for work, and how the first two days of training went for Blair. Blair went into excruciating detail about everything she had done the past two days in an effort to prolong the meal as much as possible. She didn’t want to leave, but she knew once she was done eating, she wouldn’t have a reason to stay.

Luckily, Nolan gave her a reason. “Mommy, can Bear read me a book and tuck me into bed tonight?” he asked as Erin cleared his plate from the table.

“You’ll have to ask Blair, sweetie. She probably wants to get home so she can get ready for another day of work tomorrow.”

You couldn’t be more wrong, Erin. Blair looked between Nolan and Erin and shrugged. “I’m okay with it if you are. Since Marisol started school, I’ve really only been hanging out with my parents. It would be cool to spend time with other people for once.” Especially if those people are you two.

The smile on Erin’s face told Blair that she was happy she had agreed to stick around. “Perfect. Any chance you want to help with bath time too?” Erin laughed as though she were kidding, but there was honestly nothing Blair wanted more.

“I’m down.”

After taking a few minutes to convince Erin that she was actually okay with giving Nolan his bath, Blair headed upstairs with him while Erin finished cleaning up from dinner. Blair spent the next half hour yelling at Nolan to keep the water in the bathtub while she struggled to get him clean. She was relieved when Erin finally came up and told Nolan he had to get out and get ready for bed.

Blair worked with Erin to help get Nolan dressed, then asked him to pick out a story. Blair climbed into Nolan’s bed to read to him while Erin sat beside it, watching the interaction as if it was an episode of her favorite show.

After Nolan suckered her into reading a second book, he yawned and wrapped an arm around Blair. “Snuggle me until I fall asleep?”

Blair held Nolan tight up against her, but instead of focusing all of her attention on him, she looked over at Erin, who was sitting beside the bed and already staring at her. The intensity of her stare took Blair’s breath away. She wanted to know what Erin was thinking about while looking at her like that. Of course, she couldn’t ask, because that would wake Nolan from his drowsy state and make this whole process take ten times longer. She could still enjoy that look and imagine everything it could mean though.

When Erin’s lips started to move in silent words, Blair’s imagination went even more wild. Was she telling Blair how she really felt? Inviting her back to her room? When Erin lifted her eyebrows and nodded toward Nolan, Blair realized it wasn’t anything that exciting. She was trying to tell Blair that Nolan had fallen asleep.

Erin nodded to the door, then stood and walked out of the room. Blair carefully extracted herself from Nolan then climbed out of bed and left the room as well. When she closed Nolan’s door behind her, she was surprised to find Erin was standing just

inches from her.

With Erin so close, it was hard to catch her breath. She wanted to reach out and touch her, but her hands were glued to her side. She struggled to force words out that she hoped would come across as flirty and fun. “I’m not the babysitter anymore, you know,” she whispered, but the way her voice cracked didn’t make it come across in the enticing way she’d hoped.

The small smile that had been on Erin’s face dropped and she looked toward the ground. “I know. I’m sorry. I promise if Nolan asks you to do something like put him to bed that you can say no. I don’t want you to feel that way.”

Wait. Why is she apolo- OH! She thinks I’m upset about putting Nolan to bed. Very smooth, Blair. Blair rolled her eyes at herself. So much for being fun and flirty. “No, I’m sorry. That’s not what I meant. I love when Nolan asks me to do stuff. I can’t even begin to explain how happy it makes me. I meant I’m not the babysitter, so we can be...” She let her words trail off because she didn’t want to make Erin think she was forcing her into anything she wasn’t ready for.

Erin stared at her the exact same way she had in Nolan’s bedroom, and Blair’s mind went back to the night they stood right outside this door and almost kissed for the first time. At that time, it had felt like nothing but a pipe dream, but after everything that had happened between them, Blair wondered if she should just lean in and take what she wanted.

When she slowly started to move in, Erin shut her eyes. “Do you want to stay and watch a movie with me?” She took in a long shaky breath, then opened her eyes and pushed it out. “As a friend. I’m sorry. I know it’s pathetic that I’m still so stuck on my past. I want to move on, but I can’t.”

Blair reached out and grabbed Erin’s hand. Even though that response wasn’t what

she hoped for, Blair wanted to be understanding. She couldn't imagine deciding to spend her life with someone just to have them walk away. Of course that would mess someone up, and for that reason, Blair was willing to be patient. She would take her time and prove to Erin that she wasn't like the other people who were able to just walk out of her life. "If a friend is what you need, that's what I'll be."

Being Erin's friend was much harder than it sounded, especially when Blair found herself snuggled up on Erin's couch almost every night for the next week-and-a-half, watching a movie together after Nolan fell asleep. By the following Friday night, Blair's fingers were itching to touch Erin in any way they could. The subtle flirtation between them that had become less subtle with every passing night certainly wasn't making things any easier on her.

When Erin sat on the end of the couch that had become "her spot" for their movie nights, Blair sat down close beside her instead of in her normal spot at the other end. Erin didn't say anything, but Blair could tell their closeness was having an effect on her based on how dilated her pupils were. When Erin pressed play on the movie they had agreed on, Blair placed her hand on Erin's thigh. Erin stared straight ahead, but her breathing became heavier. Since Blair's goal wasn't actually to make her uncomfortable, she decided to move her hand. Except, as soon as her fingers disconnected from Erin's skin, Erin brought her hand down on top of Blair's to bring it right back to where it had just been.

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Blair took this as silent permission, so when Erin moved her hand off of Blair's, Blair traced circles around her thigh, getting higher and higher with each minute that passed. When she reached the bottom of Erin's teasingly-short shorts, she snuck her fingers underneath them and watched Erin for her reaction. Erin continued to stare straight ahead, but licked her lips and gave the most subtle nod that Blair would've missed if she hadn't been watching her so closely.

She moved her hand higher and had just reached Erin's underwear when Erin jumped from the couch. "Do you, uh, want some popcorn?" she asked while clearing her throat an obscene number of times.

"Popcorn sounds great." Blair couldn't help but smile proudly as Erin nodded stiffly and walked away. Even though Erin had pulled away from her, it was clear that she still wanted Blair, and that was enough to keep Blair from giving up.

Blair stood from the couch and walked into the kitchen, where Erin had already put the bag of popcorn into the microwave. She was staring at the microwave as if it were the most interesting thing in the world, so Blair took that opportunity to sneak up behind her and gently pinch her ass. She knew for a fact that Erin wouldn't care, which was why she felt comfortable doing it, and the way Erin yelped but also laughed as she turned around to look at Blair told her she was right.

Blair held both hands in the air, unable to stop the huge grin that came to her face as she stared at Erin's gorgeous smile. "Oops. My hand slipped."

Erin smiled even wider and pushed Blair up against the counter, trapping her in place by resting her hands on the counter on either side of her. "In that case," Erin leaned in

and placed a chaste kiss on Blair's lips. "My lips slipped." After she pulled away, her smile dropped, and she shook her head. "Sorry. I shouldn't have done that."

"Erin, I'm not going to start planning our wedding just because you kissed me. Until you tell me something has changed, I'll take everything that happens for what it is—just a little bit of fun." God knew Blair could use some fun in her life right now, especially since she was no longer going elsewhere to get her primal needs met.

"When you put it that way..." Erin smirked and leaned in once again, this time bringing her hands to rest against Blair's stomach; a move that made Blair's skin burn underneath her t-shirt.

Then Erin's lips were on hers, and it felt like the first time and like something they did all the time, all at once. How was that possible? Blair had no idea, but this wasn't the time to overthink it. This was the time to enjoy the moment, because she didn't know when she would get another one. Blair had just worked up the courage to slip her tongue into Erin's mouth when the microwave beeped.

Both of them laughed as they pulled away from each other. Blair waved her fist at the microwave as if she was threatening to fight it. "You fucking cock block," she said between giggles.

Erin rolled her eyes at Blair, but leaned in for one more quick kiss before going to the microwave and taking out the popcorn. Blair couldn't wipe the shit-eating grin off of her face as she watched Erin delicately transfer the popcorn into a bowl for them to share and pop a piece in her mouth. Oh, to be that popcorn.

They turned the movie back on, and once they were both sitting on the couch, Blair took handfuls of popcorn from the bowl on Erin's lap and shoved them into her mouth. She had taken the lead in the kitchen, so if anything was going to happen again, it had to be on Erin's terms. After a few minutes, Erin let out a long, frustrated

sigh and moved the popcorn bowl onto the coffee table. “I’ve seen this movie so many times. I don’t actually have to pay attention to know what happens.”

“Oh yeah?” Blair lifted an eyebrow. She felt pretty positive she knew what Erin was getting at, but she needed Erin to say it before Blair did anything.

Blair wasn’t sure who moved in first, but soon their lips were just inches from each other and Erin’s body was towering over hers. Erin raked her eyes all over Blair’s body before stopping at her lips. “Only kissing, okay? And we keep our clothes on.”

Blair put a hand over her chest and feigned offense rather than show how extremely excited she was over what was about to happen. “Of course. What kind of girl do you think I am?”

Erin laughed and brought her lips to Blair’s once again.

With friends like this, who needs other women?

Chapter 22

Erin

“Yes. Of course. I’ll be right there. Thank you for calling.”

Erin sighed as she ended the call and closed her laptop. Clearly, she wasn’t getting any work done today. She had already kind of figured that would be the case when she woke up with a scratchy throat and runny nose, but since she was still working from home on Fridays, she thought maybe there was a chance she could force herself to do something.

Any hope of being productive went out the window after the call she just received

from Nolan's daycare. Apparently, he wasn't acting like himself, so they took his temperature and it was high. Taking care of herself was one thing. Taking care of a sick toddler when she was already under the weather was a completely different ballgame. She had no idea how she was going to make it through the rest of today (and most likely through the weekend as well).

To make matters worse, Blair was supposed to be coming over after work again tonight, and now she had to tell her not to. Erin was getting way too used to their movie nights which often ended with them making out on the couch. Just thinking about those hot makeout sessions made Erin's whole body heat up. Or was she getting a fever now, too? Shit.

She knew she had to go get Nolan from daycare, but she didn't want to forget to tell Blair and have her unknowingly enter the house of germs, so she took out her phone to text her before leaving.

I have to cancel tonight :(

Erin was surprised when Blair's response was almost immediate. Did she stare at her phone while she was supposed to be working? Why? Hot date? :-p

Erin rolled her eyes at her phone. Blair should know by now that if she was going to have a hot date with anyone, it would obviously be her. Yes. A hot date with my bed. Both Nolan and I are sick.

Blair's next reply came in just as quickly. No way. I'm so sorry to hear that. Anything I can do?

Of course Blair wanted to help, because that's exactly the type of person Blair was. Which was also why Erin refused to do anything that could get her sick (if it wasn't already too late, seeing as how Blair's tongue had been in her mouth just two days

ago).Stay far, far away.

Where's the fun in that? ;)

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Erin laughed to herself. This woman was too much. The fun is not getting yourself sick.

I like living life on the edge. Plus, wasn't I kind of already exposed? I think I remember some germ passing happening the other night :)

Erin's body was burning up again, and this time she was pretty sure it wasn't from the fever. Well, just to be safe, I think it's for the best if I let you know when our house is germ-free.

Erin waited a minute for another reply, but when it didn't come through, she put her phone in her pocket and grabbed her keys so she could pick up Nolan.

*

Even though Nolan was clearly sick, it didn't tame any of his energy. Erin was actually pretty sure it somehow made him even more crazy. Trying to keep him under control while she felt like complete shit made her want to cry. Days like this were always a reminder of what she had lost. Bianca didn't just break her heart. She also left her without her person. After having someone by her side for the better part of ten years, it was still so difficult to get used to doing everything on her own, especially on days like today.

She could feel the tears burning at her eyes when there was a knock on the front door followed by the sound of it opening.

"Hello? Anyone home?" Blair's voice was like the voice of an angel, which might

have been because she was a literal angel. An idiotic angel who was risking her own health, but an angel just the same.

Before Erin could answer, Nolan rolled off of the couch where he had been standing on his head, and ran toward the door. “Bear!” he shouted as he went.

Erin forced herself off of the couch and reached the hallway in time to see Blair knelt down in front of Nolan, giving him a big hug. It was such a sweet sight that for those few seconds, she actually forgot how shitty she felt.

When Blair stood up, she gave Erin a sad smile. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, but you look like shit. The most beautiful shit in the world, of course, but yeah.” Blair walked over to Erin and rested her hands on Erin’s arms. “What can I do for you?”

“Try to keep my feral child under control,” Erin said with a laugh, only half kidding.

Blair smiled knowingly. “Done. Have you two eaten yet?”

Shit. It was dinner time, wasn’t it? “Nope. Completely forgot that was a thing.”

“Dude, I feel so bad for you right now.” Blair leaned in with her lips puckered, and Erin thought she was aiming for her mouth, but she veered off and kissed her forehead instead. “How ’bout I take Nolan with me to go pick us up something to eat? That way, you get some time to relax by yourself, and maybe if we’re lucky, the car ride will chill him out a little bit.”

“Are you sure?” Erin hated to make Blair do all of that for her, but it also felt really good to have someone who was willing to help. A little too good if she was being honest with herself, but she was too sick to worry about that right now.

Blair moved her hand down Erin's arm and squeezed her hand. "Of course. I'd be happy to."

Erin breathed a sigh of relief as Blair picked up Nolan and carried him out of the house, the two of them talking animatedly the whole way through the door. Without them, the house felt almost too quiet, but Erin knew she needed that, even if her heart did tug in her chest from not having them there anymore. She pushed these thoughts aside and laid down on the couch, covering herself with the blanket that Nolan had refused to let her use earlier. It wasn't long before her eyes became heavy and she felt herself drifting off to sleep.

"Erin. Hey, Erin."

Erin woke up to the sound of her name being whispered, and slowly blinked her eyes open to find Blair crouched in front of the couch. "Blair? What? Where's Nolan?"

Blair pointed behind her. "He fell asleep in the car. I know it's taboo to let him fall asleep this late in the day, but he looked so peaceful, I couldn't bear to wake him up."

Erin followed the path of Blair's finger and found Nolan wrapped in a ball on the loveseat. "I'm glad you didn't. He needs the rest."

Blair ran her hand through Erin's hair in a way that caused goosebumps to pop up on Erin's neck. "You need the rest too. Sorry for waking you. I just figured you could probably use some food. I'm assuming you haven't eaten much all day...?"

Blair had assumed correctly. Erin hadn't actually eaten anything all day, which probably wasn't helping her feel any better. "You are correct. Food sounds wonderful. Thank you." Erin's head pounded as she struggled to sit up. "What did you get?"

“Chicken noodle soup, broccoli and cheddar soup, French Onion Soup, and macaroni and cheese, which I know will not compare to yours, but I still figured someone might eat it.”

“Are you feeding the three of us or a whole football team?” Erin laughed, which made her go into a coughing fit as well.

Blair shrugged. “I wasn’t sure what you’d want. I figured if I got enough, there’d have to be something you like. And this way, you can have some leftovers to eat later.”

Erin’s heart was bursting. She was pretty sure there wasn’t a better person in this world than Blair Breckenridge. Now, if only she could convince her own heart that it was safe with Blair, even though her head was telling her that Blair had the ability to hurt her more than anyone else ever had. That thought made her pounding headache even worse. She absentmindedly brought her hand to her head and rubbed her temples as if that was actually going to make a difference.

“When was the last time you took medicine?” Blair asked, her voice laced with concern.

Welp, it turned out food wasn’t the only thing Erin forgot. She gave Blair her most innocent smile. “Oops.”

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“Where is your medicine? I’ll grab it and then get your food ready for you. Let me guess.” Blair tapped her chin and looked toward the ceiling. “Broccoli and cheddar, right?”

How the hell did she do that? “Okay, that’s just freaky.”

“Or maybe,” Blair leaned in and kissed Erin’s nose. “I just know you.”

It had been a long time since someone really knew Erin, and that fact had her fighting back tears. Correction... the tears were coming, and now that they started, she couldn’t stop them from falling.

Blair brought her hands to Erin’s cheeks and placed more kisses across her forehead. “Baby, what’s wrong? Are you getting worse? Do you need something else? Name it and I’ll get it for you. The sky’s the limit. Seriously.”

Her sweet words only made Erin cry harder. Holy shit, I’m a mess. No one should have to deal with this. “I’m sorry. I’m not crying because I’m sad or in pain. Being sick is just messing with my emotions and you’re being so sweet right now, and no one is ever this sweet to me, and I don’t know. I guess I’m just surprised and overwhelmed.”

Blair placed another kiss on Erin’s forehead. “Get used to it. I care about you, which means I’ll take care of you. Always. In every way. No matter what.”

Erin could read between the lines of what she was saying. Blair was making a promise to her that it didn’t matter what did or didn’t happen between them. She

would be there for Erin. Blair definitely deserved someone better, and she deserved to not have to wait around for someone with more issues than Vogue. God, this line of thought was not stopping the tears. Without saying another word, Blair stood up and headed to the kitchen. "Is the medicine in one of these cabinets?" she yelled from the other room, again proving how well she knew Erin since she somehow figured out she would keep her medicine in the kitchen.

"Yes! The one all the way to the right."

After a few minutes, Blair walked back into the room carrying soup, medicine, and water. She set the soup on the coffee table, then handed the medicine and water to Erin. "Hopefully this will get you feeling a little bit better."

Erin had no doubt that it would. She felt better from just having Blair here. Blair scooted the coffee table closer to the couch so Erin could reach it. A moment later, she went into the kitchen again and came back carrying soup for herself. They ate in relative silence, but it wasn't uncomfortable at all. It was actually the opposite. Erin felt completely content sitting beside Blair, not saying a word.

She had almost finished her soup when Nolan started to stir on the love seat. "Mommy?" he asked as he slowly opened his eyes. "I'm so hungry, Mommy."

"On it." Blair jumped up before Erin even had a chance to respond. "What do you want, buddy? Mac and cheese or chicken noodle soup? Now, be warned that it's not your mom's mac and cheese, so while I'm sure it's very tasty, it's not that tasty."

Nolan crossed his arms over his chest and glared at Blair. "I want Mommy's mac and cheese."

"Mommy isn't feeling well, sweetie," Erin told him. "I promise I will make you my mac and cheese once I'm feeling better though."

“I want Bear to make it.”

“Me?”

The way Blair pointed to herself, as if she was shocked anyone would ever ask her to cook, made Erin laugh.

“Yes! You!” Nolan jumped off of the couch and wrapped his arms around Blair’s legs. “P-ease, Bear.”

Erin watched Blair’s face soften and she could tell she was going to give him what he wanted, in one way or another. Sucker. Erin smiled to herself.

Blair extracted Nolan from around her legs then knelt down in front of him. “I’ll make you a little deal. If you eat chicken noodle soup tonight, I’ll come back tomorrow and make your mom’s macaroni and cheese. I don’t have the ingredients to make it now.”

Nolan scrunched up his nose and tilted his head. “In-gredients?”

Blair smiled over at Erin, which made Erin’s stomach do a somersault, then focused back on Nolan. “That means I have to buy all of the cheese that makes your mommy’s mac and cheese so tasty.”

“You come back tomorrow?” Nolan asked, as if he were seriously considering his options.

Blair nodded. “I will.”

“No!” Nolan said matter-of-factly.

Great. This is not a battle I feel like having right now.

Before Erin had the chance to tell Nolan he needed to be nicer to Blair, he spoke again. “I want you to stay.”

“Stay?” Blair looked at Erin as if she was waiting for her to tell her what Nolan meant.

The problem was, the only thing Erin thought that could mean was that Nolan wanted Blair to stay the night. A terrible idea that also sounded pretty amazing at the moment.

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“Yes. Stay tonight and make mac and cheese after you wake me up.”

Blair looked at Erin once again, but this time she shrugged. “I’m okay with it if you are, but I’m going to have to borrow some clothes.”

Erin really needed to get her hormones under control, because she felt like she might cry again. Still, as much as she wanted Blair to stay, she also needed to think about Blair’s wellbeing. “I don’t know. I’m worried if you stay, we’ll get you sick.”

Blair waved a hand at her. “I have an awesome immune system. I’ll be fine.”

Yeah, I thought I had a good immune system before I had a child too. Erin shook her head at herself. Nolan is not her child, and you can’t expect her to step into that role.

“Is that a no?” Blair asked.

Erin shook her head once again. “Yes. I mean no.” Erin groaned at herself. She had no idea what she was even saying anymore. “What I mean is that I want you to stay.”

Blair’s face lit up as though Erin had just told her she wanted to take her to the fanciest restaurant in town, not said she could stay at their germ-infested house. “Awesome. I can’t wait.”

“Me either.” Seriously. I’m way too excited over this.

Blair took Nolan to the kitchen and sat at the table with him while he ate his soup, but insisted Erin stay on the couch and rest more. Erin tried to argue, but it was no use.

Blair wasn't budging, so Erin followed her directions and shut her eyes once again. She tried to fight sleep so she could help Blair clean up dinner, but it was a losing battle. Within seconds, she was drifting off once again.

"Psh. Erin. Wake up."

Erin thought she must be having *déjà vu* when Blair's comforting voice whispered in her ear just like she had earlier. When Erin was finally able to crack her eyes open, she noticed it was now pitch black outside. *Shit.* How long had she been sleeping? She searched the room but couldn't find Nolan anywhere. Her heart raced as she tried to figure out what was going on.

"Hey, it's okay," Blair said soothingly. "Nolan is in bed. He's been asleep for almost an hour at this point."

"What... what time is it?" Erin felt around for her phone but couldn't find it.

"It's 9:00. Nolan was really drained so we started his bedtime routine a little earlier than we usually do. Of course, he suckered me into reading him more books than I could count, but that's okay. He was super sweet and kissed my cheek after I finished each one."

Blair had a dreamy look on her face, but all Erin could focus on was her use of the word *we*. She said 'we usually do' when referring to Nolan's bedtime. Sure, Blair had been at their house for his bedtime more times than she hadn't been there these past few weeks, but when she put it like that, it really felt like they were a team. Which they could be if Erin could get her head out of her own ass. She knew that *she was* the only one holding herself back from the happiness Blair could provide her, but the fact that Erin's happiness was ripped away from her once before still scared the *shit* out of

her.

Blair ran her fingers over Erin's cheek. "I didn't want to wake you, but I also figured you didn't want to lie on the couch all night."

"Definitely not. My back appreciates the wake up."

Blair laughed and kissed Erin's cheek. "I can actually sleep anywhere." She pointed toward the kitchen. "I could fall asleep on that table and still get a good night's sleep. It's strange."

Except, it wasn't strange. Before she turned thirty, Erin was a lot like that too. Blair was a long way from thirty. That reminder made Erin feel sick to her stomach. It wasn't that she minded their age difference. Most of the time she honestly didn't even notice it, but Blair being so young meant that she really didn't have a full understanding of what she was getting herself into. That wasn't worth dwelling on right now though. She could worry about that on a day when it didn't feel like someone was rubbing sandpaper over her throat.

"I guess we can't all be that lucky," Erin said with a forced laugh. "So, I better head up."

Blair stood abruptly and looked around the room as she rubbed the back of her neck. "You, um... you don't want me to come with you?"

Of course Erin wanted Blair to come with her, but there was one very big problem with that. Erin pointed to herself. "Violently ill. Remember?"

Blair smiled and pointed to herself the same way Erin just had. "Amazing immune system, remember?" She looked down at the couch and let out a dramatic sigh that Erin could tell was completely fake. "Plus, what if tonight is the night couches decide

to start fucking with my back? You wouldn't want that on your conscience, would you?"

One thing Erin knew by now was that Blair was stubborn as hell. It was honestly one of the things she lo-liked about her. It also meant Blair would be sleeping in the same bed as Erin no matter how much Erin tried to fight her on it, so she might as well just give in. "Fine. You're right. You can come with me. Just stay on your side of the bed.

Blair's smile grew even bigger. "Fat chance of that. I love the feeling of you wrapped in my arms."

Erin loved that too, which was why she didn't fight it when Blair held her tightly from behind after they crawled into bed together. Instead, she let herself enjoy finally feeling safe in another person's arms.

As soon as her alarm went off, Erin took a deep breath and smiled at the lack of stuffiness. It was Monday morning, and she was finally feeling like herself again. Of course, that was mostly thanks to the woman lying next to her, who hadn't just stayed all day Saturday, but also stayed all day Sunday and should be waking up soon so she could go home and get ready for work. A tinge of sadness hit Erin straight in the heart. She was happy to be feeling better, but aside from not being able to breathe for most of it, her weekend with Blair had been pretty damn perfect.

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Blair groaned and started to roll around in the bed, then began to cough uncontrollably. Once the coughing stopped, she sat up and threw a hand over her forehead. “Shit. I feel like I got hit by a fucking bus. There’s no way I can go to work today.”

Erin felt awful that she had passed her sickness on to Blair, but a very small, selfish part of her was the slightest bit excited. For once, it was finally her turn to take care of Blair.

Chapter 23

Blair

Fuck my fucking immune system, Blair thought to herself as she broke into another coughing fit. Shit. No wonder Erin and Nolan were in such rough shape all weekend. This is no joke.

“Could you hand me my phone?” Blair asked Erin, pointing in the general direction of where it might be.

A few seconds later, the phone was in her hand. Blair could barely look at it since her head hurt so bad, but she had to call her boss to let her know she couldn’t come in. She was actually disappointed about missing work. In the past, she always thought she’d love any excuse to miss work, but Blair really enjoyed this job. The kids were great and they constantly kept her entertained, even when they were being completely feral.

It only took two rings for Blair's boss to pick up the phone. "Hey, Joyce. I'm really sorry to do this, but I came down with something and I'm not going to be able to come in today. Honestly, I'm not too sure about tomorrow either. I'm so sorry for letting you know at the last minute. I was fine when I went to bed, but now..." She couldn't finish her sentence because she started to cough again. "Well, yeah. As you can hear, I'm not doing too great. If I could come without risking getting the kids sick I would, but—"

"Blair," Joyce interrupted her rambling. "I completely understand. This happens a lot because of all of the germs that spread throughout the building. Just take good care of yourself and let me know once you are feeling well enough to come back. I'll plan on you being out until I hear otherwise."

Even though she didn't have much work experience, Blair still understood how lucky she was to have such an understanding boss. She couldn't say Joyce was the best boss she had ever had, seeing as how she knew for a fact the other person she had worked for looked very good naked.

Erin also looked amazing when she wasn't naked, and the way she was looking at Blair with wide, caring eyes made Blair want to beg her to stay in bed with her all day. She didn't want to encourage Erin to be irresponsible, especially since she was trying to prove to her how responsible she could be, so she forced herself out of bed. "It looks like I'll be spending the next day or two at home, but I'll let you know as soon as I'm feeling better and maybe we can do another movie night...?"

Much to Blair's surprise, Erin shook her head. "Absolutely not. I'm the one who got you sick. I'm going to call my boss and tell him I need to work from home today and tomorrow."

"You can do that?" Blair was actually amazed that Erin was willing to do that. For her. She was also pretty sure her heart was currently as warm as her head.

Erin shrugged. “I should probably tell him it’s for Nolan, not for a very sexy woman, but yes. It shouldn’t be any problem at all.”

“Wow.” For once Blair was at a loss for words. “Thank you. That’s amazing. I promise I won’t bother you. I’ll most likely lay around all day.”

“Do me a favor?” Erin stood from the bed and rested her hands on Blair’s hips. “Please bother me today.”

Blair swallowed hard. She was pretty sure Erin didn’t mean for her words to sound as sexual as they did, but that’s exactly where Blair’s mind went. If she didn’t feel like such a big steaming pile of shit, she probably would’ve taken a chance and asked Erin to get back in bed with her for a little bit of fun. Maybe once I’m better... if she’s ready.

Erin’s eyes went wide as she stared at Blair, waiting for a response that Blair couldn’t form because her mind was on other things. “Shoot. That sounded really bad, didn’t it?”

Blair squeezed Erin’s sides and smirked. “I don’t know. If you ask me, it sounded pretty damn good.”

Erin shook her head at Blair and gently poked her in the chest. “You need to relax today, so you can feel better.”

“And what’s going to happen when I feel better?” Blair lifted an eyebrow. She knew she was giving Erin a hard time, but it was impossible not to tease her.

Erin’s face turned red, and her smile dropped. Blair’s plan to be flirty had definitely failed. “I... I don’t know. I didn’t mean it like that. I’m not saying it will never happen. I just—”

Blair squeezed Erin's sides again. As cute as Erin looked when she was flustered, Blair also didn't want to upset her. "It's okay. Breathe. No pressure, all right? Whatever you want to take, I'm willing to give."

Erin put her head on Blair's shoulder. "I don't deserve you. You know that, right?"

That wasn't true, and Blair would do anything she possibly could to prove it to her. "You deserve the world."

Erin laughed. "That's even more proof that I don't. You're such an amazing person, and I'm just me, and for whatever reason, you have me up on a high pedestal."

How does she not realize how amazing she is? "You're not just you. You're the greatest mom in the entire world, but you're also ridiculously funny. And even though you try to act like you're not, you're a huge flirt, and I love that. On top of all of that, you're also extremely sexy."

"How sexy?" Erin smirked and leaned in close, her eyes shutting right before her lips grazed Blair's.

Or, at least, they would've grazed Blair's if a little voice hadn't chosen that exact moment to scream out to them.

"Mommy! Bear! I awake!"

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Erin laughed and shook her head as she pulled away from Blair. “Another day, another interruption.”

Blair booped Erin’s nose to let her know it was okay. “At least he’s averycute interruption.”

“He really is, isn’t he?”

“Mommy! Why aren’t you talking to me?”

Erin rolled her eyes. “He kind of has to be, though. It keeps me from killing him.”

Nolan pushed through the door at that very moment, hair sticking out in all sorts of directions, as he put his hands on his hips and glared at the two of them. Blair tried her best not to laugh since a little boy in Bluey pajamas was probably the least threatening sight in the world.

“Why won’t you come get me?” he asked angrily.

Blair left Erin’s side and knelt down in front of Nolan. “Sorry, buddy. You know how you’re feeling so much better now?” When Nolan nodded his head, Blair continued. “Well, that’s because your germs left you and jumped onto me. Now I’m sick. Your mommy was trying to help me feel better, so that’s why we couldn’t come get you right away.”

Nolan brought his hand to his mouth and giggled. “My germs jumped on you?”

Blair widened her eyes and nodded. "They did."

Much to Blair's surprise, Nolan stopped laughing and wrapped her in a tight hug. "It's okay. I take care of you."

Erin walked over to Nolan and put her hand on his head. "You need to go to school today, mister."

With just one sentence, the sweet little boy was gone and the feral monster returned. Nolan jumped up and down, stomping his feet hard on the ground. If Blair's head wasn't already pounding, Nolan's meltdown definitely would've done it. "No! I take care of Bear! I went to school tomorrow."

Blair was sure this was the side of things Erin was talking about when she said she was worried dating a single mom would be too much for her to handle. This only proved even more that she was ready to handle it. Sure, she kind of wanted to throw Nolan out a window right now, but she also knew the moment would pass and he would do something to steal her heart all over again.

She needed to think fast, because the more he shouted, the worse she felt, and she might actually yell at him if she didn't think of a way to calm him down.

"Sweetie, Blair just needs sleep. If you're here, she won't sleep at all because she'll be so excited about hanging out with you. If she doesn't rest quietly, by herself, it will take her longer to get better, and until she's better, she won't be able to do fun things like carry you on her shoulders and run around with you. Wouldn't you rather she gets better faster so you two can do all of that?"

Saved by the mom. Thank you, Erin.

Nolan was quiet for a moment as he wrinkled his nose as if he was deep in thought.

“No.”

“No?” Shit. Blair really thought Erin had won this battle.

“No. I want to play NOW!”

“Well, that’s not happening.” Erin picked up a screaming Nolan and carried him out of the room. “You can see Blair when you get home. You’re going to school.”

Blair tried to follow them, but Erin turned around at the open doorway and pointed a finger at her as if Blair was her second child. “Not you. You need to get back in bed.”

Blair brought her hand up to her head and saluted Erin. “Yes, Ma’am.”

Unfortunately, Nolan must’ve had her super stressed because she didn’t even crack a smile at Blair’s teasing. Blair got back into bed and shut her eyes, but it was no use. It was impossible to sleep when she could hear Erin struggling so much downstairs. She had to admit, though, she was pretty happy Erin had demanded she stay in bed, because she really didn’t want to be dealing with that right now.

Is this what it’s like to be a parent? Feeling both guilty and relieved all at once? Having a child get on your last nerve but also doing everything in your power to protect that child? It certainly wasn’t for the weak. Blair was sure of that, and it explained why her feelings for Erin just continued to grow stronger. The fact that Erin could do this on her own was mind-blowing. Blair knew she never could.

After an hour of shouting and what Blair could only assume was a ton of tears from both parties, Erin and Nolan finally left the house, leaving Blair in complete silence for the first time since waking up. Why do I love this but also hate it at the same time?

She didn’t have much time to think about that question, because without the

distraction of Erin and Nolan, her tiredness took over and she drifted off to sleep.

When Blair woke back up, it was to the sound of someone typing on a keyboard close to her. She opened her eyes and found Erin with her work laptop open, sitting in bed right beside Blair as if she were waiting to see what Blair needed from her.

Before Blair could say anything, Erin snapped her head around to look at her. “Hey there, sleeping beauty. How are you feeling?”

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As soon as Blair opened her eyes more fully, she became aware of her pounding headache once again. She wiped at her nose with her arm, because she really had no other option since her snot was currently running out of her nose like a waterfall. “I’m okay.”

Erin stared at her and gave her a sympathetic smile. “Are you sure about that?”

She looked down at Blair’s arm, which now had a line of snot across it. Awesome. So much for impressing her.

“Sorry. Not my finest moment. I must look like such a mess right now.”

“Kind of.” Erin’s smile became a smirk. “But it’s okay, because you’re literally the definition of a hot mess.”

“So, you think I’m hot, hmm?” Blair leaned forward in the hope of kissing Erin, but she had to turn away at the last second when she broke into yet another coughing fit. Man, I really wish I was still asleep. This is a nightmare.

“You’re very hot.” Erin brought her hand up to Blair’s forehead. “In more ways than one, unfortunately. God, I feel so bad that I got you sick.”

“If it makes you feel better, we can blame Nolan.” Blair laughed, but that caused her to cough again and made her head and throat hurt even more. Just kill me now.

“I think that makes the most sense. I swear I used to never get sick and then I had him, and boom, sick all of the time. Kids are germ monsters.”

“Speaking of which, how did you finally get Nolan out of the house this morning?”

“Honestly?” Erin visibly cringed. “I might have promised to take him to McDonald’s after daycare.”

“Hmm, really?” Blair tapped on her chin as if she was thinking. “I feel like I remember a certain someone lecturing me about taking him to McDonald’s when I first started babysitting. I believe you told me I showed him I was weak.”

“Ah, but here’s the difference between us. I have already established my dominance, so he knows who’s in charge, even if I give in now and then.”

“Is that so?” This fun, playful banter between them was actually the perfect medicine for Blair. It almost had her forgetting about how shitty she was feeling. Almost.

Erin laughed and playfully pushed Blair’s shoulder. “Whatever. I can’t help it that I’m a softie.”

“I think I might be a softie too. Is that going to be a problem if you ever let me cross over into the more-than-friends territory?”

As soon as the words left Blair’s mouth, she realized she shouldn’t have crossed that line. Just the mention of being more than friends had Erin tensing up beside her. Plus, what was meant to be a joke might have been taken a little too seriously by Erin.

“I... well...” Erin opened and closed her mouth as though she kept changing her mind about what she wanted to say. “I don’t know. It could be, I guess. I’m honestly not even sure how Bianca parented because she barely ever did it.”

“When was the last time you talked to Bianca?” Blair normally wouldn’t push the subject, but she had already made things awkward, so she figured why not.

Erin was definitely surprised by Blair's question, but in her defense, she recovered very quickly. "Aside from legal things, the last time we really talked was the day she left."

Blair had to stop her eyes from popping out of her head, because that shocked her. How could you spend ten years with someone and not have a longer fallout? "Did you talk about the possibility of divorce before she ended up leaving?"

Erin sighed and shut her laptop, making Blair feel guilty about pushing the subject when she was nice enough to take care of her. "No, we didn't. There were definite signs that things weren't good between us, but the problem was that they also weren't bad. Maybe that's my fault since I refused to fight with her. Every time she left the house to do her own thing, I just let her. I was petrified that if I brought anything up and pissed her off, she would leave me. I guess that backfired since she left anyway, huh?"

"Shit." Blair reached out and took Erin's hand. She wasn't sure she should ask the question that just popped into her head, but Blair wanted to put the idea out there in case it could help Erin. "Have you ever thought about talking to her about exactly what went wrong? I feel like you have so many questions. Maybe it would be good for you to get some answers. You know, for closure?"

Erin stared straight ahead for a long time, and the expression on her face gave nothing away. She chewed on her bottom lip as if there were words she was trying to hold inside.

Blair squeezed Erin's hand. "Just say it."

Erin shook her head. "I don't know what to say."

Blair didn't believe that one bit. "There has to be something you want to say. I think

you're just not saying it because you feel like you shouldn't."

"Honestly, my gut reaction was to make some rude remark like 'What are you? My therapist?' but what good would that have done?"

Blair shrugged. "It would've shown me you were pissed at my question. And you know what? I would've gotten pissed right back, because I was just trying to help." Blair tried to keep the bite out of her tone, but the truth was she was a little annoyed. She wasn't sure if she felt more annoyed that Erin was blowing her off when she was trying to help or that she was avoiding being honest with her.

"See! That's why I bite my tongue."

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“But you shouldn’t!” Blair’s voice was much louder than she meant for it to be, and she didn’t do a good job of hiding her annoyance, but wasn’t that kind of the point? “Not with me. You should be honest with me. And if we fight, you know what? Then we fight! And later, we make up. I’m not going to be scared away by one bad moment or even a bad day or month. You don’t have to be perfect with me. I’d prefer that you’re not.”

“Okay.”

“Okay? Really? That’s all?” Blair had to hold back a growl. She wasn’t sure if it was because she was sick, but right now she couldn’t handle Erin’s avoidance tactics. “Listen, I’m going to close my eyes and take a nap.”

“Are... are you mad at me?”

Erin sounded so sad. Even if Blair had been mad at her, that soft, sweet voice would’ve snapped her out of it. “I’m not mad. I’m just sick and also a little bit frustrated, but I’m not mad. I promise.”

“Do you want some space, or is it okay if I snuggle you?”

Blair smiled in spite of her frustration. “I would love it if you snuggled me.”

Erin smiled in relief and put her arm out. Blair snuggled into her and lay her head on Erin’s chest. As she fell asleep to the sound of Erin’s beating heart, Blair realized why she was so frustrated that Erin couldn’t seem to move on from her past. It was because while Erin was still holding onto past pain, Blair was slowly but surely

falling in love with her.

Chapter 24

Erin

When Erin woke up the next day, her mind was racing. After the conversation with Blair about Bianca, things had been weird the rest of the day. Not bad, per se, but definitely different in a way she couldn't put her finger on. And she hated it. She was supposed to be taking care of Blair, not making her feel worse. Blair hadn't gone home at the end of the night, so that had to be a good sign, right? In fact, she was still lying next to Erin right now, looking completely content while Erin contemplated all of her life choices.

She didn't want to wake Blair, but she also knew Nolan would likely come barging into the room any minute, so a wake up by her would be much less abrupt. She wasn't sure how to go about waking up Blair, but she felt like she had a lot of making up to do after yesterday, so she decided to give her a kiss on the forehead. After the first kiss, Blair didn't even stir, so Erin gently kissed her once again. This kiss caused the cutest little smile to spread across her face, but she still didn't open her eyes. Time to pull out the big guns. Erin leaned forward and brought her lips to Blair's and kissed her softly.

Blair's smile grew even bigger, and this time, she did start to blink open her eyes. "I could definitely get used to this alarm clock," she said sleepily.

God, Erin loved Blair's sleepy voice so much. She wanted to hear it every day for the rest of her life, which also made her want to jump out of bed and never hear it again. Screw you, fucked up mental health.

"Oh yeah?" Erin tried her best to make her voice sound flirtatious. "What's your

favorite part of it?" she asked before placing another kiss on Blair's lips.

Blair opened her eyes fully and stared at Erin as if she were the only person in the whole world. "Definitely the woman those lips are attached to."

"So, you're not mad at me anymore?" Erin figured she might as well put it out there now, so she knew just how much kissing up she needed to do today.

Blair sighed, but she never removed her gaze from Erin, those eyes full of just as much love(Love? Really? Maybe infatuation?)as before. "I was never mad at you. I told you that. I just hate when it feels like you're not opening up to me. I want to see every part of you, Erin. Even the bad parts."

"But what if the bad parts are too bad and they end up scaring you away?"

"I'm still here, aren't I?"

Erin nodded. She very much was, and Erin was so thankful for that. "Yes. Speaking of which, how are you feeling?"

Blair took a deep breath through her nose, which surprisingly didn't sound clogged, and blew it out through her mouth, which also surprisingly, did not end in a coughing fit. "I think I'm actually feeling a lot better." She pointed toward her forehead. "Do I feel hot?"

Erin put her hand on Blair's forehead, and even though that contact made her warm up, it had nothing to do with Blair's temperature. "No. Not really."

"Wow. I must've gotten some twenty-four-hour version of the bug. Lucky me." Blair's words didn't match the way her smile dropped into a slight frown. "I think I should still stay home today, though. Just to be safe. I don't want to infect any of my

kids.”

“That’s a good idea.” An even better idea popped into Erin’s head at that very moment. It wasn’t like her, but Blair was more than worth it. “If you want me to, I can call off today too. Like, completely off. That way, we can hang out. Relax together a little.”

“You’d do that for me?”

Why was Blair so surprised by that? Did she not expect Erin to do nice things for her? Maybe I need to try a little harder. “Of course I will. I just need to get Nolan to school and then we can do whatever you want.”

“How would you feel about going to my parents’ house to swim? They have a heater, so we keep it open until mid-October. Plus, we don’t even really need the heater, since it’s still so unseasonably warm outside. I should probably show my face at home eventually, so they know you didn’t murder me or something. Not that they’ll be there most of the time. My brother is at school, so we’ll have the place to ourselves essentially.” She put up her hand as if she was stopping Erin from saying something. “Not that I’m expecting anything to happen. I’m just letting you know that you don’t have to spend the whole day surrounded by my family.”

A whole day with Blair’s family actually didn’t sound too bad to Erin. “I wouldn’t mind. I really like your family.”

“I tend to enjoy them too, but I’m selfish when it comes to you. I want you all to myself.” Blair wrapped her arms around Erin and pulled her tight up against her, and it made Erin want to forget everything and spend the day lost in that sexy body.

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“That does sound pretty wonderful. You could head home now so you see your parents before they leave for work. Plus, if you’re not here, Nolan might give me fewer issues about going to school. I can meet you at your house after I drop him off and come back for my suit.” And figure out how I’m going to make today a better day than yesterday.

After fighting with Nolan to get ready and go to daycare, then running a few errands and going back home to get her suit and anything else she needed for her day at Blair’s, Erin finally arrived in her neighborhood. It was still so strange to her that she had to put in a code to even enter. Blair lived a much different life than she ever had. Yet, she didn’t act like it at all. That was another thing Erin appreciated about her. She never saw Erin as less than her, even if Erin saw herself that way at times. After parking in the driveway, Erin walked around the side of the house and entered through the fence surrounding the pool, just like Blair had told her to.

As soon as she walked through the gate, she found Blair laying in the pool in a very skimpy bikini, looking much too sexy. Shit. Erin was going to have to jump into the pool just to cool herself off. When Blair noticed her, she got off of the raft she was lying on and walked out of the pool. She’s a literal wet dream. What the hell?

Blair’s eyes ran up and down Erin’s body, but moved back to her hands after they had burned their path. “That’s a lot of bags. Are you moving in?”

Erin looked down at the bags in her hands. She had been so distracted by Blair, she almost forgot about everything she brought with her. “No. These are just a few things

I picked up to try to make today special.”

Blair wiggled her eyebrows. “Special, huh?”

God, I wish. Must.... Keep... Self... Control.“Not like that.” Erin held up the bags from the grocery store. “I bought the ingredients for my macaroni and cheese. I know we just had it a few days ago, but—”

“But mine wasn’t as good as yours,” Blair said before Erin could finish.

Erin shook her head. “I thought it was just as good, but since both you and Nolan seemed to disagree, I thought the original chef should make the recipe for you.”

“Well, you know I’ll never turn down your mac and cheese.” Blair studied the bags as if she was counting them or something. “Is that all that’s in there? It still seems like too many bags for the mac and cheese ingredients.”

Erin wasn’t sure if she should share what else she got since she was now somewhat regretting it. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but now felt kind of lame. “There is, but I don’t know. It’s pretty cheesy.”

“Cheesier than your mac and cheese?”

“I’d say yes. But definitely not as tasty.”Not tasty at all. Just childish. What the hell was I thinking? Oh yeah. I wasn’t.

“Can you at least show me?” Blair came up to Erin and moved her eyes around as if she was trying to sneak a peek at what was hidden in the bags. “I’m super curious now.”

“Promise you won’t make fun of me?”

Blair smirked and rested her hands on Erin's hips. "I promise I won't make fun of you...toomuch." She winked and it was so sexy that Erin didn't even care that she was teasing her. Actually, she kind of really liked it.

"Fine." Erin handed Blair the bag that held the gifts she picked up for her. "I sort of figured we might end up watching a movie today, and since I know you love giraffes—"

Blair laughed as she pulled out the stuffed giraffe and giraffe blanket that Erin had bought for her. "Seriously? This is fucking amazing. I love it so much. I want to hug you, but I'm really wet right now." Blair's smirk became almost devilish. "But then again, I guess it wouldn't be the first time I got you wet, huh?"

Shit. Fuck. Erin really needed to control herself while she tried to figure out exactly what she wanted with Blair (and what her heart could handle), but Blair was making it very hard. Standing in front of her soaking wet, looking like a sexy sculpture, while talking about how turned on she makes Erin was completely unfair. And it had Erin ridiculously turned on. How was she supposed to resist her? "You..." She cleared her throat because her mouth was dry and she couldn't get the words out. "You can hug me. That's okay. I don't mind being wet."

The way Blair's smirk grew told Erin she had another witty comment to make. "Oh trust me, I know you don't."

Yep. Walked right into that one.

As Blair took Erin into her arms, Erin brought her lips to Blair's ear and whispered, "You make it very hard to be good."

Now it was Blair's mouth that came close to Erin's ear, her breath hitting Erin's skin in a way that made it impossible to remember why she was fighting this so hard.

“Then maybe you shouldn’t be.”

Fuuuuck. Erin couldn’t take it anymore. She pulled away from Blair just enough to place a hard kiss on her lips. Blair immediately opened her mouth to Erin’s and their tongues met for the first time in what felt like way too many days.

After a few minutes of making out, Blair pulled away, both of their chests heaving up and down as they struggled to catch their breath. Blair licked her lips and again ran her eyes up and down Erin’s body. “Just fun until you tell me it’s something else.”

Part of Erin wanted to argue with Blair that they shouldn’t do anything else until she knew if she could give her heart away. Part of her wanted to tell Blair it wasn’t just fun anymore. It hadn’t been for a long time. It was so much more than that. Unfortunately, all rational thought was drowned out by her need to have Blair again. “Okay.”

Blair’s eyes lit up. “Really? You’re sure?”

With the way Blair was looking at her, Erin couldn’t even remember how to form words, so all she did was nod. That was clearly good enough for Blair, because her smile grew even bigger, and she lifted Erin in her arms the same way she had that day in the hotel room. Erin’s whole outfit was wet, but she didn’t care. There was another part of her that was also wet, and it was in desperate need of attention.

Thank god Blair’s family wasn’t home since Blair was carrying her through the whole house, the two of them stumbling around and sloppily making out like teenagers as they went. After they made it upstairs and down the hallway toward Blair’s bedroom, Blair held onto Erin with one arm as she reached around Erin with her other arm to open the door. Erin was pretty sure she kicked it open which was honestly hot as hell.

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“Moon! Out!” Blair demanded.

Erin watched the dog slink across the room, moving like he thought he might be in trouble, and Blair must’ve noticed too because she sighed and sat Erin down on her bed, then walked over to Moon. She bent down and petted him behind his ear. “I’m sorry, buddy. You know I love you. I just have something very important to do right now that you can’t be part of. I promise to take you in the pool as soon as I’m done.”

Erin found it amazing that Blair could be so sexy and also so sweet, all at the same time. She really was the whole package. Why she saw something in Erin was beyond her.

Blair shut the door behind Moon, then spun on her heels to face Erin. She lifted an eyebrow as she strutted toward her, and that move alone was almost enough to make Erin come. Almost. Blair didn’t hesitate to straddle Erin right where she was sitting on the bed. Fuck... Again.

“So, where were we?” Blair asked flirtatiously, gently rolling her hips against Erin and causing enough friction to make Erin moan.

Erin got enough control of herself to put a finger under Blair’s chin and pull her face closer to hers. “I believe we were right here,” she said softly, before taking Blair’s bottom lip between her teeth, then pushing her tongue into Blair’s mouth once again.

Now it was Blair who moaned, her hips grinding harder against Erin’s lap the longer they kissed. After another minute, Erin forced herself to pull back. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m really enjoying this, but I’d also like to come when I’m not wearing all of

my clothes.”

“Say no more. I’d love to take care of both of those things for you.”

Erin was so happy she had chosen to wear a button-up over her bathing suit, because watching Blair slowly unbutton it one button at a time might have been the sexiest thing in the world. Once all of the buttons were popped open, Blair seductively pushed the shirt off of Erin’s shoulders, moving her hands down Erin’s arms as she did it. With her shirt now off, Blair’s hands moved to Erin’s stomach. Chills ran down Erin’s spine from the lightness of Blair’s touch.

“Fuck,” Blair said in a breathy whisper as she moved her fingers across Erin’s bikini top. “It should be illegal to be this hot. Truly.”

It still blew Erin’s mind that someone who looked like Blair found her good looking. “Look who’s talking.”

Erin grabbed Blair’s bikini top and brought it over her head. The sight of Blair’s naked chest had Erin’s heart pounding in her own chest. She brought her hands up to touch Blair, because she couldn’t resist.

Blair groaned as Erin kneaded her breasts with her hands. Erin replaced one of her hands with her mouth and sucked Blair’s nipple into her mouth. She moved that hand down Blair’s stomach and into her bikini bottoms. She lightly bit down on Blair’s nipple as she ran a finger through Blair’s very wet folds.

“Wait.” Much to Erin’s surprise, Blair reached down and grabbed her hand to stop her from what she was doing. “Can I fuck you?”

Erin laughed at the question, while at the same time practically choking on that laugh because of the effect Blair’s words had on her. “I kind of thought that’s the direction

this was heading in already.”

“I meant, can I fuck you with a strap? Is that something you’re into?”

Erin didn’t know that was something she could be into until she heard the words leave Blair’s mouth, and nothing in the world sounded better. “I’ve actually never done that.”

“You’ve never been the one getting fucked by a strap or you’ve never done it at all?”

Erin’s face turned red with embarrassment. She couldn’t believe she was over thirty and had never done something so many people considered very vanilla. “Never at all. Bianca always said she wasn’t into it, so we just didn’t do it.”

“Is it something you want to do?”

“With you?” Erin pictured Blair getting on top of her and pushing inside of her, and it took everything inside of her not to moan just from the thought. “More than anything.”

Blair’s face lit up once again and she licked her lips as she stood from Erin’s lap. Erin watched her movements as Blair walked across the room, opened up her bottom drawer, and moved a bunch of underwear around before pulling out a purple dildo and a black harness.

Erin swallowed hard. After having a whole child come out of her, nothing should have any trouble going into her, but the object was still intimidating.

Of course, Blair chose that exact moment to look over at her and must have caught the look on Erin’s face because she walked over to her, knelt down in front of her, and put her hands on her knees. “We don’t have to do this if you don’t want to. I’m

more than happy to use my hands or mouth.” Blair’s serious face turned into a smirk. “Or both.”

Erin shook her head. “I want to do it. I’m not going to lie. I’m a little nervous, but it’s not bad nerves. I’m also excited.”

“Good. Because I’m excited too.” Blair patted Erin’s knee, then stood up.

Erin couldn’t take her eyes off of her as she swiftly put the strap-on together and maneuvered it onto herself. She swallowed hard once again when she took in the sight in front of her—Blair, completely naked, aside from the object between her legs. It was almost too much for Erin to handle and she had to squeeze her own legs shut due to the pressure building down there.

As if that weren’t enough to make her a complete goner, Blair then lifted an eyebrow and sashayed over to her. She bent down, bringing her mouth close to Erin’s ear. Instead of saying any words at first, she lightly bit Erin’s ear before licking it. Next, she blew on it, and goosebumps didn’t only pop up on Erin’s neck, but also on her arms and legs.

After all of that, when Erin could barely process what was happening anymore, Blair finally whispered in her ear. “Lay down, baby. It’s time to let me pleasure you.”

Erin followed her directions and scooted back on the bed, laying her head on the pillows and staring at the ceiling as Blair lowered her body on top of Erin’s. When the object attached to Blair rubbed against Erin’s leg, it caused a shiver to shoot down her spine.

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Blair sat up slightly, stuck two fingers in her mouth, then brought them down to Erin's center and ran them through her folds. "Just wanted to make sure you're ready for me," Blair said with a smirk.

She then removed her fingers from Erin and put them back into her mouth, moaning as she slowly pulled them back out. She winked.

That goddamn wink. Those fingers. Fuck.

"You taste just as good as I remember." She continued to smirk at Erin, clearly completely aware of what she was doing to her. "And I'd say you're definitely ready. But just in case..." She leaned over to the side, opened the drawer of her nightstand, and pulled out a bottle of lube. She leaned back and shook the bottle. "Do you want to do the honors or should I?"

Erin swallowed hard as she looked from the bottle in Blair's hand to the object between her legs. Why did she want to do it so badly? It's not like she would actually be touching Blair.

As if she could tell Erin was having an internal battle, Blair grabbed her hand and kissed her knuckles. "Some people like to do it as a kind of foreplay, but others don't find that to be sexy, so either way is fine."

"What... what do you prefer?"

"Honestly, I think it's fucking hot when the other woman does it when I'm wearing this, but I'm just as happy doing it myself. My priority is making you feel good."

“I want to do it.”

Blair tilted her head at Erin and licked her lips. “You're sure? I don't want you to do it just because you think it's what I want.”

“First of all...” Erin sat up slightly so she could run her hand down Blair's stomach, stopping just before she reached the dildo. “You're my priority. You deserve to be taken care of just as much as I do. Probably more, honestly. But also,” Erin took the girthy object in her hand and began to stroke it. “I actually really want to do this.”

Blair's eyes went wide and now she was the one to swallow hard. Without saying a word, she passed the bottle of lube to Erin. Erin squirted some in her hand then started rubbing it over the length of the dildo. As she used one hand on the dildo, she brought the other hand up to Blair's nipple and began to play with it.

“Fuck,” Blair moaned as she watched Erin.

When she closed her eyes and bit her lip, Erin sat up and brought Blair's other nipple into her mouth.

“Are you trying to kill me?” Blair asked with a strained laugh.

“I'm not sure,” Erin said as seductively as possible. “Is it working?”

“Fuck yeah.” Blair laughed once again. When she opened her eyes and stared directly into Erin's, the laughter stopped and the air became thick between them. “I wanna be inside of you... now.”

Erin struggled to get her words to come out, but once she did, she was glad her voice didn't crack. “Then do it.”

Blair slipped the dildo, which Erin hadn't realized she was still stroking, out of her hand. She brought it to her opening and moved it around, most likely to pick up more moisture, but it also made Erin crave it even more.

She placed her hand on top of Blair's to show her what she wanted. Correction—Needed. "Blair, please fuck me."

Blair smirked once again. "Your wish is my command, my lady."

Blair slowly pushed the dildo inside of her, the pain Erin felt at first ultimately becoming intense pleasure. She moved her hips up and the toy slipped even deeper inside of her. Erin wasn't sure why she had never done this before because...shit.

Once Erin was pretty sure Blair couldn't get any deeper inside of her, Blair lifted her hips and pulled out of her slightly, before slowly pushing in once again. "How does that feel?" she asked hesitantly.

"So good," Erin forced out just above a whisper. "So fucking good."

"Are you ready for me to go harder?"

Ready? If Blair didn't start pounding her, Erin might literally die. Erin grasped on to Blair's arms and squeezed them hard, then looked into her eyes with all of the fervor currently pulsing through her body. "Blair, I need you to fuck me. Now."

Her normal cocky grin was wiped from Blair's face as she stared at Erin with wide eyes, then slowly nodded her head.

She pushed the dildo in harder this time, and Erin couldn't stop herself from screaming out in pleasure. Each thrust that followed was harder and faster until both of their bodies were thrashing together, and Erin couldn't even remember what day it

was.

She felt her orgasm building, and with one especially good thrust from Blair, it shot through her. Erin had always thought “toe-curling” was just a figure of speech, but her toes literally curled as her whole body reacted to the sensations pulsing through her.

Blair rolled off of her as Erin struggled to catch her breath. When she was finally able to function, she looked over at Blair, who looked just as spent as Erin felt. “Did you finish?” She didn’t see how Blair could’ve possibly gotten the same enjoyment as she had out of that, and Erin didn’t want to leave her unsatisfied.

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Blair laughed at her question. “Fuck yeah. I think I came before you even did. That was so fucking sexy.”

Blair reached over and took Erin’s hand in hers, and the sensation of their fingers intertwining had Erin feeling even more than the sex had. It was no longer the feeling of being completely satisfied or on the edge of a climax. This was different. Erin knew exactly what this feeling was even after not experiencing it for so long. This was the feeling of falling in love.

There was no denying it and no stopping it. Erin was falling head over heels for the woman lying beside her, and she’d never been more terrified of anything in her entire life. She needed to share all this with Blair, but was struggling to put her feelings into words. How did she explain that she wanted Blair more than anything in the world, but didn’t know if she could take the leap yet? How did she tell her that she had dreams of what their life together would be like but wasn’t ready to make those dreams a reality? Even as Erin said it in her head, it sounded completely crazy. But if anyone would understand, it was Blair. Not because she had experienced any of the same things Erin had, but because she was the most understanding person Erin knew. One more reason to take this leap (but also another factor that would make the potential fallout that much worse).

Erin took a deep breath and then blew it out. She just needed to say all of this out loud and get Blair’s input on it. “No matter how hard I try, I can’t stop myself from falling for you more and more.”

A wide, almost childlike smile spread across Blair’s face as she squeezed Erin’s hand and rolled onto her side to stare into her eyes. “Maybe you should stop trying. Maybe

it's time you finally let yourself fall."

"I... I want to. I really do. I'm not trying to lead you on. I promise. My feelings are very real. I just—"

Before Erin could finish her sentence, her phone started to ring. As much as she didn't want to, she stood from the bed to find it, because it could be about Nolan.
"Sorry."

"Don't worry about it. I know you have to make sure Nolan is okay."

Erin fished her phone out of her discarded shorts and found it was the number for the indoor playground facility where Nolan was having his birthday party. As much as she didn't feel like talking to them right now, she also didn't have a choice since the party was a week-and-a-half away.

"Hello?"

"Hi, is this Erin Corcoran?" the person on the other end of the phone asked, their voice sounding weirdly nervous.

"This is her."

"Hi. Yes. I'm calling about your son, Nolan's, birthday party. It appears we somehow double-booked that day."

Erin scoffed. "You double-booked and didn't realize it until a week-and-a-half before?" She didn't like getting an attitude with people just trying to do their job, but she was so frustrated right now, she didn't know how to hold it in.

"Yes. I'm very sorry. We have multiple party planners, and it seems they didn't

communicate. There are a few options.”

Erin couldn’t even focus on what the woman on the phone was saying, because she was so overwhelmed. “It’s okay,” she said, trying to make it sound like she actually meant it. “We will figure something else out. I just need my deposit back.”

“Absolutely. I will make sure that gets put back on your credit card as soon as possible. Thank you so much for understanding. I hope you consider us for a party in the future.”

“Of course.” Fat chance. Erin sighed as she hung up the call.

“Everything okay?” Blair asked from where she sat on the bed in all of her naked glory.

“Yeah, it’s fine.” Erin immediately shook her head, because she knew it was no use lying to Blair. She’d see right through her. “No. Not at all, actually. You know Nolan’s birthday party that was supposed to be happening in a week-and-a-half? Well, that’s ruined now. The venue was double-booked. I can’t do it at my house. There’s no way. I invited his whole class. Why the hell did I do that?”

Blair shrugged nonchalantly, as if this wasn’t a huge catastrophe. “We’ll do it here.”

“What?” Erin had to have heard that wrong.

“Seriously. It’s perfect. The pool will still be open. There’s a lot of space. Plus, Nolan loves it here. I’m sure he’ll be pumped.”

“Absolutely not. This is my responsibility. I’m not putting that on you and your family.” Blair got out of the bed, dildo still hanging between her legs, and walked over to Erin. She rubbed her hands up and down Erin’s arms, immediately making

her feel more relaxed. “You don’t have to do everything on your own, you know. Let me do this for you.”

“Are you sure?” Erin really wasn’t used to someone taking care of her like this.

“Positive. We will have to put our talk on hold for a bit, though. We have a party to plan.”

We.Erin was really starting to love the sound of that.

Chapter 25

Erin

“Mommy! Mommy! How much time ’til my birthday?” Nolan asked from the back of Erin’s car.

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Erin had to suppress an eye roll. If she had a dollar for every time Nolan asked about his birthday this past week, she could quit her job. “Soon! We’re going to Blair’s house now to get everything ready, and in a little bit, all of your friends will be there!”

“Not JP. JP say he not coming.”

“I’m sorry, bud. You’ll have a lot of other friends there, though.” Honestly, Erin wouldn’t know who JP was if the kid threw a toy at her head, but hopefully this party would allow her to get to know not just Nolan’s friends, but also their parents, much better.

“I know! And Bear will be there!”

Erin laughed. “Of course! It’s her house, after all.”

“I love Bear’s house. And I love Bear!”

“I do too, buddy.” Erin’s whole body immediately heated up and she could feel her face turning red. What the hell did I just say? “I really like Blair too.”

Erin spent the rest of the drive anxiously overthinking what she had just admitted to Nolan and to herself and whether it was just the slip of her tongue or something more. I mean, you can love someone without being in love with them. Maybe that’s how she felt about Blair. The knot in her stomach said otherwise though.

She hated that she couldn’t be a normal person who found these feelings exciting,

rather than having her fight-or-flight instincts kick in and tempt her to run away. There was no running from Blair though. Even if she tried, she knew she'd end up turning right back around.

“Bear!” Nolan shouted, shocking Erin back to the present moment.

Erin realized she was sitting in Blair's driveway and Blair was walking toward them, waving excitedly. Erin had been so caught up in her own thoughts, she didn't even remember putting in the code for Blair's neighborhood. Shit, I really hope I didn't just drive through the gate. I would've realized if I did that, right? Even if I didn't, Nolan definitely would've let me know.

Erin jumped when Blair tapped on her window. She brought one hand to her chest while she used the other to hit the button to put down the window.

“Someone's a little jumpy today, huh?” Blair asked as she stuck her head through the window. For a second, Erin thought she was going to kiss her, but instead, she leaned around her to look at Nolan. “Hey, dude! Happy birthday! Are you ready for the best birthday party ever?”

“Yes!” Nolan bounced up and down in his car seat and started to claw at the straps. “Get me out!”

“I'm on it.” Blair pulled back, but stopped for a moment to stare at Erin. “You're okay, right?”

“I'm good. Just a lot on my mind with all of the last minute party details.” Not a complete lie. “I brought a big thing of my mac and cheese and the pizza will be delivered about a half hour before the party. And you said you grabbed some snacks and drinks, right?” When Blair offered to get all of that, Erin told her she really didn't have to, but Blair insisted, and given how stubborn she was, Erin knew there was no

point in fighting her.

“I did. Don’t worry. Even if his classmates have a bigger appetite than an NFL football team, we’ll still have enough food.”

Erin figured Blair was exaggerating until they walked into the house and found the snack table already set up. Well, snacktables. There were multiple. Small bags of popcorn, assorted chips, every type of cookie imaginable, and so many different juice boxes and other drinks lined the tables.

“There’s also mini sandwiches and potato salad in the fridge that my mom made. We’ll wait to get those out until right before the party starts, though.”

Erin’s eyes burned as she blinked back her tears. Blair was way too good to her, and she had no idea what she had done to deserve such kindness. As much as she wanted to be someone who deserved Blair, she had a really hard time convincing herself that she was worthy. “You really didn’t have to do all of this.”

Blair turned to face Erin and put her hands on her arms. “I know I didn’t. That’s not why I did it. I did it, because I would do anything to make you and Nolan happy.”

Erin thought her heart might leap out of her chest. The amount of...feelings...she felt for this woman was getting harder and harder to contain. She wanted to give Blair a kiss right there in the middle of her dining room, but that didn’t seem like the best idea with Nolan also right there and Blair’s family most likely close by. She settled for a light kiss to her cheek instead, which still made a shiver run down her spine. “Thank you. I honestly don’t know what I did to deserve all of this.”

Blair stared at her with eyes that were full of adoration and care. The look would’ve made Erin weak in the knees if it hadn’t ended so quickly when Blair dropped her hands and jumped away from her. “That’s not all! I have one more surprise for you!”

Another surprise? Erin was barely keeping it together already. If Blair did anything else, she might cry, or worse—take her up to her room and have a repeat of the last time she was at Blair’s house. Fuck. Erin really wished her mind hadn’t gone there, because now it was all she could think about and the last thing she should be thinking about.

Luckily, Blair rushed them through the kitchen and out the glass doors to the pool area, so she didn’t have much time to focus on things she shouldn’t be thinking about.

“A bounce place?!” Nolan shouted, before Erin even had a chance to notice the huge structure set up in the large open yard beside the pool.

It was one of the biggest bounce houses Erin had ever seen, and it was right there in Blair’s yard. There was what looked to be a mini obstacle course, followed by a large bouncing area, as well as a set of blow-up stairs that led to a high slide. “Blair...” Erin tried to form words, but she couldn’t find any that described exactly how she felt in that moment. “This... It’s too much. It probably cost you so much money.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Blair pointed to where Nolan was already running over to the bounce house and jumping inside, a smile on his face so big that it removed every pain Erin had ever felt from her heart. “That makes it all worth it.”

Erin turned toward Blair and rested her hands on Blair’s hips. “You’re the most amazing person I’ve ever met.” She looked around and didn’t see Blair’s family anywhere in sight, then checked to see if Nolan was completely distracted by the bounce house (which he was). She leaned in and placed a kiss on Blair’s lips that immediately lit a spark inside of her.

She opened her mouth to Blair’s and was about to deepen the kiss when the sound of her phone ringing loudly in her pocket caused them both to jump apart. She pulled it out to check who was calling, then held it up to show Blair. “Sorry. My sister

has impeccable timing,” she said sarcastically.

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She took a step away from Blair and answered the phone. “Hey, April. What’s up?”

“I just wanted to let you know that we’re about five minutes away. Sorry to crash the party early. It took less time to get here than we expected.”

“No problem.” Except for the small detail of you interrupting the perfect moment. “That just means I can put you all to work once you get here.”

“Works for me. I’ll put Sydney and Tanner on Nolan duty and the rest of us can help with set up.”

“Perfect. I’ll see you soon.”

Blair smiled at Erin as she hung up the phone and put it back into her pocket. “I take it that was your family?”

“Yes.” Erin rolled her eyes. “They are unfortunately going to be here very soon.”

“That’s okay. My parents should be home soon too. They’re just out taking Moon for a walk since he’ll most likely hide in my room once all the kids start arriving.”

After coaxing Nolan out of the bounce house with the promise that he could get back in as soon as his cousins arrived, the front door opened and Erin heard the voices of not just Blair’s parents, but her own family’s as well.

When she, Nolan, and Blair walked into the hallway, Moon ran over to them, going directly for Nolan, who giggled as he gave him belly rubs.

“Wow, Nolan, Moon seems to really like you,” April said with a certain lilt to her voice that told Erin she was up to no good. “You must spend a lot of time with him.” She looked directly at Erin and gave her a shit-eating grin, which would have absolutely driven Erin insane if she wasn’t too happy to care about her sister’s antics.

“Yeah. Moon loves me,” Nolan said, completely unaware that April only said that to tease his mom.

Erin said hello to Blair’s parents and thanked them profusely for hosting the party. Brandy waved a hand at her. “It’s no worry at all. We’re happy to do it. We miss having little ones running around in here.”

Erin patted Nolan’s head. “Don’t worry. I’m sure this one is happy to run around here whenever you’d like.”

“Well, we’re always happy to have him.” Brandy looked from Nolan to Erin and smiled in a way that could only be described as mischievous. “We’re always happy to have both of you.”

The way she said it almost made it sound like she knew there was something going on between Erin and Blair. Was that her way of telling Erin she was okay with it or was that just wishful thinking on Erin’s part? Either way, it was still nice to hear. It really felt like Blair’s whole family had made it their goal to get her to cry today.

Erin and Blair both greeted Erin’s family, then all of the kids and Erin’s mom headed out to the back so Nolan could show them the bounce house. Blair’s dad asked for help with something involving the pool and Blair, along with Erin’s brother-in-law, jumped at the opportunity to help him, leaving just Erin and her sister standing by the door.

“So, now she’s hosting your son’s birthday parties? Things must be getting pretty

serious.”

Even though Erin knew her sister was just teasing her, she couldn't help but smile when she thought about the past few weeks with Blair. Movie nights, time with Nolan, the amazing sex they had in Blair's childhood bedroom, the way Blair had jumped at the opportunity to help with Nolan's party. It was all so perfect. “Blair's great.” The words slipped out of her mouth before she even realized what she was saying.

Her sister pulled away from her and gave her an incredulous look. “Wait. Did something change? Are you two finally official?”

Erin shook her head. “Not yet.” Yet. That little word held so much possibility. The possibility to make Erin the happiest woman in the world and the possibility of breaking her once and for all.

“Yet?” Her sister asked, also latching onto that one very important word. “So, that means you're finally going to get your head out of your ass and let something good into your life?”

“I want to.”

April laughed and pointed down the hallway. “You're saying that as if the woman who is currently throwing a goddamn birthday party for your son wouldn't date you at the drop of a hat.”

“Blair isn't the problem. It's me.”

April sighed, clearly sick of having this same conversation over and over again with Erin. “The problem is that attitude. It's not your fault that Dad left. It's not your fault that your ex-wife turned out to be a complete douche. I feel like you've done such a

good job of convincing yourself you caused those things to happen that you figure it's just a matter of time before you scare someone else away, but you can't live like that. You're going to end up pushing away the people who actually matter; the ones who would never leave you if you just gave them a chance."

Erin wanted to ask her sister how to stop blaming herself, but before she had the chance, Blair walked back into the hallway. She stopped when she saw Erin and April, most likely both looking like they had just been caught doing something wrong. "Sorry. I was just coming to make sure you two were okay." Blair pointed her thumb behind her. "If you're having some secret sister talk, I can go though."

"No. You should stay." April took a few steps away from Erin and closer to Blair. "My sister was just telling me how great you are. I think maybe she should tell you instead."

April shot Erin a smile over her shoulder, then walked down the hallway, leaving Erin and Blair alone.

Blair closed the space between her and Erin, the cocky smile on her face getting more pronounced with each step. When she was practically toe-to-toe with Erin, she leaned forward and rested her hand on the door behind Erin, essentially pinning her there. "So, you think I'm pretty great, huh?"

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Erin couldn't help but smile back at her, and her breathing picked up due to their close proximity. "I think I said you were okay."

"Just okay? Are you sure about that?" Blair leaned even closer to Erin, causing her heart rate to pick up now too. "That's not what you were saying last week when I—"

Do not pull her upstairs. It's inappropriate. This is your son's birthday. But, fuuuuck. Erin used all the strength she could muster to gently push Blair away. "You can't talk to me like that right now."

"Why? Because you don't want it?" Blair made a point of running her eyes up and down the length of Erin's body. "Or because you want it so bad you can hardly stand it."

"I think you already know the answer to that." Erin pushed past Blair, but before walking away, she checked for signs of anyone else around and when she found no one, she squeezed Blair's ass.

Blair's laughter followed behind her the rest of the way down the hall, and it was like music to her ears.

Nolan's birthday party turned out to be a huge success, mostly thanks to Blair and her parents. All of the parents of Nolan's friends seemed impressed, and Erin even managed to get a few of their numbers to set up future play dates. Some of the parents were under the impression that Blair was Nolan's other mom, which Erin didn't

bother to correct, mainly because she had no idea how to actually describe their situation.

After the last parent and child left, Erin blew out a long breath. As much as she had enjoyed getting to know all of them, it was nice to be surrounded only by people she knew well.

“What can we help with?” April asked.

“You've done enough already.” Erin walked over to her backpack and dug through it until she found her keys. She pulled off her house key and threw it at April, who fumbled with it before giving up and letting it land on the floor. “Why don't you all head back to my house and get yourselves settled?”

“Are you sure?” April looked around. “It looks like there's still a lot to do.”

“We're sure.” Blair walked up to Erin and put an arm around her waist. “You were such a big help in getting set up, and I know you had to leave at an ungodly hour to get here. Let us handle the rest.”

We. Us. Those words rang through Erin's ears and made her heart skip a beat. She hadn't realized how much she missed being part of a team. It felt good. Too good. There was that pit in her stomach again. She really needed to figure out how to stop that.

After saying goodbye to her family, Erin and Blair walked to the kitchen where Blair's parents had already started cleaning up. “Please stop,” Erin told them. “You were so nice to host this party and set it up. I can handle the clean up.”

“She's right, parents.” Blair pointed her thumb over her shoulder. “Let us do all of this.”

Erin turned toward Blair and poked her side. “I was obviously talking about you too. You got Nolan a freaking bounce house.”

Blair smacked her hand on her forehead. “Shit. That reminds me. I forgot to give Nolan his actual gift.”

“Actual gift? There’s more?”

Blair’s parents looked at each other and gave one another a knowing look, then her mom subtly nodded at him before smiling back at Erin. “If you insist, we’ll leave you two to do this, while we take Moon for a walk.”

Erin watched as she quickly left the room with Blair’s dad following close behind. After they were gone, she turned toward Blair again. “Whatever you got him, you should take back. This is too much.”

Blair furrowed her eyebrows as she studied Erin’s face. “Too much because it’s not what you want or too much because you’re worried about me?”

It was definitely the second one. “Does it really make a difference?”

Blair nodded. “Definitely. If it’s because you want me to back off, I’m more than happy to do that. Not because it’s what I want, but because I never want to make you feel uncomfortable or as if I’m pressuring you into something.”

“You’ve never once made me uncomfortable. I can promise you that. I just don’t want you to ever feel like you have to do all of this. The last thing I want is for you to think I’m taking advantage of you. I like you even without any added benefits.”

Blair smirked and lifted an eyebrow. “What added benefits are we talking about exactly?”

Erin snorted out a laugh because that was the last thing she was expecting Blair to say, even though she really should've seen it coming. She playfully pushed Blair's shoulder. "You know what I mean."

"Oh, I know exactly what you mean." Blair wiggled her eyebrows, but then became serious once again. "But anyway, I wanted to get this for Nolan. It's honestly kind of a gift for both of our birthdays, since it was a bit selfish on my end. When we were at the zoo, I noticed they had a two-hour up close and personal giraffe experience, so I'm going to take him to that. I didn't get the actual tickets yet, because I wanted to figure out what day works. I hope you don't mind that I was just going to have it be me and him. We'd obviously love to have you, but I figured this could be our special time since we don't really get that now that I'm not his babysitter."

There was so much to pick apart there that Erin didn't know where to start. One thing in particular had really caught her attention, though. "Wait. You said a gift for both of your birthdays. Is your birthday coming up soon?" Erin couldn't believe she didn't know this, especially after everything they had been through and talked about with each other.

Blair nodded slowly, as if she was hesitant to admit that to Erin. "It's actually two weeks from yesterday, on October 10th."

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Two weeks? Really? Erin was nowhere close to prepared for that. “What? How did I not know about this?”

Blair shrugged. “I guess we never had the birthday conversation. When is yours, by the way?”

“March 18th, but that’s not important right now. I’m shocked because you honestly strike me as one of those people who would celebrate your birthday for the whole month. No offense.”

“None taken.” Blair smiled coyly. “I am special like that. Plus, you’re right. I normally am that person.”

“So, what changed?”

Blair put her hands on Erin’s hips and placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. “I guess you could say my priorities changed. Some things or people are more important than me.”

Erin had to bite her tongue so she didn’t say a certain L-word that was getting harder and harder to hold in. The fact that she was even thinking about it was completely insane. Blair wasn’t even her girlfriend. She didn’t even know her birthday until a minute ago. Still, she had to say something. She couldn’t leave Blair standing there thinking she was the only one experiencing this intense connection between them. “To me, there is no one in this world more important than you and Nolan.”

Blair’s smile blossomed bigger than Erin had ever seen it before. “If you were

thinking about getting me a birthday present, forget it. Hearing you say those words is all I need.”

Even if that were the case, Erin’s mind was already buzzing with ideas of what she could do to make Blair’s birthday extra special.

Chapter 26

Blair

“Anything specific you want to do for your birthday this weekend?” Blair’s mom asked her just a few days before. She probably found it strange that Blair wasn’t already talking her ear off about everything she wanted and exactly what her plans were.

Blair shrugged. “Erin and Nolan have something special planned for me for Saturday, but they won’t tell me what it is. Aside from that, I figured I would also do something with Marisol and obviously you and dad, and Blake and Trinity if they end up coming home this weekend.”

“You’ve been spending a lot of time with Erin and Nolan lately. I take it that’s where you’ve been staying all the nights you don’t come home...?”

Blair’s parents had been very good at giving her space ever since she had started college. They said they understood she did whatever she wanted while she was there, so they were not going to try to control her when she was home. For that reason, even though Blair always let them know when she wasn’t coming home just so they wouldn’t worry, they never questioned where she was. Blair wasn’t sure if her mom even realized there was something going on between her and Erin. Although, the birthday party probably gave that one away.

“Yeah, but it’s not like that.” Kind of? Sort of? Beats me.

“Oh? That’s too bad. I really like Erin. Is it because she has a kid? I can’t blame you. I was also worried about that when I first noticed you watching her with that distinct sparkle you get in your eyes every time you have a crush. If I’m being brutally honest, I didn’t think you were ready for that.” She put up her hand as though she could sense how much that sentence crushed Blair, because really, was there anyone in her life who actually believed she could handle this? “If you were listening, which god knows if you were, because you are your father’s daughter after all, I said I didn’t think. As in past tense. You proved me completely wrong these past few months. I’ve seen a completely different side of you, and watching you with Nolan...” Blair was surprised when her mom grabbed a tissue and dabbed at her eyes. “I have no doubt that you are the perfect person for him and for Erin. If you’re questioning that, please don’t.”

Wow. So, her mom did believe in her. That meant more to Blair than she could ever imagine. Now all she had to do was convince the person she was trying to date of that. But what more could she do if Erin still didn’t realize it by now? “It’s not me who’s questioning it.” Blair shook her head as she thought of how to explain it without making Erin look bad. She didn’t want her mom to have a bad taste in her mouth about the girl she was trying to spend her future with. “Erin had a really bad experience with her ex-wife. She left Erin and Nolan with pretty much no warning, and now Erin has trouble trusting people. It doesn’t help that her dad also left her.”

Her mom’s face hardened slightly, and Blair worried that she revealed too much. “In that case, be careful. I really like Erin and I’m sorry she went through that, but you’re my daughter, so in the end, my loyalties are with you. I don’t want you to get wrapped up in her drama and end up hurt.”

“I won’t. I promise.” Blair hoped that was a promise she could keep.

“Good.” Her mom’s smile returned. “Why don’t you have everyone come here for your birthday on Friday night? I’ll ask your brother if he and Trinity can come home, and you can invite Marisol.” Her mom winked. “And Erin and Nolan, of course.”

Blair couldn’t stop the smile from spreading across her face as she took out her phone to text Marisol and Erin. This is going to be the greatest birthday ever.

“Happy birthday, beautiful.”

Blair felt like she had to be dreaming when she rolled over in bed and found Erin lying beside her. Except, it wasn’t a dream. After going for ice cream with Erin and Nolan then staying to watch a movie after Nolan went to bed, Erin had shyly asked her if she wanted to stay, and of course, Blair said yes. They were both exhausted after a long week, so they passed out without having sex. Although, sex hadn’t happened since their slip up at her parents’ house, so Blair didn’t actually know where things stood with that. She wanted to talk to Erin about it, especially since they still hadn’t had that talk she promised, but this weekend wasn’t the time for that. For her birthday, she wanted to just take things as they came. If they had sex, that would be awesome, but if not, that was fine too. She would be just as happy spending time with Nolan and Erin.

“Good morning,” Blair said sleepily, still in her dreamlike state, most likely because being with Erin was a dream come true.

Erin smiled and pushed a piece of hair behind Blair’s ear. “Have I ever told you that I adore your sleepy voice? It’s so cute.”

“You haven’t told me that, but I’m glad you did.” Blair snuggled closer to Erin. “I’m also happy to take any other birthday compliments you want to toss my way.”

“Well, I think you’re super sexy.” Erin leaned in and placed a kiss on Blair’s neck that already had her thinking about all of the things she wanted to do to her. “You also have a bigger heart than anyone I’ve ever met.” Another kiss. “You’re also amazing with Nolan, and I think, to me, that might be the hottest thing about you.” She ran a hand down Blair’s stomach, inching closer and closer to where Blair really needed her. “I also really love when I make you—”

“Mommy! Where are you? I wake up, Mommy.”

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Erin threw her head back on her pillow and groaned before she broke into a fit of laughter. “Ugh, I’m sorry.”

Blair grabbed the hand that Erin had just put over her face and brought it to her lips to kiss her knuckles. “No need to apologize. This is what I signed up for, right?” Or at least, what I’m trying to sign up for.

Before Erin could answer, the bedroom door swung open. “Mommy, why you not answer me?” He glared at Erin before turning toward Blair and giving her the same look. “Bear, you not s’posed to be in Mommy’s bed. You s’posed to be in my bed.”

“Hey, don’t be mean to Blair,” Erin scolded. “Don’t you remember what today is?” When Nolan shook his head, Erin sighed. “Whose birthday is it?”

Nolan smiled and pointed to himself. “My birthday?”

Blair laughed. This kid was too much. She hopped out of bed, very thankful that he didn’t walk in to find her naked, and ran over to him. When she reached him, she brought her hands to his sides and tickled him.

“Stop,” he said between giggles.

“If you want me to stop, you have to tell me whose birthday it is.”

“Mine?” Nolan said again, laughing even harder this time since he clearly knew the right answer.

“You know it’s not your birthday. You just had your birthday.” Blair stopped tickling him for a second, but his laughter continued. “You know, I have a present I was saving to give you until my birthday, but I guess if it’s not my birthday, I can’t give it to you.”

Nolan’s eyes went wide, and he immediately stopped laughing. “It’s your birthday.” He wrapped his arms around Blair and kissed her cheek. “Happy birthday, Bear.”

“Thanks, buddy.”

Blair tried to hug him back, but he quickly wiggled out of her arms and held out his own. “Can I have my present now?”

Blair walked over to Erin’s closet where she had been hiding it and took out the small bag with a dinosaur on the front.

“Is it a T-Rex toy?” Nolan asked when Blair handed it to him. When she told him it wasn’t, he studied the bag, but still didn’t open it. “A car?”

“For God’s sake, Nolan,” Erin said from bed. “Just open it.”

Nolan giggled again and tore into the bag, pulling out the shirt Blair had gotten him. “A giraffe shirt?” He looked at it for a few seconds then held it against his chest. “I love it. I love it. I love it.”

If Blair had realized he’d be so easy to please, maybe she could’ve saved some money by not getting his actual gift. She knew that wasn’t the case though. She might have been more excited about this giraffe experience than Nolan was going to be.

Blair pointed to the shirt. “That’s only part of the present. On Tuesday next week, your mommy is going to pick you up a little early from daycare and bring you to my

house, so you and I can go meet giraffes.”

“Like before?”

“Kind of like that, but even better. We get to be the only two people there besides the zookeepers and we get to pet them and feed them and learn more about them.”

“Whoa.” Nolan’s eyes and his mouth were all perfect circles. “And it’s special, just me and you? No Mommy?”

Blair shook her head and laughed. “No Mommy.”

She turned around and winked at Erin, who quickly flipped her off before Nolan could see.

“Is today Tuesday?”

Blair shook her head. “No. Today is Friday.”

“Tomorrow?”

Shit.Maybe she should’ve waited longer to give him this gift. “No, not tomorrow.”

“Is it the next—”

Blair put her hand up to stop him and took a deep breath. “It’s many days away, but we have a lot of other fun things planned to do before that, so the time will fly by. Don’t worry.”

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Erin got out of bed and knelt beside Blair, putting a hand on her knee in the process. “One of those fun things is tonight, when we get to go to Blair’s house. Which means you need to get ready for school so I can pick you up early to go over there.”

“Yay!” Nolan yelled before sprinting out of the room.

When Erin and Blair both stood up, Erin turned toward her and booped her on the nose. “And I will see you tonight, birthday girl.”

Erin had offered to take the day off from work since Blair’s daycare was closed for a long weekend for Indigenous Peoples’ Day on Monday, but Blair convinced her to save her days off for something more important. It wasn’t that Blair didn’t want to spend her birthday with Erin. It was actually the opposite. If she could, she would spend the whole weekend with Erin and Nolan, which she was sure was exactly what she would end up doing, so she needed to spend some time with her family and Marisol today.

“See you tonight!” Blair turned to walk out of the bedroom, but before she could, Erin grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

“Forgot something.” Erin pulled her closer and placed a hard, but sweet, kiss on her lips.

When Blair walked out of the room this time, she felt like she was floating.

“Where’s the birthday bitch?” Marisol shouted when she walked into Blair’s house a few hours later.

Blair left the family room where she had been hanging out with her parents, who had also both taken off from work for the day, and walked to the front door to find Marisol standing there with her arms stretched out wide, waiting for a hug.

Blair hadn’t realized how much she missed her best friend until she was standing right in front of her. Even though Marisol was in Philadelphia for school, which was a little less than an hour from where they lived, they still hadn’t seen each other since Marisol moved into her new apartment in August. Blair didn’t know if that had more to do with how busy Marisol was with school or how busy she was with Erin and Nolan. Either way, she was so happy to see her now, and vowed to herself she wouldn’t go this long without seeing her again.

Blair stepped into Marisol’s hug and wrapped her arms around her as well, squeezing her extra hard to try to convey how much she missed her. “Dude, it’s been way too long.”

“You’re telling me. I’ve been busy with school. What’s your excuse?”

“I’ve been kind of busy too.” Blair tried to hold her smile back, but it was no use. Every time she thought about Erin, she couldn’t help but smile. Erin had been a lot more affectionate lately, and Blair hoped that meant they were getting closer to finally becoming official.

Marisol pointed at the stairs then started pushing Blair toward them. “Up to your room now. You’ve been holding out on me. Now you have to tell me everything.”

Blair followed Marisol’s direction and once the two of them (and Moon, of course) were inside, Marisol closed the door. With her arms crossed in front of her chest and

a no-bullshit look on her face, she said, “What’s going on with you and Erin and why don’t I know about it?”

Blair shrugged. “There’s not much to tell. We’re still in the same boat. She’s not ready to make things official, so we’re just kind of letting things come as they do for now.”

Marisol stared at Blair for a long time before a wide grin spread onto her face. “Given that lovestruck look on your face, I’d say something’s definitely coming and that thing is you.”

Blair burst into a fit of laughter. It really had been a long time since Blair and Marisol were together, because Blair should’ve seen that coming and she didn’t. “You’re not wrong. I have been coming a lot, but it’s mostly my own doing while picturing her face.”

Marisol scoffed at her. “That was so fucking cheesy, I’m not sure if I should love it or hate it. Also, don’t think I missed the fact that you said mostly.”

“So, we might have had sex just one more time, and it might’ve been fucking mind-blowing... again.”

“I mean, it better be for how little you’re getting laid,” Marisol said with a laugh.

Even though she knew Marisol was only joking around, she couldn’t help but get defensive on Erin’s behalf. “It’s not about that. The sex is great, but it’s such a small part of our relationship, I’m not even worried about that.”

“Shit.” Marisol’s smile dropped as she tilted her head and studied Blair’s face. “You’re in love with her.” The way she said it made it sound like it was a death sentence. “Please be careful.”

Blair tried not to roll her eyes. Why was everyone telling her that recently? “Now you sound like my mom.”

“Of course I do, because your mom is a smart fucking lady, and even though you’re an asshole at times, we love you like crazy for some reason.”

Blair crossed her arms in front of her chest. “Erin isn’t going to hurt me.”

“I don’t know Erin all that well, but from what I’ve seen, I think you’re half right. I don’t think she would ever hurt you on purpose. But I’m afraid you’re in so deep that you’re going to let her drag you along until you have nothing left to give.”

Blair loved Marisol, and while she knew Marisol was only having this conversation with her because she cared, it still wasn’t what she wanted to hear right now, so she couldn’t help but be bitter. “Wow. Happy birthday to me.”

Marisol’s face softened and she walked over to Blair and grabbed her hands. “You’re right. We shouldn’t be talking about this when we’re supposed to be celebrating. If you promise me you’ll be careful, I promise I won’t bring it up again.”

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“I’ll be careful. I promise.”

“Good.” Marisol wiggled her eyebrows. “Now tell me more about this amazing sex.”

They both laughed and everything went back to normal as Blair gave Marisol a play-by-play, making sure to make it very detailed just to drive Marisol a little bit crazy.

That night at dinner, everyone was acting a little too interested in Erin, and Blair hoped Erin didn’t realize it. It wasn’t that she didn’t want her family and friends to get to know Erin, but more that she felt like they were interrogating her.

When she rode back to Erin’s with her and Nolan that night, she thought about bringing it up, but wasn’t sure what to say. It was still all she could think about as they put Nolan to bed together, then both got ready and fell into Erin’s bed.

As Blair stared up at the ceiling, Erin scooted close to her and began to kiss her neck. As good as it felt, Blair wasn’t in the mood for birthday sex. It wasn’t Erin’s fault, and it’s not like she was mad at her. She just had a lot on her mind.

After a few seconds, Erin pulled away from her. “Is everything okay?”

Blair tried her best to give her the most reassuring smile she could, then reached out and squeezed her hand. “Everything is great.”

Erin sat up slightly and rested her head in her hand. “Since when do you lie to me? I

can tell something is bothering you.”

Blair sighed. “It has nothing to do with you.” She shook her head, because that actually was a lie. “Okay, I mean, it does. But it’s nothing you did wrong.”

“Please tell me what’s going on. The last thing I want to do is hurt you.”

Blair rolled onto her side so she could stare at Erin. As she studied the contours of her face and the little crease that formed on her forehead when she was worried, she realized that Marisol was right. She wasn’t just falling for Erin anymore. She was head over heels in love with her. “I think that’s what I’m afraid of. Getting hurt.”

Erin pointed to herself. “You think I’ll hurt you?” She asked as if it was a completely foreign concept that she could hurt someone.

“I like you so much, Erin, and I’m starting to worry that you’ll never let yourself feel the same.”

Erin scooted even closer to her now, the heat of her body making Blair uncomfortable in the best way possible. “See, that’s the thing. I do feel the same. I like you so much too. No matter how much I try to fight it, and trust me, I’ve tried, I can’t stop myself from falling for you harder and harder.”

Blair wanted to tell Erin how she really felt. She wanted to confess that she was in love with her and had no doubt she wanted to spend the rest of her life with her. The words were on the tip of her tongue, but she worried if she let them out now, she might scare Erin away. Erin had good reason to believe that people don’t always stick around just because they say they will. The problem was Blair was running out of ways to show her that she wasn’t one of those people. When she said forever, she actually meant it. “Why are you still trying to fight it?”

“I don’t want to.”

Blair wasn’t sure if that was an observation or a promise, but it was good enough for now. She leaned in and brought her lips to Erin’s, letting herself fully enjoy this moment with the love of her life.

The next morning, after waking her up to breakfast in bed and a birthday card that Nolan claimed he had spent hours making, they got dressed for an activity that still hadn’t been revealed to Blair.

Blair tickled Nolan’s side as they walked to the car. “Come on, buddy. Just one hint. Tell me what we’re doing.”

Nolan shook his head. “Mommy told me I’m not allowed to say.”

And since when do you actually listen? Blair thought to herself. “But it’s my birthday weekend, and I’m sad because you’re keeping a secret from me. Please tell me.” Blair pushed her bottom lip out in an exaggerated frown.

Nolan looked at Erin, who was walking far enough ahead of them not to hear their conversation, then looked back at Blair. “Okay. I tell you.” His eyes went wide, but his smile went even wider. “We going to a carnival. There’s rides and games and it’s like a big arcade.” When he said big, he motioned with his hands dramatically. “And we love arcades. Right, Bear?”

“That’s right, buddy, we do.” The truth was, carnivals were one of Blair’s favorite things, but she didn’t remember ever sharing that with Erin. She scooped a giggling Nolan into her arms and ran with him to catch up to her. “Did I tell you how much I like carnivals? Because I don’t remember having that conversation.”

Erin looked confused at first, but when the realization hit her, the look of confusion became one of annoyance. “Really, Nolan? You promised me you wouldn’t tell.”

“Bear was sad.”

“Manipulating my son, huh?” Erin looked at Blair and shook her head. It was clear she was trying to keep a straight face, but she cracked a smile within seconds.

Blair shrugged. “I decided to go for the easier target.”

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Erin smiled even wider now. “You don’t fight fair. To answer your question, though, you never told me you liked carnivals. I just made an educated guess and really hoped I was right.”

“Well, you must be very smart, because you’re exactly right. I fu-” When Blair remembered that Nolan was in her arms, she stopped herself. “Freaking love carnivals. They’re literally one of my favorite things.”

“And there’s rides,” Nolan said excitedly.

“Somerides,” Erin said, giving Blair the impression they had this conversation before. “The little ones that you can do by yourself. Mommy doesn’t do rides that aren’t permanently attached to the ground.”

Blair laughed and tickled Nolan’s side once again. “Lucky for you, little dude, Blair does.”

“Yay, Bear! Rides! Rides! Rides!”

Blair joined in with Nolan’s chanting, which continued until they were all safely in their seats and on the way to the carnival. Blair watched Erin as she drove, taking in every little thing she did, from the way she bit her lip when she made a turn to the small smile she got every time Nolan said something ridiculous. She had one hand on the steering wheel and the other was resting on the middle console, and all Blair could think about was reaching out and taking it in hers.

When she tentatively rested her hand beside Erin’s, Erin quickly looked over at it,

before putting all of her focus back on the road. A few seconds passed, and Blair was about to pull her hand away when Erin intertwined their fingers. Blair could barely focus on the conversation for the rest of the car ride, because all she could think about was that hand in hers.

After parking at the carnival, it was a different hand that found hers this time. As soon as they were out of the car and Erin told Nolan that he needed to hold someone's hand, he took Blair's. As they walked around the front of the car to where Erin was standing, she looked at their hands and smiled, but there was also something else in her gaze. A little bit of jealousy?

Blair held out the hand that wasn't holding Nolan's and wiggled her fingers. "I have another one, you know."

Erin gave her the sweetest smile before grabbing onto her hand and squeezing it tightly like she was worried Blair might actually let go. As if.

"No." Nolan pointed right at their interlocked fingers. "I want to hold both hands."

Even though she could see it in Erin's face that she wanted to let go of Blair's hand just as little as Blair wanted to let go of hers, they both did since they understood that Nolan was the priority.

They walked like this throughout the carnival, Nolan only dropping their hands to play games or go on rides. After hours of games and rides, they had all worked up an appetite, so they shared a big bucket of chicken fingers and fries, then got ice cream at Nolan's request. As they walked toward the Ferris Wheel, which Erin miraculously agreed to ride on with them, Nolan pointed to a little girl sitting on her dad's shoulders, then looked up at Blair. "I ride on you!"

Blair shrugged. "Sounds good to me!"

As she was picking him up, Erin started to laugh. “I hope you realize what a terrible idea this is. You’re definitely going to end up with ice cream in your hair.”

Blair shrugged again. “It is what it is.” Nothing could ruin this day. She was sure of that.

She became even more positive when Nolan was safely up on her shoulders and Erin reached out a hand toward her. Blair held on to Nolan with one hand and held Erin’s hand with the other. It wasn’t the easiest thing, but it was the best.

After a few minutes, she felt a cold liquid dripping onto her head and down her neck. Before she could tell Nolan to be more careful, the whole ice cream cone slid down the front of her shirt. “What the hell?”

Erin looked over at Blair, then quickly up at her shoulders, before bringing a hand to her mouth and starting to laugh. “I’m sorry to laugh, but I did warn you.” She laughed even harder. “He is passed out right now.”

As if he subconsciously needed to prove Erin was telling the truth, Nolan laid his head on top of Blair’s, and she could tell by the little snores coming from that direction that he was definitely asleep. Erin helped get her as clean as they could using wipes and napkins, then they headed toward their car instead of the Ferris Wheel.

Walking to the car with Erin, hand in hand, a shirt stained with ice cream, and a little boy asleep on her shoulders, Blair was pretty sure this had been the best day of her life.

Chapter 27

Erin

Erin woke up the day after the carnival feeling happier than she could ever remember. After getting home and putting Nolan to bed, Blair got into the shower to get the ice cream off of herself, and Erin decided to join her. They didn't have sex this time, but Erin did help her clean herself, and somehow massaging shampoo in Blair's hair was more sensual than watching her come. After making out under the water for a few minutes, they got out and dried each other off.

Erin was pretty sure they both assumed this would lead to sex, but instead, they snuggled in bed naked and talked for hours. Blair told stories of when she was younger, and they both talked about their college years. Erin shared the highlights of Nolan's life so far and Blair seemed to hang on every single word. When they could barely keep their eyes open anymore, Blair suggested they put on pajamas so Nolan didn't break into the room in the morning and find them naked. It was such a simple gesture, but it made Erin's heart skip a beat.

As Erin stared at Blair, she slowly opened her eyes. When she caught Erin looking at her, her whole face lit up. She reached out and grabbed Erin's hand and kissed her knuckles, a move she had been doing more and more, that Erin found she really liked. "Good morning."

"Morning," Erin said as all of the words she wanted to say threatened to spill out.

Blair pushed a piece of hair behind Erin's ear and stared even deeper into her eyes. "I want to tell you something."

Erin swallowed hard as her heart began to beat erratically in her chest. She hated that this was how her body reacted, but she didn't know how to stop it. "What is it?" she asked quietly, barely recognizing her own voice, as the walls seemed to close in around her.

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“Days like yesterday are all I want for the rest of my life.”

Erin’s heart exploded in her chest, because that’s all she wanted as well. Then, reality came crashing down on her. She wanted to spend the rest of her life with Blair. She didn’t just want today and tomorrow, but every single other day that followed. “Please don’t say that if you don’t mean it.”

The smile immediately dropped from Blair’s face, and she groaned and put a hand over her face. “I obviously mean it, Erin. I wouldn’t say it if I didn’t.”

“I know you think you mean it, but when you say those things, it gives me hope, and hope normally leads to someone getting hurt.”

“When are you going to realize that I’m not like the people who hurt you?”

Erin hated to hear Blair so upset and angry, especially when she knew it was her fault. “I... I know you’re not.”

“Then stop treating me like I am.” Blair’s voice shook, and Erin could tell it was because she was trying her best to stay strong. “Do you want to be my girlfriend?”

Yes. More than anything in the world. Erin opened her mouth, but those words wouldn’t come out.

Blair groaned once again. “See? This is what I mean. I’m trying to be patient, but it’s really hard. What else do I have to do to prove myself?”

“Nothing. You’re...” God, why couldn’t Erin form words right now? “You’re perfect. It’s not you.”

When the tears came to Erin’s eyes, she knew there was no use trying to fight them. She could feel Blair slipping away, and it was all her fault.

“Hey,” Blair said, her voice now much softer. She ran her thumbs underneath Erin’s eyes to dry the tears, even though it was no use, because they wouldn’t stop. “I’m still here. I’m just frustrated, because I like you so much, but I don’t know if that’s enough for you. I told you I’d wait for you, and I still mean that, but I need to know that I’m not waiting for something that’s never going to happen; for someone who’s never going to be able to trust me.”

Erin knew she had to say something to prove to Blair how much she meant to her and that shedidtrust her, but Blair placed a kiss on her lips before she could.

When she pulled away, she replaced her lips with her finger. “Don’t say anything right now. I want to give you some time to think this through. I’m going to go home, but that doesn’t mean I’m not coming back. I think we both just need a little bit of time to get our heads on straight before we have this talk. Maybe I can sleep over after Nolan and my giraffe experience?”

Erin wanted to stop crying but she couldn’t help herself. Even though Blair hadn’t given up on her completely, Erin worried she would if she wasn’t able to get her head on straight over these next two days. Blair was right, though. Maybe they needed this time, even if it sucked feeling like they were saying goodbye while leaving things unresolved. “You’re right. A sleepover on Tuesday sounds great.” She tried her best to smile, but she was sure it wasn’t good enough to fool Blair.

Blair smiled back at her and wiped her cheeks once again. “Good. Now stop crying, please. There’s no way I’ll be able to leave here if you’re crying.”

Her words only made Erin cry harder, because it was a reminder of how amazing Blair was. At first, Erin had worried she was too immature, but at some point over the last few months, Blair had become the mature one between the two of them.

Erin put her hands on top of Blair's and squeezed them. "I'm okay. I promise. I'll be okay. We'll be okay."

Blair watched Erin with all of the wonder and awe of a mother looking at her newborn. "I know we will."

Blair gave her one more kiss before standing from bed and getting all of her things together. She turned around one more time when she was at the doorway and gave Erin a sad smile and a small wave before leaving.

Erin wanted nothing more than to stay in bed all day and cry and wallow in self pity, but there were two big reasons she couldn't. The first was that she had Nolan, and as much as she always made sure to let him know it was okay to be sad, she didn't want him to realize she was sad and get worried. The other reason was that wallowing was not going to do anything to solve her problems. She needed to figure this out to make sure she didn't end up losing the girl of her dreams.

Since Nolan wasn't awake yet, she grabbed her phone and called her sister. For some reason, just the sound of her sister's voice made her feel like she might start to cry again. "Hey, April! What are you up to today?"

April laughed. "Believe it or not, we actually have some free time for once. I think this weekend might be the only free time we have the rest of this year, but hey, we'll take it."

"Awesome. Are you okay with having some company?"

“If you’re talking about you and Nolan, then obviously.”

“Perfect. We’ll be there in a little while.” Erin hung up the phone before her sister could ask her any more questions, because she didn’t want to get into it just yet.

She woke up Nolan, who was disappointed when he found out Blair wasn’t there, but recovered quickly when she told him they were going to see their family. Because of his excitement, it was easier than usual to get him out of the house, and they left within an hour. As Nolan watched videos on his tablet, Erin thought about not only how she could prove to Blair that she was ready for this relationship, but also how she could prove it to herself. Because she was ready. The fear and hesitation were there, but there was also excitement. She wanted this, but she needed to fully let go of her past so she could enjoy her future. Hopefully her sister had some wise advice, because Erin clearly needed help.

Because she was so caught up in her own thoughts, the drive seemed to go faster than usual. Before she knew it, she was pulling into her sister’s driveway. She hadn’t even shut off the car when the front door opened and her sister and niece walked out.

“Aunt Ape-il! Cousin Syd!” Nolan shouted gleefully from his car seat.

When they reached the car, Sydney walked around to the back where Nolan was sitting, and April walked over to Erin’s door and opened it. She stuck her head in and waved to Nolan. “Hey, buddy! Guess what? Your Uncle Wesley and Tanner are waiting inside to hang out with you and Sydney. Is it okay if I steal your mommy for a few minutes?”

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Nolan looked between Sydney and Erin and then back at April. “Will you give her back?”

April nodded, and with the way she was smiling, Erin could tell she was holding back a laugh. “I will give her back. I promise.”

“Okay!” Nolan turned to face Sydney again. “Get me out, please.”

Once Sydney got him out and they were almost inside the house, April gave Erin what could only be described as her sister-look. It was the one she gave Erin every time she was about to force information out of her. “So, what’s up? It’s not that I don’t love having you here, but you hate last minute plans.”

Erin pointed toward the sidewalk that looped around April’s neighborhood. “Wanna go for a walk? This might take a bit.”

“Of course.” April put her arm around Erin’s shoulder and began walking. “So, what’s going on with Blair?”

Erin’s body stiffened just at the mention of Blair. “How do you know this is about her?”

“Because I haven’t seen you look this rattled since Bianca left. Honestly, you might look worse this time.”

“Well, gee, thanks,” Erin said sarcastically.

April rolled her eyes. “You know what I mean. I can tell something is wrong, and you’re normally pretty good at hiding it, which means something is really wrong.”

“I think I might’ve really messed things up.”

April waved her hand in a go-on motion. “You’re gonna have to give me more than that if I’m going to tell you what an idiot you are.”

“She asked me to be her girlfriend.”

“Okay... You do know that is supposed to be a good thing, right?”

“I know.” Erin threw her hands up in the air. “So, why do I feel like I’m going to throw up at the thought of it? I want it so bad, but at the same time, I don’t know how to stop being scared.”

“Can I give you the hard truth?”

“I’m sure you would even if I said no.”

April laughed. “This is true. That’s what big sisters are for.” She stopped walking and turned to face Erin. “There are always going to be things that scare you in life, but sometimes the scariest things are the most worthwhile. Tell me this, do you worry about Nolan?”

“Every second of every minute of every hour of every day.”

“If you had the chance to give him up so you didn’t have to worry anymore, would you?”

Why would she even ask that? Erin wasn’t Bianca. Not that Bianca seemed to worry

about him even before she gave him up. “Of course not.”

A shit-eating grin took over April’s face. “Exactly, because some people are worth being scared for.”

Point made. Erin had never actually thought of it that way. She was too stuck in her own fear to see everything she was missing out on. Unfortunately, that still didn’t help her get rid of the sick feeling in her gut. “Can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything.”

"How did you get past dad leaving?" Erin didn’t know how her sister would react to her question, since their dad had always been a taboo subject that no one really spoke about.

To her surprise, her sister laughed. "Aside from years of therapy? Meeting a good man like Wyatt helped. I put him through the wringer when we first started dating."

“Really?” Erin never knew that.

“Oh yeah. I had a lot of trouble trusting men because of the man who claims to be our father. But thank god I did, because if not, I’d be missing out on the man who will wake the kids up early to sneak out and get donuts. The man who is not only at every single softball game of Sydney’s, but also in the backyard with her afterward helping her with things she struggled with.” April reached out and took Erin’s hand. “Even though we never really talked about it, I know, just like me, you always dreamed of having the family you felt like we missed out on. And you really thought Bianca was the one you were going to make that family with, and then she let you down even worse than Dad did. I don’t blame you for being skeptical. That’s a lot to go through. But I also know you deserve to be happy, and I’ve never seen you happier than you’ve been these past few months.”

That all made sense. There was just one burning question in Erin's brain that she couldn't let go of, no matter how hard she tried. "Why do you think Bianca left me?"

"Aside from the fact that she's a bitch?" April asked with a laugh. "I really don't know. What bullshit excuse did she give you?"

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“She said she wanted to leave, so I let her. At first, I truly thought she’d come back. When I realized she wasn’t, it was too late to ask.”

“I don’t know. I don’t think it’s ever too late to get closure.”

Her words reminded her of the conversation she had with Blair a few weeks prior. “Blair actually told me I should talk to her.”

“She’s a smart girl. Do you also realize how unusual it is for someone to tell the girl they like to talk to the ex who broke their heart? She did that because she cares about you so much. That’s special.”

“She’s special.” Erin sighed. Just thinking about Blair made her want to jump right into her car and drive straight to her house, but she knew she had to take care of something first. “That’s why I need to do whatever it takes to make this work, even if it’s going to be hard.”

Before she could overthink it, she pulled out her phone and brought up the contact she never thought she’d reach out to again. Her hand shook as she typed out the text. Would it be possible to get together and talk at some point?

She half expected Bianca to never answer, so she was shocked when a reply came back within seconds. About what? A few seconds later, another text came through. Everything has been settled. The documents were signed.

Of course she thought this was about custody or child support. Erin wanted to scream. Bianca was infuriating. This isn’t about Nolan.

Then what's it about?

When April snuck behind her and tried to look over her shoulder, Erin took a few steps away to type out her next message. Closure.

This time Bianca's response wasn't immediate, and Erin thought the conversation was over for now. That was until her phone started to vibrate in her hand with a call from none other than her ex-wife.

She held the phone up toward April. "She's calling me. What the hell am I supposed to do?" Her heart pounded in her chest.

April pointed to the phone. "Pick it up! Now!"

"But what do I say?"

Her sister laughed. "Whatever the fuck it is you need to say."

Erin took a deep breath and took a few more steps away from her sister. I can do this. "Hello?"

"What's up?"

Erin used to think if she heard Bianca's voice again, it would take her back, and she would find herself missing her all over again, but that wasn't the case. There were absolutely no feelings there for the woman on the other end of the phone—aside from anger. And the anger wasn't even for herself. It was for Nolan.

Erin cleared her throat. "I want to ask you something." Her voice sounded stronger than she felt.

“Ask away.”

There were so many things she could ask, but there was one question that burned in her brain about both her dad and Bianca. Something that had made her wonder if she was worth sticking around for. “Was it hard for you to walk away from me?”

“That’s a loaded question,” Bianca said nonchalantly.

Erin’s blood was boiling now. All of the nights spent wondering what was wrong with her, and Bianca wasn’t even bothered. She tried to keep her voice calm, but it was no use. She had been holding this in for way too long. “How is it a loaded question? It’s pretty simple if you ask me. Was it fucking easy for you to walk away from me?”

Much to Erin’s surprise, Bianca laughed in response to her anger. “Wow. I’ve never experienced this spicy side of you. I like it.”

She likes it? What the hell? Erin could feel her face turning red as she paced the sidewalk. “It’s...” Erin shook her head in frustration. “It’s not for you.”

“I realize that. I’m just saying, whoever brought this out in you must be pretty great. Much better than me.”

“What? No. This is about you and me. No one else.”

“Be honest, Erin. It wasn’t about just you and me for a very long time.”

What is she talking... “Nolan.”

Bianca was silent, and for a moment Erin thought the call had dropped. “The thing is, I never actually wanted kids.”

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What the hell? How could Erin have missed that? Wasn't that a pretty important conversation to have with someone before, oh, I don't know, starting a family? "Why didn't you tell me that?"

"I'm sure you realize this, but I'm pretty awful at communicating. When we first met, I fell so hard and fast for you. And it only got stronger from there. I thought if I loved you enough, I could also love having a family with you, so I decided to keep it to myself that I didn't actually want kids. Every step of the way, I kept telling myself I'd get there. Maybe I just needed to feel the baby kick. Maybe I just needed to hold him. But nothing worked. I felt so detached from him. I even resented him, because he took you away from me. And then I resented you, because it felt like you loved him more. When I left, I didn't even miss him. I missed you, of course. How couldn't I? You were such a big part of my life for so long. But if I'm being completely honest, I was too relieved to let it get to me too much. And I realize that makes me a terrible fucking person, but I can't help it."

Erin didn't know whether to scream or cry. While she knew Bianca clearly didn't feel attached to Nolan, hearing her say it out loud pissed her the fuck off. How could anyone meet that kid and not love him, especially his own flesh and blood who was there from the time he was made?

"Are you totally pissed now?" Bianca asked into the silence.

"I'm just trying to figure out how someone could meet my son and not realize how fucking amazing he is. Honestly, I feel bad for you. You're the one who's missing out."

“Maybe I am, but I had to do what was right. I did a lot of selfish things, but leaving was the least of them. Nolan deserves two moms who love him as much as you do.”

Erin immediately pictured Blair playing with Nolan, the love shown all over her face as the two of them laughed together. She was so worried about Blair ending up to be like Bianca, she missed what was so obvious. Blair was nothing like Bianca. Not because she was a good person who stepped up for a child she was not responsible for, but because she was the one Erin was meant to spend her life with. Things were meant to fall apart so something so much better could come together. Erin couldn't believe how stupid she'd been.

She completely forgot Bianca was on the phone until she heard her chuckle. “So, do you hate me? Are you plotting my murder?”

“I could never hate you. You gave me the greatest gift in the world.” Erin looked in the direction of her sister's house and smiled when she thought about the little boy inside.

“He's lucky to have you.”

Erin appreciated the sentiment, but the opinion of the woman who decided to give up the greatest boy in the world meant nothing to her. “You're damn right he is.” Erin laughed at herself and softened her tone. “Thanks for the talk. Good luck with everything.”

“Uh, yeah, you too,” Bianca said hesitantly, as if she was still trying to dissect their conversation. “I hope you find everything you're looking for.”

“Don't worry. I have.” Erin brought her fingers to her smiling lips as she hung up the phone without another word.

“Okay, that was amazing,” April said from where she was apparently standing right behind Erin. “How are you feeling?”

Erin felt light and free, and as if she was finally seeing clearly. “I feel great.”

April stepped up beside Erin and put her arm around her. “Now that that’s over with, on to more important things.”

“What would that be?” Erin asked even though she already knew. She just wanted to hear April say it.

“Finally getting the girl.”

Finally.

Chapter 28

Blair

Blair was happy she had been able to put all of her worries over her impending talk with Erin aside so she could fully enjoy the giraffe experience with Nolan. This had already been one of the best nights of her life, and she really hoped her talk with Erin made the night even better, instead of worse.

Erin had texted Blair on Sunday to tell her she talked to her ex, but wanted to wait until they could talk in person to tell Blair about it. Unfortunately, Erin was at her sister’s house, so it wasn’t possible to make that talk any sooner. Blair had been feeling positive about their talk until Erin dropped Nolan off at her house a few hours earlier. She was cordial and seemed happy, and Blair wouldn’t exactly say things were awkward between them, but she did find it strange that Erin seemed more interested in talking to her mom than her.

As soon as she got Nolan into his car seat, her phone rang. “Hey, Mom. What’s up?”

“Hey, sweetie! I was wondering if it would be okay if I took Nolan for ice cream when you two are done at the zoo.”

Blair looked at her watch. It was starting to get kind of late, so she wasn’t sure how Erin would feel about that. “Let me call Erin and ask her. If she says it’s cool, I’ll bring him to your house.”

Blair said goodbye to her mom and called Erin next. It took her longer than usual to answer, but right before Blair was expecting it to go to voicemail, she did. “Hey! Everything okay?” Her voice sounded chipper, giving Blair the impression that she wasn’t actually worried.

“Oh yeah. Everything is great. Super random, but my mom just called me to ask if she could take Nolan for ice cream. Are you okay with that?”

“Of course! That sounds wonderful.”

There was something off about Erin’s voice, but Blair couldn’t figure out what it was. “Okay. Awesome. I’ll bring him to your house after we go.”

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“Oh.” Erin sounded disappointed. “You’re, um, going to go with them?”

“I figured that made the most sense. Then I can just bring him back to your house once we’re done.”

“Oh, um, yeah. Of course. Have fun.”

There was definitely something weird going on, but now that Nolan had heard the word ice cream, he was shouting at Blair about it, so she couldn’t ask Erin what was up.

As soon as they arrived at her house, Blair’s mom walked out carrying her car keys. She wiggled them in front of Blair. “Since the car seat is already in your car, you take my car to Erin’s, and I’ll bring him over there once we’re done.”

“You don’t want me to come with you?” This situation keeps getting weirder and weirder.

“No. Your father is coming. We’re looking forward to spending time with a child who doesn’t speak back to us.” Blair’s mom gave her a playful smile and wink.

“Good luck with that.” Blair laughed and pointed to Nolan. “This one’s worse than me.”

“I highly doubt that.” Blair’s mom smiled lovingly at Nolan, then looked back at Blair. “Now, stop worrying. Go have fun.”

Why did her mom have that twinkle in her eye when she told her to have fun? Were Erin and her mom conspiring? There was no way, right?

Blair drove to Erin's house as fast as she could without having to worry about being pulled over. Here! she texted before shutting off the car and getting out.

Awesome. Door is unlocked. Come in.

When she got to the door, she noticed there was a sign hanging on it. She almost ignored it, figuring it was none of her business, but it was a good thing she didn't, since it was clearly made for her.

The sign looked like it had been made on Canva or something similar and was printed on normal computer paper. It read, "Now entering the Hall of Times I Knew I Was Falling for You Even Though I Didn't Want to Admit It (even to myself)."

Blair's heart beat fast when the realization hit her. This is for me. Erin did this for me. She couldn't get through that door fast enough and as soon as she did, she found pieces of paper hanging from the ceiling, cut out in the shape of chicken nuggets. There were too many of them to count and each one had a different memory on it, starting with "That first time at the pool ;)" and going through "The Beach

Blair's smile grew as she read each one, and by the time she got to the last one, she was fighting back tears. This was so much better than the talk she thought they would be having. Erin was waiting at the end of the hallway, wearing a fitted black dress and high heels, and she looked so fucking phenomenal, Blair had to steady herself on the wall so her legs didn't give out.

When Blair finally made it over to her, she ran a finger over the side of Erin's dress and bit her lip flirtatiously as she smiled at her. "I think I missed the memo that we were getting dressed up."

Erin wrapped her arms around Blair's neck and rested her arms on her shoulders as if they were dancing. "With Nolan around, I'm not sure how often I'll be able to get dressed up for you, so I figured I might as well do it now."

"I think you look drop dead gorgeous right now, but for what it's worth, I think you're just as beautiful in sweatpants and a T-shirt that Nolan spilled his lunch on."

The look Erin gave Blair almost knocked her off her feet once again. There was so much affection in her eyes, even if she tried to deny how she felt, she wouldn't be able to. Blair had a feeling she wasn't going to be denying it any more though.

Erin placed the lightest kiss on Blair's lips before pulling back again, leaving Blair's body buzzing as it begged her for more. "There were two memories I didn't add in the hallway."

"Oh yeah? What were they?" Blair couldn't imagine what she had missed since it seemed like Erin had included almost every memory they had together.

"The first one was the time we slow danced in my living room."

"But we ne—" Blair thought she might melt when she realized what Erin meant. "Oh."

She put her arms around Erin's waist and held her close as they swayed to the nonexistent music. Erin laid her head on Blair's shoulder, and it was as if everything that was wrong with the world had righted itself at that very moment. Blair was pretty sure she couldn't possibly be happier.

Erin proved her wrong when she lifted her head and brought her lips to Blair's ear to whisper to her. "The second one I didn't add was the time I asked you to be my girlfriend."

Blair pulled back and looked into Erin's eyes to make sure she wasn't hearing things. Erin's eyes sparkled as they looked into hers, and Blair wanted to stay lost in them forever.

"Really?" Blair was pretty sure she had the world's goofiest grin on her face, but she really didn't care. This was the best day of her entire life, but what made it even better was she was sure that the best was yet to come, because Erin was hers.

"Yes, really. As long as you still want me." Erin chewed her bottom lip as she waited for Blair's answer.

"Yes, yes, yes." Blair picked Erin up off of the ground and spun her around in a circle. "I'll never stop wanting you."

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When Blair set Erin back down on the ground, she leaned in and kissed her, and it was the greatest kiss of her entire life. It was somehow even better now that she knew she could kiss this woman whenever she wanted. When their mouths opened to each other and their tongues met, Blair had only one thing on her mind. She moved her hands down Erin's back and grabbed her ass, then started to bring her hands around front.

Erin grabbed onto her hands before she could continue with what her body was begging for. She kept her mouth just inches from Blair's as she spoke. "Your mom really is bringing Nolan back here right after they get ice cream, so we'll have to save that for later. I hope you don't mind being tired at work tomorrow though, because I don't plan on letting you get much sleep tonight." She kissed Blair deeply, but pulled back much too quickly. "I have something to give you."

Blair laughed. "What else could you possibly have for me? You've already given me everything I could ever dream of."

"It's nothing to get overly excited about. I promise." Erin's face turned red as she pulled herself away from Blair's embrace and picked up a small bag sitting on the coffee table. She looked toward the ground as she handed the bag to Blair. "Now, I'm kind of wondering what I was thinking. If this doesn't scare you away, nothing will."

Erin laughed softly, and the sound was music to Blair's ears. She took the bag in one hand, then used the other to push the bottom of Erin's chin to force her to look at her. "Nothing in this world could ever scare me away from you."

When Blair took the tissue paper out of the bag and saw what was inside, the tears

she had done so well holding back fell freely from her eyes. She picked up the black frame that said “Family” across the top and studied the picture. It was a picture of her, Erin, and Nolan at the beach. Nolan was sitting on her shoulders blowing bubbles and Erin was watching the two of them with all the adoration in the world. Blair had seen the version of this picture where they were all smiling at the camera, but this one was so much better.

“Erin, I—” Her voice cracked, and the words refused to come out.

Erin also had tears in her eyes, but instead of wiping her own, she used her thumbs to remove the tears from Blair’s cheeks. “When I had my talk with Bianca, I realized something I probably should’ve a long time ago. Bianca was meant to be in my life to give me Nolan, but you, me, and Nolan...wewere meant to be a family.”

“Are you trying to kill me?” Blair laughed through her tears. “This is absolutely perfect. I’m literally speechless.”

Erin ran her fingers over the picture. “I love this one. When I first saw it, it freaked me out because of the way I’m looking at you. That’s why I never showed it to you. But now, I’m pretty sure it’s my favorite picture of all time. It’s veryus.” She laughed as she pointed to Nolan. “He was so annoying with those freaking bubbles.”

Blair laughed along with her. “He really was.” Blair ran her fingers along the picture as well. “He’s cute though. I think I might love that kid even more than I love you.” Blair snapped her mouth shut. This certainly wasn’t how or when she planned on telling Erin that she loved her, but now that she said the words, she couldn’t take them back. Especially since she had never spoken anything truer in her life.

Erin’s eyes went wide. “You love me?” she asked, sounding truly surprised.

Blair laughed as more happy tears poured from her eyes. There was no use trying to

stop them, because the emotions running through her body were more than she could handle. “You mean it’s not obvious? I guess I’m just going to have to work a little harder to show you.”

Erin lifted an eyebrow at her. “Oh yeah? How do you plan to do that?”

“In all the ways, babe.” Blair kissed across Erin’s neck and stopped after placing one lone kiss on her lips, because there was something else she needed to say. “Also, don’t feel like you have to say I love you soon just because I said it. I understand it might take you a while. I won’t get offend—”

Erin cut Blair off with her boisterous laughter. “Blair, I just told you that I want us to be a family. I skipped about 10,000 steps and broke so many dating rules. Obviously, I love you.”

Blair brought her hand to Erin’s chest and enjoyed the rhythm of her heart rapidly beating up against it. A heart that was beating for her. She could hardly believe it was real. “Are you still scared?”

Erin nodded, but the smile never left her face. “I’m terrified. But you’re worth it.”

There was so much Blair wanted to say, but she didn’t get the chance because there was a knock at the door at that very moment. “I’m guessing that’s my parents and Nolan.” She pointed at everything hanging from the ceiling. “I think they might figure out what happened here. I hope that’s okay with you.”

Erin’s face turned the cutest shade of red. “Your mom kind of already knows. I couldn’t really hide it when I asked her if she could take Nolan for us for a little bit.”

Blair threw her head back in laughter. Not that it was that funny, but because she was just so fucking happy. “I knew you two were conspiring behind my back.”

Erin pointed at the door. "I guess we better let them in."

Blair reached out her hand toward Erin, who readily accepted it, and they walked to the door hand in hand. Blair was pleasantly surprised when Erin didn't drop her hand when she opened the door.

Nolan ran right past them and stared up at the pieces of paper hanging from the ceiling. "Why's those hanging?"

"Well, buddy," Erin knelt to the ground, but instead of letting go of Blair's hand, she pulled Blair down with her. "Those are there because I asked Blair to be my girlfriend. Do you know what that means?" When Nolan shook his head, Erin shared a quick smile with Blair before focusing her attention back on him. "Well, it means Blair is going to be around a lot more often."

Nolan looked between the two of them and furrowed his eyebrows. "But Bear's already here all the time."

Both Blair and Erin broke into a fit of laughter at the same time, which in turn, made Nolan laugh. Blair was so absorbed in this moment with Erin and Nolan that she almost forgot her parents were still standing there until her mom cleared her throat.

Blair tickled Nolan's side before quickly standing to her feet.

Her mom gave her a knowing smile and wink. "We better get going."

The goofy smile on her dad's face probably matched how Blair's face looked right now. "Yes. You all have a good night."

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:31 pm

Blair's mom looked down at Nolan. "And you—thank you so much for getting ice cream with us tonight. Maybe sometime soon, if your mommy and Blair say it's okay, you could have a sleepover at our house."

Erin laughed and jokingly pushed him toward Blair's parents. "You can have him anytime you want."

"Yay!" Nolan did a little dance that made everyone laugh. "Can Moon sleep in my bed?"

"Of course he can," Blair's dad bent down and gave Nolan a high five before standing to give hugs to both Blair and Erin.

When Blair hugged her mom, she squeezed her extra tight and whispered in her ear. "That one's a keeper. You better not break her heart."

"I don't plan on it."

As soon as Blair shut the door and turned around, she noticed Nolan staring at her. "Bear, are you sleeping over?"

"I am." Blair winked at Erin, who looked so fucking hot when her face turned red in embarrassment. She really couldn't wait to rip that woman's clothes off and make love to her all night.

Nolan's eyes went wide and his face lit up. "Can we all have a sleepover in Mommy's room? Please!"

“Oh, honey, I don’t know if tonight is the best night for that,” Erin said. “We have work tomorrow and you have school. We all need sleep.”

Or something like that, Blair thought to herself, her body heating up just at the thought.

Nolan looked from Erin to Blair and pushed his bottom lip into a pout as he stared up at her. Shit. How was Blair supposed to resist those puppy dog eyes? “I think a family sleepover sounds great.”

“Really?” Nolan squealed as he bounced up and down.

“Yeah, really?” Erin repeated, not sounding nearly as excited.

Blair walked up to Erin and put a hand on her back that she slowly moved down to her ass. “Don’t worry,” she whispered. “We have plenty of nights ahead of us for you to keep me up. I promise I’ll make it up to you.”

Erin rubbed her nose against Blair’s, a mischievous smile on her face. “You better.”

Blair squeezed Erin’s ass. “Don’t worry. We have forever.”

The smile on Erin’s face grew bigger than Blair had ever seen it. “We sure do.”

Epilogue

Erin

“Happy two-year anniversary, babe.”

“Has it really only been two years? It feels like so much longer,” Erin joked. The

truth was, the time with Blair had flown by, but at the same time, she couldn't remember what her life was like without Blair at this point.

Blair pushed her side against Erin's from where they sat hand in hand at their favorite park. "That's only because you made me wait for months to finally be your girlfriend."

"Whatever." Erin rolled her eyes and laid her head on Blair's shoulder.

Somewhere in the distance, Nolan was playing on the playground with Blair's parents, who had become like grandparents to him. It was so nice to have people close by that Nolan was comfortable with who could take him so she and Blair could have some alone time. And they took full advantage of that alone time. Her body buzzed just thinking about everything they had done two nights ago when Nolan had a sleepover with Blair's parents.

"So, I have something for you," Blair said, suddenly sounding nervous.

"What is it?" Erin sat up as Blair rummaged through her backpack.

After a minute, she pulled out a stack of papers and handed them to Erin. "This is a complete breakdown of how to do name changes in Pennsylvania for both adults and kids. That way, we can make sure we do it as quickly as possible."

As quickly as possible? Erin and Blair had talked about both Erin and Nolan taking her last name, but she assumed that would happen after they got married and did a second parent adoption. "Did I miss something? Why the sudden rush?"

Blair shook her head. "Sorry. When I said as quickly as possible, I didn't mean right now. I meant after our wedding."

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:31 pm

Before Erin could comprehend what she meant, Blair was down on one knee in front of the bench. “When you asked me to be your girlfriend two years ago, you told me that me, you, and Nolan were meant to be a family. I think it’s time we finally make that official.” Blair reached into her pocket and pulled out a ring box, which she opened to reveal the most gorgeous diamond ring Erin had ever seen. “Will you marry me, Erin Soon-to-be Breckenridge?”

“Yes! God, yes! Yes! Yes!” Tears poured from Erin’s eyes as Blair slipped the ring onto her finger. There was a time in her life when Erin truly believed she would never be able to feel this much joy again, but everything that fell apart had to happen so something so much better could fall together.

After the ring was on her finger, Erin brought her hands to Blair’s cheeks and pulled her close to kiss her. She kissed her as if it were just the two of them, because at that moment, it really felt like it was.

That was, until she heard a little voice yelling for her. “Mommy! Mommy! Did Bear ask you?”

Erin pulled away from the kiss but kept her hands on Blair’s cheeks. “You told him?”

There was a wide smile on Blair’s face and tears running down her cheeks as she nodded. “I had to make sure I had the blessing of the man of the house. Plus, I wanted to make sure he was ready for me to officially be his other mom.”

“Look, Mommy, I got a ring too.” Nolan brought his hand to a large wedding band that was hanging from a necklace around his neck.

“That’s so cool.” Erin ran her fingers over the ring then looked back at Blair. “You got this for him?”

Blair shrugged. “I gave it to him, but it’s my dad’s ring. He got a new one a few years ago and was saving this for something special. We both agreed this was definitely a special occasion.”

Now, even more tears came to her eyes. When Erin started dating Blair, she didn’t just get Blair. She got her whole family, along with the father she never had growing up. The fact that her dad would give his wedding band to Nolan meant more to her than she was sure he even realized.

“It’s perfect,” Erin said, her voice cracking as the tears continued. When she looked up, Blair’s dad and mom were standing in front of her, and her dad had a proud smile on his face. “Thank you so much for this. I’ll never be able to tell you how much it means to me.”

“It’s my pleasure.” Blair’s dad held his arms out toward her, and when Erin stood up, he wrapped her in a big hug. “You’re family. This wedding will make it official, but you have been from the beginning.”

“Now, I’m going to cry.”

Erin whipped around at the sound of her sister’s voice and found her mom and sister standing behind her, both with tears in their eyes. “What are you two doing here?”

April pointed at Blair. “Did you really think your future wife was going to propose without your family here? Speaking of which, Wyatt and the kids apologize for not being able to make it. Sports, you know.”

Erin didn’t quite understand it yet, but they were going to soon since they had just

signed Nolan up for both T-ball and soccer to try to help him get out all of his extra energy. “I’m just so happy to have you two here,” she said before pulling both her mom and April into a tight hug.

The faint sounds of an ice cream truck had barely reached Erin’s ears when Nolan started to shout. “Ice cream! Ice cream! Let’s get ice cream! Pleaaaaase.”

Blair laughed. “It sounds like the king has spoken.”

Erin looked around at their group. Her family. “What do you all say? Celebratory ice cream?”

Blair’s dad took her mom’s hand. “Sounds good to us.”

Erin’s mom pointed toward the truck. “You three lead the way.”

Nolan stepped in front of Blair and reached his hands up. “Can I go on your shoulders?”

“Of course, buddy. You’re getting down once you have your ice cream, though,” Blair said with a laugh.

“Okay. Thanks, Bear.”

Erin laughed. Even though Nolan could pronounce Blair’s name correctly now, he still chose to call her Bear. “I feel like you’re going to be Bear for the rest of your life,” Erin said as Blair hoisted Nolan onto her shoulders.

“Kind of.” Blair smiled up at Nolan. “Wanna tell Mommy my new name?”

Nolan giggled and nodded his head a bunch of times. “She’s not just Bear anymore.

She's Mama Bear now."

Blair's eyes glimmered from the tears she was clearly trying to hold back. "Yeah. I'm Mama Bear."

Blair held her hand out toward Erin and played with the ring on her finger as they held hands and walked. The ring that meant Erin got to spend the rest of her life with the amazing woman walking next to her. The woman carrying their son on her shoulders. This was everything Erin had spent her life searching for, but so much better than she could've ever imagined.

Three years later

Blair

Blair smiled at herself in the mirror as she adjusted her bow tie. She still couldn't believe how much had happened since she and Erin got engaged just three years ago—a wedding, a new house, many trips to the doctor, and now, Nolan's official adoption day.

She turned when she heard someone hopping down the stairs and saw Nolan. She still couldn't get over how big he was. This was a completely different boy than the one she babysat five years ago. He was a little man now.

He did a twirl and held his arms out. "How do I look?"

With his hair under control with gel and in his suit, he looked even more mature. "Very handsome." Blair ran her hands over the suit that matched his, down to the color of the bowties they were wearing. "How 'bout me?"

Nolan gave her a thumbs up. "Also very handsome."

Erin walked into the hallway in a long flowy red dress that matched the color of Blair's and Nolan's bowties, and she was absolutely glowing. When Blair first fell in love with Erin, she didn't think her heart could possibly be any more full, but each day, Erin and Nolan proved her wrong when her love for them grew and grew.

She ran her eyes over Erin's body and rested them on her stomach, or more precisely, on the baby bump that was there. Before she could find the words to tell Erin how perfect she looked, Nolan walked up to her and wrapped her in a hug. "You look

beautiful.” He pulled away and rubbed her stomach, leaning in close to talk to it. “How is my baby sister today?”

Erin put her hand on her stomach and cringed. “She’s kicking a ton. I swear she’s dancing in there.”

Blair walked over and bent down in front of Erin’s stomach, putting her hand on top of Erin’s. “That’s my girl.”

Blair couldn’t help but wonder what their daughter would be like. Nolan was so much like her and didn’t share any of her genetics. Since they used Blair’s eggs, this little girl was genetically hers. If that somehow made her even more like Blair, they were screwed. She hoped more than anything that nurture took over and their daughter was more like Erin.

Erin looked at her watch, then tapped it. “We gotta go or we’re going to be late.”

“We can’t let that happen.” Blair scooped a laughing Nolan into her arms, an action that had gotten much harder throughout the years. “We can’t let you miss out on this amazing opportunity to have me as your mama.”

Nolan laughed even harder now. “I don’t want you to miss out on this amazing opportunity to have me as your son.”

Erin pushed on Blair’s back. “You two can continue this argument in the car.”

“We will,” Blair and Nolan said at the same time.

Blair’s heart warmed as she watched the little boy that she had seen grow up these past five years. She still couldn’t believe her spur-of-the-moment decision to find a babysitting job for the summer had resulted in her finding the family she didn’t know she was looking for.

Best summer job ever.