



# Holiday Hitch

**Author:** *Cara Porter*

**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Lesbian Romance

**Description:** It takes a village to plan a wedding, and the sapphic community of New Winford is happy to band together to make sure that Jamie and Dani's special day is something truly memorable. But a winter wedding poses unique challenges, and the crew must balance their personal problems and holiday plans carefully to ensure the wedding goes off without a hitch. Jamie and Dani couldn't wait to tie the knot. But as rockstar Jamie prepares to release a new album and head out on another global tour, Dani grows anxious about spending time apart. Confused by Dani's desire to rush their nuptials, Jamie needs to reconnect with her bride-to-be before leaving town.

**Total Pages (Source):** 41

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1

Jamie

“Jamie?” Dani’s soft voice whispered in her ear as her eyes resisted opening to the bright morning light.

Leaning closer, Dani’s sweet smell filled Jamie’s nose, “Baby... I have a present for you.”

Before she opened her eyes, a smile lifted the corners of Jamie’s mouth. Waking up next to Dani every day felt like living in a fantasy. Sometimes, when Jamie saw her fiancée’s soft cheeks and beautiful, voluminous hair, she still wanted to pinch herself.

“So I’ve been thinking about the bridal bouquet,” Dani began as soon as Jamie’s lids lifted.

Groaning, Jamie turned over and buried her face in the lush pillows. With a muffled laugh, Jamie pleaded, “Dani, baby, please. Too early for wedding planning.”

Dani tapped her naked shoulder, “But I brought you something.”

Lifting her head just enough to look at the steaming mug in Dani’s hands, Jamie raised her eyebrows. Dani always knew how to ease Jamie into the morning with a perfectly brewed cup of coffee.

“You’re sweet,” Jamie said as she sat up in the bed, wrapping the white top sheet

over her chest as she took the mug in her hand. It was a welcome warmth on her chilly hands as the December air moved through their house.

Dani sat cross-legged in the middle of the bed as her partner took a few sips.

“Did you turn the heat off again?” Jamie shivered as she took her first sip.

“Look, you may have gotten spoiled in the big city. But in the country, we take winter as it comes,” Dani said with a grin.

After a moment of Jamie’s soft sips, Dani began to shake her leg with excitement.

Jamie tried to enjoy the silence and pretend that the movement wasn’t sloshing her coffee, but after a moment, she relented, “Alright, what’s on your mind?”

Like a kid on Christmas, Dani’s face lit up as she started, “The bouquet has been such a hassle, right? Like, do we go bright and unseasonably bold to keep it fresh? Or do we go classic, simple and keep the winter wedding vibes?”

“Right,” Jamie followed along, drinking more of the caffeine elixir. It had been Dani’s idea to have a winter wedding, not wanting to wait until the spring to tie the knot. But Jamie couldn’t understand why Dani would want to pack all the stress of wedding planning into some of the busiest, coldest months of the year when they could take their time planning something warmer.

“Well, I think we should do classic with a few bold touches!” Dani said like she had just discovered a new planet.

Jamie giggled; Dani sure was adorable when she was excited. Jamie set her cup on the midcentury modern nightstand and pulled Dani into her lap by the waist.

“Ah!” Dani squealed as she landed on top of Jamie, “Ms. Lawson, we have plans!”

Shaking her head, Jamie groaned, “My only plans are to stay in bed with you all day while the snow falls.”

She brought her hands to Dani’s neck and gently pulled her face closer. Pressing her lips to Dani’s, Jamie could taste the coffee Dani had already had. It would be hard to catch up to her at this rate. Once Dani had had her first coffee, she was quick to the second.

Dani teased Jamie’s lips with her tongue, sending a moan to Jamie’s throat.

“Baby...” Jamie grumbled.

“M-hmm,” Dani moaned as she moved her lips down toward Jamie’s neck, delicately letting her mouth suck on the soft skin.

Jamie laughed, “Don’t be rude, you’re the one that wants to get up.”

With a giggle, Dani sat up and let her ass fall onto Jamie’s pelvis, sending a wave of excitement directly to Jamie’s center.

“Just consider it an advance,” Dani said with a wink as she got off of Jay’s lap.

Jamie sat back up and rubbed her eyes, trying to wipe the dirty thoughts from her mind. Dani stood from the bed and headed to the window to look out at the snow.

As she scanned the room, Jamie’s eyes landed on Diesel, who was happily perched at the end of the bed. He was completely passed out, which likely meant that Dani had already taken him out for the morning... or he was being his usual couch potato-self.

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Reaching across the mattress, Jamie gave his soft tummy a rub as he stretched out and grumbled.

“Who’s a good boy?” Jamie mumbled. Throwing her legs over the side of the bed, Jamie hauled her body out of the bed. She had been off tour for a few months, but her body still ached as if she had put on a three hour show the night before.

And all the running around New Winford wasn’t helping. But Jamie couldn’t pretend like she didn’t love to see Dani so excited for their wedding.

She threw on an oversized t-shirt and her loose, distressed jeans. Walking toward Dani in the window, Jamie ran her hand over one of the pine fronds sticking out from their bedroom Christmas tree. Only a few needles fell off as Jamie peeked at the trunk to check for water in the basin.

Dani had insisted on getting their trees the day after Thanksgiving, which she argued was the earliest they could get a live tree that would survive through Christmas day. But Jamie was certain if there was a way for the tree to stay alive year round, Dani would leave it there.

Jamie wrapped her arms around Dani as she took a deep breath.

“Are you excited to be my wife in... 20 days?” Jamie asked as she rested her chin on Dani’s shoulder and watched the delicate snowflakes land on the windowsill.

Dani smiled and turned her head just enough to look into Jamie’s green eyes, “You have no idea.”

Zoey

Zoey tapped her finger along the bare, wood studs as she listened to the person on the other side of the phone.

“I do understand that. But my client is hoping to host two hundred people at the peak of Fox Mountain,” she argued.

After a moment of listening, Zoey continued, “Well the park toilets simply won’t do. These are celebrity clients.”

Robin poked her head in from what would eventually be a kitchen, prompting Zoey to glance up for just a moment before turning away. Unwilling to be ignored, Robin ducked her head into Zoey’s line of sight and gestured to the kitchen.

Zoey raised a finger and said into the receiver, “Price is not a concern.”

Finally winning out, Zoey raised her hands in praise as she replied, “Great, we’ll be in touch,” and hung up the phone.

“Again?” Robin questioned.

Zoey laughed, “Look, I want this cleared up before the wedding. Dani and Jamie are too high-profile to have a vendor not show.”

Robin nodded, “I know... it just seems like a lot going on.”

“But I’m so goddamn good under pressure,” Zoey said with a wink as she threw her hands around Robin’s neck.

Zoey loved that even after nearly two years together, Robin couldn't resist her charm.

Wrapping her arms around Zoey's waist, Robin said, "As true as that is, you're supposed to be taking it easy."

Zoey pulled away, "You're just mad I'm not doing more on the house."

"To be fair, I renovated Oak Lane for you, so it's only right," Robin joked.

Zoey pursed her lips. It was true, but fixing up the old house from their childhood was a choice Robin had made on her own, and Zoey wasn't going to claim responsibility for it now.

"But you were supposedly doing that for yourself," Zoey argued.

Robin laughed, "We all knew that was a lie." She winked as her eyes drifted down Zoey's body. Robin had definitely been deluding herself by saying she had bought Oak Lane for herself. Every day Robin had worked on it, she imagined a life with Zoey inside. It had always been both of their dreams to bring the house back to life.

Robin may have resurrected the house's old bones, but Zoey had come home just in time to finish up the interior design and leave her mark on alongside Robin. As it turned out, Zoey could be a very opinionated designer; it seemed Sarah wasn't the only Greenwood sister with a passion for critiquing all of Robin's design choices.

Zoey brought Robin in for a hug, breathing in the scent of lumber and sweat on her skin. It smelled like home.

Most of their friends thought they were crazy moving in together so quickly, but they knew it was the right call. Plus, U-Hauling was a sapphic right of passage. Every day it felt like the right decision waking up next to Robin and starting to build their lives

together. Quitting her job in the city hadn't just allowed Zoey to rekindle her relationship with her first true love, it had also allowed her to become even closer with her niece and nephew, help her sister Sarah through her divorce, and finally help her parents settle into their retirement.



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“Look, I know it’s a lot to juggle. But have I ever failed one of our projects before?” Zoey questioned, crossing her arms with a smile as she prepared for Robin to counter.

Robin’s goofy grin took over her face, her eyes bright as she looked at Zoey, “I never said that. I’m just worried about you is all.”

This was their third flip and at this point, Zoey felt like they were a well-oiled machine. Zoey had become an expert in getting permits through the town council – the task Robin detested the most.

“If I own it, I should be allowed to do whatever I want to it,” Robin would always groan, “If it fails an inspection, that’s my problem!”

Zoey could still see how thrilled her dad had been when they told him about their new business idea: take all of the run down houses in New Winford and restore them to their former glory. William had even offered to show Robin and Zoey his favorite buildings across New Winford, places he had always dreamed of doing the same thing to.

And standing here now in the kitchen of their current project, Zoey couldn’t be more proud of where she was. She and Robin had done a great job fitting each other into their lives, and this was only just the beginning.

Zoey had hardly noticed that Robin was rambling on about the backsplash in the kitchen as she thought about where the last two years had taken them. She shook the train of thought and turned back to her stunning partner, trying to ignore the falling snow outside.

“I wonder if something neutral might be smarter since we had a hard time selling buyers on the color scheme last time,” Robin said half to herself. But Zoey put her arm around Robin and looked at the gorgeous kitchen.

It was perfectly designed with a massive, six-foot island at the center. With touches of everything they both loved, the behemoth of a house was being brought into the 21st century.

She admired the gorgeous stainless steel appliances and exposed wood beams. By the time they finished each flip, Zoey struggled to actually let go of the house. All of them felt like her kids that she had spent painstaking hours – and endless money – bringing to maturity.

But every time they drove past one of their sold homes in Robin’s new pickup truck, Zoey loved seeing Robin’s face light up as a new family was welcomed to New Winford, kids running around the front yard and couples breaking in their brand new kitchens with a family dinner.

Having considered Robin’s point about the backsplash, Zoey gave her two cents, “I think we should do whatever the fuck we want. Who cares if no one buys it. I’ll keep it.”

Robin couldn’t stop herself from laughing, “You can’t keep all of them.”

“Who could stop me?” Zoey asked as she planted a kiss on Robin’s soft lips, a wave of warmth passing over her body.

Though Zoey loved her modern conveniences, she was a country girl at heart and loved the character of these old buildings. She was as big of an advocate for keeping the strange features of the houses as Robin was, despite how gorgeous her modern city apartment had looked when she’d lived alone.

Robin kissed Zoey on the cheek and nodded, “Okay but if a single buyer mentions it, you have to buy me a beer.”

Zoey stuck out her hand firmly just like she did when they had reunited at the Town Hall two years ago and shook Robin’s hand, “It’s a deal.”

Robin made a note in her years-old notebook, its spine barely holding together. The event planner in Zoey wanted to scream every time she saw it. But as Robin’s partner, she couldn’t help but find it endearing.

“If it sells, can I get you a new notebook?” Zoey tried.

Robin winked, “Never.”

She slammed the notebook shut after making the note and checked the brown, leather watch on her wrist, “Oh shit we’re gonna be late.”

Zoey couldn’t stop the nervous smile from creeping onto her face. It was going to be an interesting Christmas.

3

Daryl

“Robin, will you please tell your girlfriend that she’s crazy?” Daryl begged.

Robin raised an eyebrow at Daryl and laughed, “You and I both know she might be bold, but she’s not crazy. I’ve seen you do dumber shit on worse time crunches.”

She wasn’t wrong, Daryl immediately remembered having to source dozens of hydrangeas a week before the Town Hall wedding for Zoey’s former clients. And

Zoey had been much more of a hard-ass back then.

Zoey ignored Daryl, continuing to address Leah, “It hasn’t been that cold this year. I’m not even sure anything is frozen.”

“She’s not wrong, honey. It might not be impossible to plant live shrubs at the venue,” Leah said, trying to play the middle.

“In December?” Daryl asked incredulously.

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She shook her head as she looked around at Garden and Fountain. The money the town had donated to keep her shop running after the Garden Showdown had gone a long way. Besides paying off her overdue mortgage payments, she had been able to pay Robin to fix up more of the nursery's neglected bits.

She still thought it was bullshit that Robin wouldn't do it for free, but that was besides the point.

Daryl grumbled, "Why do you always come to me with absurd propositions? Like it's not enough that you want an elaborate floral arrangement in the middle of winter with just a few weeks notice?"

Zoey flashed a charming smile and fluttered her eyelashes, "Because you're so goddamn good at what you do."

Waving her off, Daryl rubbed her face as she thought about what Zoey was asking for. It would be a huge undertaking in addition to the floral arrangements they had already promised Jamie and Dani, and with the amount of time she and Leah were already splitting between their two shops, Daryl wasn't sure how she'd find the time or money to get all of it done.

"Plus, there's a pay increase if you agree," Zoey added with a wink.

"Consider it finished," Daryl relented.

Robin laughed, "That's all it takes?"

Daryl shrugged, “I mean the donation last summer helped, but I have big ideas for the shop.”

Daryl working on the shop was music to everyone’s ears. Leah had done wonders to get Daryl out of her rut and thinking of ways to improve the business.

Since the competition, Garden and Fountain had been booming with business, even in the usual dead season. Leah had even gotten Daryl to host a weekly gardening class, teaching locals how to care for their plants and start their own gardens.

Helping people become self-sufficient and protect the environment had been something Daryl was passionate about from the start of her career, and it made Leah smile to see her usually grumpy girlfriend so impassioned about her work.

Zoey clasped her hands together and smiled, “Well if you’re on board, we’ll be in touch with more details soon. Pleasure doing business with you.”

Robin checked her watch, “Babe, we gotta move if we want to make this appointment.”

A stranger could have sensed the anxiety that fell over the room as the couple began to leave the shop.

“Wish us luck,” Robin called over her shoulder.

Daryl and Leah hollered back, “Good luck!” as the door slammed behind them.

Taking in a deep breath as silence washed over the shop, Leah mumbled, “I hope it goes okay.”

“Me too, hon,” Daryl said as she wrapped her arms around Leah.

She was still getting used to having a girlfriend again after decades of being single. She loved it, but was still getting used to all of the rules and sacrifices she had to make in order for Leah to feel loved and seen. “Do you think you’ll make it up to see Dad? He could really use some help putting up lights this year,” Leah asked as she stepped away, nervously tapping her fingers along the display table in the center of the shop.

Daryl took a breath. It was the other major obstacle of their relationship: the hour-long drive between Sugarties and New Winford. Sure, it was mostly highway. But all said and done it was almost two and half hours out of each of their weeks every time they wanted to visit one another.

And even though they had been able to afford more time out of their shops for a few weeks, it was becoming more and more important for them to not be away from their respective businesses for more than a day at a time.

Daryl had really grown to love Leah’s family, but a decline in her father’s health had necessitated more and more time in Sugarties. And while of course she wanted to be there for her girlfriend during this difficult time, she would be lying if she denied how much of a toll the constant travel and caregiving was taking on both of them.

“Would I be able to come a little late? I really don’t want to miss another book club,” Daryl said. She loved spending time with John and fixing up his house, but Daryl missed her routine too.

Leah nodded, “Yeah, that’s okay. I’ll just close up early and head to dad’s so my brother can step out to get his kids from school.”

Daryl tilted her head, “Are you sure?”

Stepping closer to Daryl, Leah smiled and looked into her eyes, “Yeah. But seriously,

you do need to hire someone. Kiera is so helpful when I'm down here."

"I know," Daryl grumbled. But she was still worried Garden and Fountain wasn't ready for the new expense. She had already increased her spend on inventory and maintenance costs to increase business. She still feared what would happen if the mortgage money ran dry again.

After all, she didn't want to rely on the kindness of the people of New Winford forever.

Stepping closer to Daryl, Leah smiled and tried to catch Dar's gaze.



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“Besides,” Leah started as her hands made their way from Daryl’s hips to her soft stomach, “If there’s someone here, we can spend more time doing this...”

Daryl gasped as she felt Leah’s soft hand move under the waistband of her worn jeans. Feeling Leah’s fingers explore down toward her center, Daryl became immediately slick with excitement.

Even after a few months, Daryl felt like the way they touched each other just kept getting better and better. The only reason they had slowed down was because of pure exhaustion.

Leah let her fingers begin to rub at Daryl’s clit, feeling it harden in her hand.

“Leah, the shop...” Daryl moaned as she got lost in Leah’s touch.

Whispering in Daryl’s ear, hot breath warming her skin, Leah said, “I already flipped the sign, baby.”

Daryl smirked and flipped her body around so she could watch Leah’s face as she got fucked.

“I want you inside me,” Daryl groaned as Leah continued to massage her. At the request, Leah allowed her fingers to slowly drift down her soaked slit, teasing her entrance with two wet fingers.

Leah bit her lip, “Already?”

Daryl nodded, too excited to pretend like she could wait any longer.

Pressing her forehead against Daryl's, Leah pulled her fingers away from Daryl's slick entrance and moved back toward her hard clit.

"Please," Daryl moaned as she looked into Leah's eyes, desperate to feel her thrusting inside and massaging her G-spot.

Leah wasn't one to hold out on Daryl for too long, so she made her way back down to Dar's entrance and allowed her fingers to slip inside.

"Oh god," Leah whimpered as her fingers became encased in Daryl's warm center.

Daryl smiled at Leah's pleasure as she began to rock her hips along her lover's strong hand.

As she moved, Daryl's clit pressed against Leah's palm.

"Fuck, you're perfect," Daryl encouraged as Leah used her free hand to pull Dar's hips into her hand.

She could feel Daryl's excitement dripping down her fingers as she pushed deeper and deeper inside of her.

Leah knew exactly the right speed Daryl needed to get to her climax. And as much as Daryl wanted to savor every second of Leah's touch, they didn't have all day.

So, Daryl surrendered her body to Leah and let her hands rhythmically bring Dar right to the edge of her orgasm.

"I want you to come with my fingers inside of you," Leah whimpered in Daryl's ear.

The words sent a jolt of excitement straight to Daryl's center, her body beginning to shudder under the pleasure of Leah's touch.

She felt her pussy flexing along Leah's fingers, multiplying the ecstasy she was already enveloped in. Daryl closed her eyes and took in Leah's scent as her fingers dug into Leah's back, "Oh, please."

Leah bit Daryl's shoulder softly as she screamed out in pleasure, "There you go, baby."

Daryl tried to keep grinding along Leah's hand, but as her orgasm took over, it was Leah who kept the pace.

"Fuck!" Daryl cried out in pleasure as her body gave a final shudder.

Leah pulled her fingers away, knowing she had finished when she felt the tension in Daryl's core release.

She smirked at her girlfriend, "Did you like it?"

Daryl tried to find the words, but she could only manage a nod. She rested her head on Leah's shoulder as she steadied her breathing. Daryl still wasn't sure how she had managed to make Leah hers, but it felt like an honor every day.

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Dani

Dani watched as Jamie's hands strained against the metal strings of her electric guitar.

Even after seeing Jamie play countless shows, Dani still felt like an excited fangirl every time she got to watch Jamie practice. The way her strong fingers glided to new chords, the way her forearms flexed as she moved.

It felt sacred.

“Goddammit,” Jamie grumbled as her hands fell off the neck of the guitar.

The sound of her fiancée's distress was the only thing that could knock Dani out of her trance.

“It's okay, baby. Just take a deep breath, there's no rush,” Dani said as she let her hand rest on Jamie's knee, just barely exposed by her distressed jeans.

Jamie softened at Dani's touch, “I just can't get it right.”

Dani knew there wasn't much she could say to comfort Jamie at a time like this. Like all artists, Jamie was fragile, especially when she was trying something outside of her comfort zone. And this upcoming album was certainly new.

Instead, Dani rubbed Jamie's knee and smiled at her, “Do you want a distraction?”

Jamie thought about it for a moment, looking into Dani's gorgeous eyes. It still

occasionally startled her to remember that the soft, gentle eyes of the woman she loved and wanted to marry had once been the hardened eyes of her high school bully. But they were just kids then, and a lot had changed.

“Why not?” Jamie relented.

Dani's face lit up as she started to talk, “So, I've been thinking about how we should order the reception.”

“Of course you have,” Jamie laughed. The wedding was all Dani had time to think about. And the time crunch wasn't helping.

“And?” Jamie prompted.

Dani smiled, “I think we should save all the dancing until after the speeches and food.”

Jamie raised an eyebrow. She hadn't ever been to a wedding where the dancing wasn't scattered between the food. But to be fair, Jamie hadn't had time to attend many weddings between concerts and recording sessions, which was why Dani was taking the lead on planning in the first place.

That and because Dani wasn't Jamie ever would ever take the initiative to plan it without her pushing. She tried to shake the feeling; of course Jamie wanted to marry her, she just wasn't as concerned with the details.

“Well, I always hate how empty dance floors are. And if we hold off on opening the floor, more people will go out there when it finally does open,” Dani suggested.

Jamie shrugged as she brought her hands back to the guitar strings, “What does Zoey think about that?”

Dani smirked, trying to catch Jamie's gaze, "When have I ever cared what Zoey Greenwood thinks?"

"I trust your instincts," Jamie said blankly.

Rolling her eyes, Dani tapped her finger along her crossed arms. She knew Jamie was busy, but this would be the biggest celebration of their lives, and she really wanted Jamie's opinion.

Dani slipped out of her chair and got on her knees in front of Jamie, who couldn't avoid her gaze.

"Hi," Dani said in a soft voice.

Jamie set the guitar down next to her, taking a deep breath.

"I love you, and I know you're busy. But I do want your input," Dani put a hand on each of Jamie's legs, giving them a squeeze.

She leaned in and whispered, "Plus if you help, there's a reward in it for you."

Jamie raised her eyebrows and blushed.

"Game on," Jamie joked as she sat up in her swivel chair, "More dancing sounds great. So if that's a way to make it happen, I'm in."

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Dani smiled, “Wonderful.” She let her hands move up Jamie’s thighs, exploring her body.

“And the bouquet?” Dani asked, running her fingers along the soft inside of Jamie’s thighs. All she wanted was to kiss the skin under those rough jeans.

Jamie squirmed in her chair as she tried to think, “Pops of color would be really pretty.”

Dani nodded, resting her hands on Jay’s hips, grazing a thumb lightly against her clit through the heavy denim.

“See, it’s not that difficult,” Dani whispered in Jamie’s ear.

Laughing, Jamie brought Dani’s face to hers and planted a gentle kiss on her plush lips. She jumped at the excited jolt that moved through her body at Jamie’s touch.

Dani slipped her tongue inside Jamie’s mouth and teased at her lips.

Pulling back for a moment, Jamie whispered, “You know, we don’t have to rush it. We can take our time, and then you won’t have to be so worried about everything being perfect.”

“I’ll always be worried about it being perfect,” Dani quipped, lightly biting Jamie’s neck.

Jamie smiled, “We could always just go to the courthouse and elope.”

Dani shook her head, “I want to hear you profess your love for me in front of all our friends and family.”

“Didn’t I already do that?” Jamie teased as she wrapped her hands around Dani’s waist and lifted her into her lap.

Knowing she couldn’t argue with that, Dani placed her lips on Jamie’s jaw, eliciting a moan from Jamie’s lips.

Dani smirked, “Would it be so bad if I wanted to hear you say it again?”

Jamie shook her head, but something about her face made Dani nervous, like she was holding off on saying something.

“Do you want to go to the courthouse?” Dani asked, pulling away from Jamie a little.

Jamie shook her head, startled by Dani’s retreat, “No, baby. But I do want us to have fun planning the big ceremony, and there’s a lot going on right now.”

Dani nodded. Maybe Jamie wasn’t ready to say “I do...”

She tried to shake the thought. “Do you want to wait?” Saying the words out loud created a pit in Dani’s stomach, but she tried to keep her expression neutral.

“Not necessarily,” Jamie started, “I’m just worried about the album and the tour... It’s just a lot all at once. I’m sure it’ll be fine, though.”

“Okay,” Dani said. But a part of her didn’t trust that this was the end of the conversation.

Jamie took a deep breath and picked up her guitar, “I just need to get this riff right.”



Leaning back in her chair, Dani got back to her phone and tried to distract herself from Jamie's obvious hesitation. Dani had been running ragged for weeks, and it was probably all in her head, anyway.

5

Robin

"You know, we could try to make one right now," Zoey winked as she sat on the doctor's table.

Robin giggled, trying to hide the blush on her face as she moved closer to her partner. She leaned into Zoey's ear and whispered, "You've said that before, but we haven't had much luck in that department."

Zoey grabbed Robin's head and pulled her ear down to her mouth and nibbled on it, "But trying wouldn't hurt, would it?"

Robin couldn't help but look down at Zoey's gorgeous body. Even in a hospital gown, her gorgeous hips and perky breasts stood out.

"You're a very dirty patient, Ms. Greenwood," Robin joked as she brought her hand up the skirt of Zoey's gown.

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A moan escaped Zoey's throat as Robin placed a finger delicately over her mouth.

"If you want me to fuck you in public, you're going to have to be a little quieter," Robin laughed.

But just as Robin's hand was making its way up Zoey's side, there was a knock at the door and a soft, "Can I come in?"

Zoey cleared her throat as Robin pulled her hand away, her face flushing red as the doctor entered the exam room.

Robin wanted to believe that the doctor had no idea what they had been getting up to, but it was obvious from her face that she knew she had interrupted something.

But ever the professional, Dr. Morales let the incident pass without notice. Sitting down on her stool and pulling up Zoey's chart, she asked "So, how have you been feeling?"

Zoey smiled and shrugged, "Pretty good."

Zoey was always cautious to temper her expectations at the doctor's. But as she peeked at the holly garland draped across the drab, beige walls, Robin had a good feeling about this visit.

Zoey had been feeling more nausea and was far more cuddly than usual. It could have been the holiday season, but something deep inside of Robin told her that it wasn't just the time of year.

Dr. Morales smiled and said, “Well then, why don’t we take a look?”

Zoey nodded, even though a part of her was worried about what would show up on the screen. After one too many false positives, they had agreed to stop taking over-the-counter tests. Robin watched as Zoey leaned back on the table, the paper crinkling under her body, and delicately placed her legs in the stirrups.

Zoey somehow managed to make it all look so seamless despite how awkward she felt being examined. Between regular egg retrievals and embryo transfers in the last year, she’d had plenty of opportunities to perfect the choreography.

Robin took a big deep breath and tried to calm her nerves, knowing that it was entirely possible that Zoey would need a steady hand after this appointment.

It had been a far bumpier journey than either of them had anticipated. But if everything went to plan, it would all be worth it.

“The nurse already collected a sample, correct?” Dr. Morales asked as she began the exam.

Zoey nodded as she thought about crouching over the toilet and peeing in the cup just a few minutes earlier.

“Alrighty, here we are,” Dr. Morales said as she began the ultrasound. There was a moment of silence as she got her bearings, but Robin watched her face carefully.

The doctor always tried to keep her face as neutral as possible, but Robin could see a smile lifting at the corners of her mouth.

“Okay, give me one second,” Dr. Morales continued. But after a moment, she looked up to Zoey with a smile and said, “Congratulations.”

Zoey's mouth fell open as she processed the doctor's words, "Are you joking?"

"So long as the sample comes back positive, I would call this a success," Dr. Morales said.

Robin nearly jumped into Zoey's arms on the table as she realized what the doctor had said.

"Zoey Greenwood is going to have my baby!" Tears welled in her eyes as she thought about the great love of her life becoming the mother of her children.

Dr. Morales interrupted and said, "Obviously, nothing is certain just yet, but it means the embryo we implanted has taken. A lot can happen, but as long as you keep your stress at a manageable level and nothing else changes, we can hope to see this baby to term."

Before the couple could get too excited, she reminded, "Because of your age, it is really important that you take extra care with your health and wellbeing."

Robin couldn't help but laugh at the thought of Zoey Greenwood keeping her stress low. She felt like her partner was born with a stick up her ass. And sure, moving back to New Winford had helped, but even in her relatively laid-back lifestyle, Zoey always managed to find a project to amp up her anxiety.

But if they were going to be parents, Zoey would have to take some things off her plate. Even if she really didn't want to.

"We'll see you in about four weeks for your six week scan," Dr. Morales said, "So unless something changes or feels off in the meantime, call it a Christmas miracle."

Looking at Zoey now, it was hard to imagine a baby growing inside her. It felt like a

dream come true.

Dr. Morales made her way to the door, collecting the paperwork from the countertop. She turned back to smile at the couple, “Congratulations, you two. I’m not really supposed to say this, but I was really rooting for you.”

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Collectively Zoey and Robin said, “Thank you, Dr. Morales,” as she left the room.

The pair could barely find the words as they scheduled their follow up appointment and made their way to Robin’s new truck, the chill of northeastern December flushing both of their cheeks.

After helping Zoey in, Robin slammed the driver’s door behind her and stared forward as her mouth dropped open. From the passenger’s seat, Zoey began to giggle.

“Holy shit,” Zoey mumbled.

Robin turned to look at her, “Are you okay?” Her laugh had turned slightly maniacal as she covered her gaping mouth with her own hand. Of course they had been planning to start a family together for a long time, but even Robin couldn’t believe that it was really happening.

It felt like just yesterday that Robin was renovating the Town Hall and avoiding Zoey.

Zoey smiled as she looked at Robin “We're really having a baby.”

She leaned across the cab to throw her arms around Robin, taking in her scent and the joy of the moment. She looked over Robin’s shoulder and noticed a few flecks of snow beginning to speckle the windshield.

“I can’t believe it,” Robin said, hardly able to contain herself.

\* \* \*

Zoey's hands had been teasing Robin's thighs the entire drive back to Oak Lane, slowly making their way from her knees to her inner thighs, now resting just below her pussy.

Robin parked the car and ran around to the passenger side door, throwing it open. Before Zoey could hop down from the truck, Robin grabbed Zoey's legs and wrapped them around her waist. "Oh my god." Zoey gasped as Robin lifted her out of the truck and carried her toward the house, kicking the car door shut behind her.

As she carried Zoey to the house, Robin could feel herself growing wet with anticipation.

"God, you're so strong," Zoey whimpered as Robin held her up with one hand and unlocked their front door with the other.

Robin smirked, the compliment making her want Zoey even more. She slammed the door shut behind them and carried Zoey through the open first floor to the dining room table.

The house had changed a lot since the Town Hall wedding, no more bare studs or worktables visible. Instead, a beautifully decorated home had taken the construction site's place.

Robin set Zoey's ass down on the walnut, mid-century dining table. She had found it for free on the side of the road, and when Zoey expressed a love for the piece, Robin made it her mission to turn it into the centerpiece of their living space.

"Ms. Lowell, what are you doing to me?" Zoey asked in a deep whisper.

Smirking, Robin began to kiss her neck, “I’m fucking a MILF.”

Zoey moaned as Robin sank her teeth into her neck, delicately tracing her hand down Zoey’s soft sides before sliding beneath her shirt to explore the lush expanse of skin underneath. Robin could see the goosebumps rising on Zoey’s chest as she nipped at her lover’s neck.

“Do you want me to fuck you?” Robin asked in Zoey’s ear, licking her lobes as she finished the question.

Too excited by Robin’s touch, Zoey could only manage an enthusiastic nod, which prompted Robin to peel the shirt off of her body, exposing a soft stomach and her gorgeous, purple bra.

“You’re too goddamn beautiful,” Robin complained as she took a step back to examine her girlfriend. Zoey leaned back onto her hands and let her body speak for itself.

Robin reached for Zoey’s slim-fit black trousers, and began to unbutton them.

“I need you to taste me,” Zoey begged.

The smile that overwhelmed Robin’s face could have been seen from space as she undid the clasp around Zoey’s waistband, using both of her hands to tug the trousers out from under Zoey’s ass.

Robin knelt between Zoey’s legs, slipping off her three-inch, beige heels so that the pants could fall to the floor.

Beginning to stand, Robin eyed Zoey’s matching purple panties. But before she could get off her knees, Zoey placed her feet on Robin’s shoulders and pushed her down,



“You can eat me out like this.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Robin said as she placed her hands on Zoey’s hips. She kissed up Zoey’s thighs, working her way toward her soaked folds. Robin forced herself to take her time on Zoey, wanting to force her lover to wait for it.

Zoey squirmed on the table, her ass digging into the edge of the wood, “Please.”

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Robin hovered her lips just above Zoey's clit, letting her breath tease it. After years of touching and fucking each other, Robin knew Zoey would tell her if she was uncomfortable. But as she watched Zoey's ass grow red from pushing against the edge of table, she couldn't help but find the squirming unbelievably sexy.

Finally relenting, Robin brought her mouth to Zoey's clit, letting her tongue explore the soft slit and hood.

"Oh fuck," Robin moaned into Zoey, her taste making Robin somehow grow wetter.

Zoey arched her back as she began to rock her hips along Robin's tongue, "Robin, please."

She couldn't stop from smiling at Zoey moaning her name; even after all these years, it still felt like she had won a prize.

Robin pushed her tongue against Zoey's clit, spreading the pressure out so as not to overwhelm Zoey's nerves too early. She wanted her to enjoy every second of this pleasure. Her hands gripped Zoey's thighs as they grinded along with Robin's movements, but then she brought one hand toward Zoey's pussy as she continued to please her with her mouth.

Allowing her fingers to tease Zoey's entrance, they became slick with her pleasure, "Zoey, fuck. You really want me to fuck you, don't you?"

Zoey nodded, her head lightly knocking against the walnut. Robin looked up at her to check in, feeling more protective of Zoey's body now that their baby was inside of it.

But Zoey kept moving, the feeling of Robin's tongue exploring her as her strong fingers grazed her slick pussy made her even more eager to have Robin inside her.

Robin could tell that Zoey was rocking her hips and trying to angle her pussy so that Robin's fingers would slip inside. She pulled away for just a moment, clicked her tongue, and said, "Baby, if you want me inside you so badly, you could just ask nicely."

Zoey moaned, "Robin, please finger me."

It was all Robin needed to relent, allowing her slick fingers to gently push inside of her lover. The feeling of Zoey's walls squeezing her fingers forced a whimper from Robin's mouth, vibrating Zoey's clit against her tongue.

Robin let Zoey find her rhythm, grinding against her tongue and fingers until she found the perfect pace. Robin gently massaged Zoey's G-spot, letting her fingers curl slightly with each thrust of her hand.

"Robin please," Zoey cried out as she neared her peak, writhing against Robin's hands and slamming her ass into the table.

Lifting her mouth from Zoey's folds, Robin said, "Zoey Greenwood, you're having my baby."

Zoey laughed as Robin brought her tongue back to Zoe's folds, this time applying a deeper pressure that brought Zoey right to the edge.

"Oh fuck," Zoey screamed, "Fuck, Robin, I love you."

Robin used her tongue to spell out "I love you too" onto Zoey's clit before going back to strong circles. Zoey put her hand in Robin's hair and pulled it, unable to

contain her excitement.

A moan escaped Robin's throat as she felt the tug on her scalp pull her hands and mouth closer to Zoey's warm pussy.

Zoey grew louder, her hips struggling to keep pace. Robin took over, thrusting deeper and slower into Zoey as she pushed her tongue against her clit.

"I'm so close," Zoey whimpered as her body began to shudder against Robin's touch. It was only a few seconds later that Zoey's entire body seized up under the pleasure, a few jolts of movement grinding her against Robin's hand.

She cried out in ecstasy as she reached her climax, "Fuck, Robin!"

When her body slowed and gently fell back against the table, Robin slid her fingers from Zoey's entrance and allowed her tongue to move toward it. She slipped it inside, licking up Zoey's pleasure.

She fucking loved cleaning up Zoey's mess.

Zoey sat up on the table and pulled Robin up to her face, kissing her lips and letting her tongue play with Robin's.

"I want you upstairs," Zoey groaned, still excited from her orgasm.

Robin smirked and nodded, helping Zoey down from the table and making their way up the winding, Victorian stairs. The first time Robin had led Zoey up them, there wasn't any drywall hung or any lighting installed. They had made love under a construction light, too absorbed in each other to care.

But now, they walked into the beautiful, large primary bedroom with a king-sized bed

centered against a large bay window.

Zoey pulled Robin in for more kisses, tasting herself on Robin's lips. She moaned at the excitement, her clit still throbbing from Robin's tongue.

Walking Robin toward the bed, Zoey stopped at the foot and turned Robin around by her hips.

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“I want to take you,” Zoey moaned into Robin’s ear, pressing her hips into Robin’s ass.

“Then do it,” Robin challenged. Zoey laughed, deep from her chest, and pulled Robin’s waffle-knit sweater over her head, revealing a tight, black sports bra.

Zoey licked her lips at Robin’s gorgeous body, running her hands over Robin’s toned stomach and strong arms. With a palm on Robin’s back, Zoey bent her over forcefully, letting Robin catch herself with her hands on the edge of the bed.

Her ass was up in the air, just near Zoey’s center. She grabbed at Robin’s worn work pants and pulled them down to her ankles, “See, you’re so easy.”

Robin rolled her eyes with a laugh, “Only for you, baby.”

Zoey giggled and ran her hand up Robin’s leg toward her red boxers.

“Is this my Christmas present?” Zoey asked with a smirk.

Looking back at her girlfriend between her legs, Robin winked, “Maybe I should’ve put a bow on it.”

Zoey gripped the red fabric with both hands and pulled them down roughly, exposing Robin’s plump ass. Her loose pants hid her curves from everyone else, but Zoey was very familiar with the stunning figure concealed underneath.

She let her teeth sink gently into the soft flesh of Robin’s ass, giving it a light smack

with her hand.

Robin moaned at the pain. One of Zoey's favorite discoveries about Robin had been learning exactly how she wanted to be fucked: a little rough and a lot of praise.

Popping up, Zoey rubbed her hand along the spot she had smacked.

"Do you want it?"

Robin nodded, her eyes pleading for Zoey to enter her already. Zoey ran two fingers along Robin's slit, her pleasure already dripping down her legs.

"Did you like fucking me?" Zoey asked in a whisper.

"Yes, ma'am," Robin whimpered. She loved pleasing Zoey first and getting herself worked up before Zoey ever laid a hand on her pussy. But now, Robin was soaked and ready to take all of Zoey.

With a smirk, Zoey thrust her fingers inside Robin's entrance. She let out a moan as she felt just how warm and wet Robin was for her.

She placed a hand beneath Robin's hips, lifting them up as she guided them into her hand.

"Fuck," Robin moaned immediately.

Zoey leaned closer to Robin, inches from her back, and whispered, "You're so good at taking me." She bounced Robin's hips against her hand and watched as her ass jiggled from the impact.

Robin rocked along Zoey's hands, finding herself far closer to her peak than she had

expected. But Zoey knew all the perfect spots and just the right tempo to make her come.

“I’m so fucking excited to have your baby,” Zoey whispered trailed kisses and small bites across Robin’s back.

“Oh god, Zoey,” Robin cried out as Zoey pushed deeper inside of her. Using her own hips to guide her hand, Zoey moved her fingers in and out of Robin, so slow that Robin had to beg for her to go faster.

Robin pleaded, “Baby, please, I can’t wait any longer.”

Zoey loved having this kind of power of Robin, knowing that Robin would let her fuck her however she pleased.

“Anything for you, sweetheart,” Zoey said, giving in and plunging a third finger deep inside Robin’s soaked pussy. Every thrust made Robin drip even more, covering Zoey’s hand in her pleasure and sweat.

Moans turned to screams as Robin grinded on Zoey’s hands. Zoey slapped her ass as she thrust deeper inside of Robin.

Zoey purred, “Are you ready to come for me?”

Robin nodded as Zoey pulled her hips closer.

“Fuck!” Robin screamed as she neared the edge of her orgasm. She closed her eyes and let her face fall into the plush duvet, screaming into the fabric.



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“Good girl,” Zoey growled, keeping up the pace. It was enough to send Robin off the cliff, her body shaking and rocking faster as she reached her climax.

She screamed so loudly that she shouldn’t have bothered using the sheets. When her body slowed and Robin pulled her hips away from Zoey’s hand, Zoey licked the mess off of her fingers and gently guided Robin into their bed.

Robin laid her head on Zoey’s chest as sleep began to take over.

“Maybe next year we should do an orgasm advent calendar,” Zoey joked.

“Are you trying to kill the mother of your children?” Robin laughed, kissing Zoey’s neck.

Zoey smiled as she smelled Robin’s hair. She nuzzled her face closer to her lover and whispered, “You’re going to be such a great parent.”

6

Leah

Leah sat anxiously on a stool in her father’s kitchen. Daryl had promised to pick up her father’s prescription from the pharmacy on her way from New Winford. But nearly two hours after the pharmacy closed, there was no sign of Daryl.

Leah tried not to let her frustration show, but her dad was clearly picking up on her anxiety.

“Why are you so worked up?” John asked, plugging away at a sudoku problem at the table, “She’ll get here when she gets here.”

It was easy for him to say. He wouldn’t be the one dealing with his attitude for the rest of the night when he missed his dose and couldn’t think clearly. If she’d known Daryl would be so late, she would have gotten the meds herself.

“Keep that same energy when you’re throwing up all over the place later tonight because you didn’t take your meds on time,” Leah grumbled as her father went back to his puzzle. She turned back to the dishes in the sink to distract herself from Daryl’s absence.

But when she heard the front door open, Leah couldn’t help herself, hollering “Took you long enough,” at the new arrival.

She could tell from the footsteps though that it wasn’t who she thought it was. Instead of seeing Daryl’s rosy cheeks, Leah was greeted by Johnny’s gentle face.

“Not excited to see your brother?” he joked.

Leah rolled her eyes, “Daryl was supposed to be here an hour ago with Dad’s meds but I don’t know where she is.”

Johnny lifted the brown paper bag that he had been holding at his side and displayed it for Leah, setting it on the table.

“How did you know to grab them?” Leah asked.

Johnny looked confused, “Daryl told me to pick it up because she knew she would be late.”

Leah rolled her eyes. It was so typical for Daryl to tell her brother she would be late but not Leah herself.

Not wanting her dad to comment on her annoyance again, Leah said, “Perfect, thanks for bringing it.”

From the table without even looking up from his puzzle, John grumbled, “See, you got your panties in a twist for nothing.”

Leah rolled her eyes and turned her attention back to Johnny, who was placing a bag of groceries down on the counter, “Grabbed some supplies while I was at the store too.”

“Did you get the ham for Christmas?” Leah asked, already calculating how she could rearrange the fridge for the large hunk of meat.

Johnny nodded and pulled the ham from the canvas bag, passing it to his sister. He lowered his voice and asked, “How has he been today?”

“I can hear you, motherfucker,” John yelled from the table.

Leah took a deep breath as she met Johnny’s eyes, “Like that.”

Somehow his already fiery temper only intensified as the day went on. She had experienced his rage countless times throughout her life, but it continued to surprise her just how mad he could get.

John had been more accepting of Daryl than Leah could have ever hoped. But as his pain got worse, so did his attitude. And although Leah tried to have sympathy for him every day, it was hard not to take it all personally, especially since he had been this mean since she was a kid.

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Johnny began to open the brown paper bag from the pharmacy and pull out the medication from inside, giving Leah a familiar look as he did. He knew exactly where she was coming from; the last few months had been tough on all of them.

“Your old man gets a little attitude and all you can think to do is drug him up. I’m just speaking my mind,” John barked from the table.

Leah replied quickly, “So you’d be fine if I didn’t give you any of these pills? You wouldn’t be in pain all night?” She normally wouldn’t let such rude words slip, but he was on her last nerve tonight, and Daryl being missing in action certainly wasn’t helping.

“Don’t get smart with me,” John grumbled.

As if she knew there was a fight to diffuse, Daryl swept in the front door, bringing in a cold gust of air along with her. The large wood door slammed shut as her heavy work boots stomped along the floorboards. It made Leah cringe to hear the boots on the newly refinished floors, but she had too much on her plate to fight it.

“Stop giving your kids so much trouble,” Daryl insisted when she appeared in the kitchen. Before John could try and pick a fight with her, Dar gave John a pat on the back. She walked over to Leah and gave her a gentle kiss on the cheek before setting her bags down on the counter, adding to the pile Johnny had already created.

Under her breath, Leah groaned, “You better have brought dinner.”

Daryl winked at Leah and said, “You know I always bring food.”

Leah grabbed plates and brought the plastic takeout containers to the table as everyone sat to eat.

Once she had her plate dished, Leah looked around at the house.

A lot had changed in the last few months: more railings and refinished floors, to start. It had been months since Leah had gotten a splinter from the worn wood.

Daryl and Leah weren't the only ones making the long drive from New Winford to Sugarties. Robin had been coming up as much as she could to make the house more accessible for John, which was a huge help.

But it had become an uphill battle as his MS continued to progress despite his treatments. Even with all of Robin's work, it didn't seem like they could make adjustments to the house or his treatment plan fast enough.

It was a small miracle to be sitting at the table all together this holiday season instead of by John's hospital bed three towns over.

But as everyone dug into their food, Leah tried to enjoy the moment. The glimmer from the newly hung Christmas lights cast a warm glow over her family's faces. She was glad she'd forced Daryl up onto the twenty-foot ladder to hang them on the old house just a few nights before.

Leah felt like she hadn't truly celebrated Christmas in a few decades, not since her mom's passing. Even Johnny and Tyler didn't have a lot of time to plan holidays. So even though Leah normally spent it with them, it always felt a little underwhelming.

"Any big plans for the holidays, John?" Daryl asked, knowing John was limited in what he could actually do.

John laughed, “Might go sledding, or maybe shovel the driveway myself for once.”

“Remember when dad used to dress up as Santa every year and hand-deliver our presents in the morning?” Johnny asked.

“It kind of ruined the illusion that Santa was like some mythical being,” Leah said, “But it was fun.”

Even though she was loath to admit her dad had ever done anything sweet for them, Leah couldn’t stop the smile from growing on her face. It had been a long time since she’d had a nice Christmas with her dad, and the memory felt so special.

John shook his head as he thought about the things he used to do to make his kids laugh. “I’m sure that suit is buried somewhere in that attic with all sorts of other junk,” he said.

Everyone dug into their food and chatted, John beginning to relax as his pain medications kicked in.

Once they finished, Johnny, Leah, and Daryl cleaned up the leftovers together.

“Want me to get Dad settled before I go?” Johnny asked.

Leah nodded, “I wouldn’t say no. But if you need to get back home, don’t let us hold you up.”

Johnny smiled and gave their dad a pat on the back, “Ready to head upstairs?”

John grumbled but started to move his wheelchair toward the old Victorian staircase while Leah unloaded dishes from the dishwasher into the lower cupboards of the kitchen.

Luckily, Robin had been able to help install more wheelchair friendly cabinetry for John, so he could at least get himself basic foods while he was alone. But he was starting to slow down so much that even pouring a bowl of cereal felt like a big task nowadays.

“Sorry I was late,” Daryl murmured once John and Johnny had disappeared. She could hear the low hum of the chairlift on the staircase.

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“It’s okay,” Leah said, trying to temper her own annoyance.

Daryl approached her and set her chin on Leah’s shoulder, “Do you want to talk about it?”

Leah shrugged, “I mean you know it’s hard.”

“Yeah, I do. And I’m sorry I was late. But he did get his meds at least,” Daryl tried to smile.

Raising her eyebrows, Leah replied, “Sure, but you could’ve texted me too and not just my brother.”

Daryl couldn’t stop a giggle from rising, “I just figured he’d tell you anyway. Two birds, one stone and all that.”

Leah shook her head, turned around in Daryl’s arms, and pulled her in roughly. They wrapped their arms around each other, and Leah let her lungs inhale Daryl’s scent. Her usual earthy musk was slightly salty; clearly Daryl had been working all day.

Leah couldn’t help how the smell calmed her nerves. Sure, Daryl could be forgetful and a little spacey. But Leah hadn’t ever met someone who was so good at calming her down.

“Fine, I forgive you,” Leah rolled her eyes playfully. But she wasn’t letting her girlfriend off quite that easily. “But now that I’ve got you alone, what’s the plan for Christmas?”



“Ugh,” Daryl groaned, “Can’t we wait until after Jamie and Dani’s wedding to figure that out?”

Shaking her head, Leah said, “Nope, we have to plan how much food we need and where to meet up.”

“I assumed you would be here?” Daryl asked.

“If there were enough people, we could bring Dad to Johnny’s place so he can get some new scenery,” Leah suggested.

Daryl’s forehead scrunched, “Why is that body count dependent?”

Leah waited for the dots to connect in Daryl’s mind. Eventually she nodded, “Right. Stairs.”

Looking into Daryl’s eyes, Leah admitted, “I know you don’t usually like Christmas, and you’ve been... alone for a while. But everyone would love to see you.”

Daryl tensed at the thought. She had spent most Christmas mornings alone for the last few years. Robin and the Greenwoods were very generous in always inviting her to their family dinner. But Daryl had grown accustomed to spending the morning with a hot cup of coffee and her dogs.

“I promise it’ll be fun,” Leah begged.

Taking in a deep breath, Daryl nodded, “I know. Just let me think on it.”

Leah smiled and kissed her cheek, “Besides, who doesn’t love a steamy Christmas?”

All Leah really wanted for Christmas was more time in bed with her lover, and

maybe she would would get her wish.

7

Jamie

Jamie looked in the mirror and gently flattened the navy suit to her body, trying to position it exactly how she liked.

Technically, there was nothing about this suit that screamed, “I’m getting married.”

But as she looked at herself in the mirror, Jamie knew one of these suits would be the suit, the one she would wear to get married to the love of her life in just a couple weeks. She just needed to find it.

“How’s it looking?” Clarissa hollered from outside the dressing room.

“Good, I think. But I’m not sure it’s perfect,” Jamie said as she took a deep breath and pulled back the velvet curtain to face her mother.

Clarissa gasped as she looked at her daughter, “Oh, I like this one.”

Jamie stepped in front of the tri-fold mirror in the hallway to get a better look at the suit. “Are we sure it’s a good idea to not look for something in the city,” Jamie asked quietly as she bit her lip, not wanting the owner to hear her hesitation.

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Clarissa sighed, “Well, if we were certain it wouldn’t blow your secret, maybe we could. But the paparazzi would be everywhere. And I really think everything you’ve tried on looks incredible. You just have to find what makes you feel the best.”

Of course every designer in New York swore that they would be able to keep Jamie’s nuptials a secret if she came in and got fitted for a suit. But Jamie had gotten used to the quiet of her small town and had no interest in risking their quiet ceremony for the sake of an expensive suit.

Even if the dim lights in the boutique made it impossible to judge the color of the suits correctly.

Besides, Jamie was excited to support a local, queer business who specialized in making suits for different bodies.

“Do you think Dani will like it?” Jamie asked, blushing.

She could see her mom’s face light up at the question, she loved how much Jamie thought about Dani’s opinion. It was a behavior Clarissa had never seen in Jamie before Dani came into her life.

“I think she’ll love anything you show up in because it’s you in the suit,” Clarissa said. It was the most mom thing she could say, and it was exactly what Jamie needed to hear. She wanted the day to be perfect, and Dani loving the suit would be a huge part of that.

Jamie rolled her eyes as she walked across the cat walk and looked in the mirror,

“What a copout.”

Jamie took a deep breath as she got one last look at the dark blue suit. Her leg began to shake, her heel tapping against the large format tile. Something about it wasn't quite right.

Maybe the blue was too basic.

“There's one more I want to try,” Jamie promised

Clarissa smiled and laughed, “Honey, I'm here for you. You take your sweet ass time, because we're not leaving here until you find a suit you love.”

Jamie smiled as she made her way back into her dressing room, so thankful for her mother and her infinite patience. Trying on the suits had made Jamie wish she had had the confidence to wear one to prom, knowing she would've been more comfortable in her own skin if she had.

She pulled the curtain closed and began to take off the suit, first pulling off the jacket and hanging it back up.

Her mom had insisted that there be some fanfare in looking for Jamie's suit. “You're my only child, and if you're not gonna do dress shopping, I do insist on being there for your suit shopping,” Clarissa had said in her kitchen when Jamie first mentioned trying to find a suit quietly.

Originally, Clarissa was insistent that Jamie invite Malack as well, but Jamie was nervous about picking her suit in front of so many people.

It already felt strange to have the tailor fiddle around with each piece as she tried them on. But Jamie was more used to that than an audience... at least when she was

trying on clothes.

She unbuttoned the shirt that accompanied the blue suit, careful not to wrinkle it and create more work for the tailor.

Dani's cooking had definitely softened the muscles Jamie had gained from her last tour. All the time spent working out and dancing around on stage was no match for the incredible meals waiting for her back in New Winford.

But Jamie loved letting Dani take care of her, almost as much as she loved taking care of Dani. Even after all this time, Dani was still reluctant to allow anyone to take things off her plate, but Dani always let Jamie help.

She had quit her job at Dirty Dee's over a year ago, but Dani always found a way to fill her days, especially with her dog grooming business starting to take off. Jamie shook her head as she thought about Dani's insistence on hosting a holiday adoption drive for the New Winfford Humane Society the same week of their wedding. Even after Arden offered to run the event herself.

Jamie still wasn't sure why Dani had been insistent about cramming so many things into the short time before she went back on tour. She'd rather spend the time relaxing and getting to enjoy one another's company before she was back on the road instead of racing to plan all of these events. But she could tell it was important to Dani for whatever reason, so she decided to go along with it. After all, Dani was taking on the bulk of the planning, and if all she had to do to make her happy was answer some questions about bouquets and pick out a nice suit, she could do that happily.

Jamie slipped on a black button down and carefully did up each button. The collar was stiff around her neck as she did the top button. She carefully slid her arm into the evergreen suit jacket and pulled up the matching pants.

Well that's better, Jamie thought as she looked in the mirror. The trousers fell at a perfect spot on her hips, and the color felt perfect: seasonal, but not too Christmas-y.

"Okay, I actually like this one," Jamie called out to Clarissa as she smiled at herself in the mirror.

Clarissa let out a squeal as she clapped her hands and waited to see her daughter.

As Jamie peeled back the curtain to reveal the suit, Clarissa's mouth dropped open immediately.

"Wow, honey. It's perfect," Clarissa said, tears building up in her eyes.

Jamie smiled as she looked at herself in the mirror and saw exactly what she wanted to: a woman who was ready to make Dani Crawford her wife.

"Do you think it'll be warm enough?" Jamie asked.

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It was going to be cold the week of their wedding, and because Jamie had insisted they do it outside, she wanted to make sure she was well prepared. She had always hated the thought of getting married indoors. But when Dani pitched a winter wedding, Jamie feared she might have to give up that dream.

That's why they'd begged Zoey to come out of wedding-planning retirement to make their perfect day. Because no one else could pull off their elaborate vision.

Clarissa nodded ecstatically, "It looks pretty cozy, but you can always add another layer under the shirt since it's a dark color."

Jamie took another look at herself and considered the suggestion just as the tailor walked in and said, "That's perfect."

Jamie couldn't stop the blush on coming to her face as Atlas examined the fit of the suit.

"Could we leave enough room for some sort of undershirt? Something slick and warm?"

Atlas examined the suit and nodded, "I can special order some merino and make one."

Surprised, Jamie asked, "Really?"

With a nod, Atlas began to fiddle with the legs of the trousers. "I'd like to bring it in at the legs if that's alright with you. Have you decided on a shoe yet?"

Jamie shook her head. She was definitely behind schedule, but hopefully with her suit taken care of, she could get on track.

“Not yet, but I trust your vision,” Jamie said with a nervous smile.

“That’s what I like to hear,” Atlas joked as they began to measure the fabric around Jamie’s ankles, shaking their head in disbelief, “I still can’t believe Jamie Lawson from Intro to Photography is getting married to Dani fucking Crawford.”

“Neither can I,” Jamie said with a giddy smile. It was strange to remember that the confident professional fitting her wedding suit was the same kid Jamie would skip class with back in high school.

As much as both Jamie and Dani had changed since then, it wasn’t lost on Jamie how strange it was to have ended up with her high school bully. What were the odds that they were destined to be together the whole time? That every road led Jamie back to her small-town and the one girl she couldn’t ever stop thinking about?

Of course over the last few years of dating, Jamie and Dani would exchange stories about their time in high school, and with each retelling, it was obvious that all of the tension had stemmed from a deep, burning desire to be together.

“Okay if you’re happy with how this looks, I’ll get going on the alterations and call you when they’re finished,” Atlas said.

Jamie nodded and looked to Clarissa for her thoughts.

“I think it’s perfect,” she said, beaming at her glowing daughter.

“Great, then I’ll see you back here in about a week,” Atlas said, writing down a few measurements in their notebook.



“Thank you,” Jamie called as she headed back into the fitting room and slid into her baggy jeans and oversized sweatshirt.

Upon exiting the boutique, she and Clarissa were immediately greeted by warm Christmas lights strewn across the outdoor mall.

It was unusual to see an outdoor mall here, but the few that existed often had the best stores around and catered to a more expensive shopper.

Jamie had found out about Atlas from Zoey, who had been quick to connect with new vendors in New Winford, especially for the occasional high-profile contact like Jamie.

“Do you mind if we make a stop?” Clarissa asked with a goofy smile.

Jamie rolled her eyes, “Did you seriously plan to do your Christmas shopping at the same time as I was getting the suit for my wedding fitted?”

“To be fair, it’s a long drive, and the selection is better here,” Clarissa teased.

Jamie groaned but followed her mother’s lead to one of the outlets, rubbing her hands together to warm them against the chilly air.

Inside, they were immediately greeted by an employee in a Santa hat, “Welcome!”

Clarissa and Jamie smiled back and greeted them, but as the pair walked into the store, Jamie could hear the same employee whispering with a coworker, “Is that LAWSON?” It was still strange to be recognized, but her celebrity had grown even larger after her last release and the benefit concert that it was happening more and more often.

“Have you figured out what you’re getting Dani yet?” Clarissa asked as they browsed. Obnoxiously loud Christmas music blaring behind them forced Clarissa to speak louder than she would have liked.

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Jamie shook her head, “We decided not to do gifts this year because of the wedding, but I know that sneaky bitch is going to get me something anyway.”

Clarissa smiled, certain that Jamie was right. Over the past year or so, Clarissa had grown really close to her future daughter-in-law and appreciated how much Dani adored Jamie. More than that, though, having Dani around had made her house feel fuller and gave her someone new to hang out with, which were always good things in her book.

But right now, Clarissa was more interested in investigating the tension emanating off of her daughter than she was in speculating about Dani’s Christmas present.

“How are you feeling about the wedding?” she asked as they browsed the racks.

Jamie’s forehead wrinkled at the question, unsure exactly what her mother meant. As far as she knew, her mom loved Dani and was thrilled to have a daughter-in-law.

Clarissa was quick to explain, “I just know you had originally thought you would take your time planning it, and I just wanna see how you’re feeling now that it’s so soon.”

She was right that a summer wedding had originally been the plan, but Dani was eager to get married as soon as possible, and Jamie had no real reason to wait. She had known she wanted to marry Dani from the second they first kissed.

“I’m excited, but mostly I’m worried that Dani is taking on too much,” Jamie admitted. “I’ll marry her any time, any place. But I don’t understand why all the

stress is worth it to get married a few months earlier.”

Clarissa considered the question before answering, unsure how honest she should be.

But Jamie could always sense when her mother was holding back an opinion, and she couldn’t help wanting to know what it was. “Well, go ahead.”

Clarissa gritted her teeth but finally said, “Well, where are you going to be after Christmas?”

Jamie considered it for a moment. The new album was due just after the holiday, which meant soon after Jamie would be heading back out on another tour.

She shook her head. It was hard to believe that Dani would be worried about her going on tour. They’d been totally fine doing long distance during the last one.

“Why would she be worried about tour?” Jamie asked.

Clarissa couldn’t help but giggle at her daughter’s naïveté, “Staying loyal for a single tour is one thing. But a second is where most relationships fall apart.”

Jamie shook her head, “But I wouldn’t ever.”

“Of course not, honey. I’m sure it’s just a paranoid thought on her part,” Clarissa clarified, rubbing Jamie’s arm.

She trusted her mother’s opinion, but she wasn’t always right. Dani wasn’t the type to keep a concern like that to herself...

Was she?

Zoey

Zoey watched as Robin gave orders to the construction crew scattered around the venue.

As intimidating as Robin could be professionally, Zoey couldn't help but think it was hot to watch her so in control. When they were friends in high school, Robin was always the more sheepish of the duo, always letting Zoey speak up first. But here she was barking orders across the site.

Despite her easy-going attitude, Robin had worked so hard to build a career for herself in New Winford, and it was times like this where her expertise was evident to everyone around her.

Zoey had insisted that each row of seats for the wedding have their own heater to ensure that guests were warm no matter what. But that meant Robin had to find a way to temporarily install enough electricity to power a few dozen heaters in the middle of the woods when the state wouldn't allow them to install high voltage equipment in the middle of a park.

Catching Zoe's eye, Robin smiled and rushed over, "Are you feeling okay, baby?"

Zoey giggled at her concern. Other than some slight nausea, Zoey felt pretty much exactly the same as usual. But Robin had already jumped into caretaker mode, ready to fetch Zoey anything she might need at a moment's notice.

Zoey nodded, "Yeah honey, don't worry about me. I'm all good. You're going to give us away if you're this worried all the time."

Glaring at her, Robin nodded. But it was clear that she didn't really believe Zoey. In Robin's experience, Zoey rarely knew her own limits and often pushed herself beyond reason.

"I know, but what if something changes?" Robin questioned, concern washing over her face.

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Zoey replied, “Well then I’ll let you know. But in the meantime, I need those heaters installed like... yesterday.”

Smiling, Robin recognized Zoey’s familiar persistence. It was enough to assure Robin that everything was alright.

“And I need an update from Daryl as soon as possible,” Zoey said, “And we need to figure out which room we’re going to make into...”

She trailed off from saying more, knowing it was far too early for anyone to know the news. New Winford was a small town and as soon one person overheard, it wouldn’t be long before it was front-page news.

It still felt surreal to remember they were about to be parents. But Zoey knew that everything would be all right, even if this wedding was driving her crazy.

Robin tried to hide the smile on her face and replied, “We definitely do.”

But before Robin could turn back to her work, she saw Zoey’s foot anxiously tapping against the forest floor. She placed her hands on Zoey’s arms and took a deep breath, hoping Zoey would follow suit.

Zoey forced a deep breath into her lungs and exhaled deeply. The cold air felt like taking a dive into a deep pool in the middle of August.

“I love you so much, but I need you to be more careful. You heard Dr. Morales; it’s really important that you relax,” Robin reminded her, staring into her eyes.

Zoey shook her head and argued, “Really the doctor said I shouldn’t be unusually stressed out.” A cheeky grin covered her face. She hoped the semantics would distract Robin from the glaring problem that was her insistence on working constantly. Deep down, Zoey knew Robin was right, but she just wasn’t ready to admit that yet.

She wasn’t sure if she knew how to be less stressed. When she was building her career in the city, she had no choice but to take on as much work as she possibly could. Her work-life balance then was nonexistent, and for a long time, she preferred it that way. That work ethic was what enabled her to pursue her dream life back home.

But more than that, she feared what it would mean to let someone else take control for once. Sure, she had taken a few months off after quitting her job, but without fail, someone always needed Zoey Greenwood’s expertise in planning their events.

Plus, when she wasn’t planning events, she and Robin were flipping houses, a passion project they’d started up after finishing the renovations on Oak Lane.

It was work she really enjoyed, but it was work nonetheless.

“I know you’re so strong and tough and you can do it all. But maybe you shouldn’t have to,” Robin proposed. Before Zoey could reply, though, Robin was being summoned by a crew installing luxury portable bathrooms.

Alone, Zoey looked up to the bare, winter canopy. The trees swayed together in the cold breeze, their branches entangling. She needed more of this kind of calm in her life.

What would it feel like to really let Robin take control? She asked herself as she observed the venue.



Daryl

“Look who decided to show up,” Zoey joked as she pulled Daryl in for a hug between the bookcases in the local bookstore, Cleo’s Shelf. Cleo had done a great job hanging some classy lights around the place, providing a soft light to read by and a cheery holiday vibe.

Daryl laughed, “You’re one to talk. I feel like I haven’t seen you here in months. Been too busy zooming around town trying to run the place. Now that I think of it, I only see you when you’re demanding work from me in my shop.”

With a laugh, Zoey and Daryl wandered to the back of the store and took in the smell of the books.

“How goes the wedding planning?” Daryl asked, regretting it almost as soon as the words left her lips.

Taking in a deep breath, Zoey joked, “Well, this bitch of a gardener is taking too damn long on the floral arrangements.”

Shaking her head, Daryl kept moving through the stacks of books and gave Zoey a once over. “How did the appointment go the other day?” Daryl asked.

Even though she wasn’t ready to tell anyone just yet about the big news, the truth was evident on Zoey’s face, which immediately flushed pink.

Daryl knew better than to say anything. Instead she waited for Zoey to say, “We’re just going to have to wait and see.”

“Well, you know I’m excited to be an aunt,” Daryl said with a wink. The giddy smile playing at the corners of Zoey’s mouth wasn’t lost on Daryl as they made their way to the circle of chairs at the back of the shop.

Each woman took their respective spots in the book club circle, eager for the group to start.

Once everyone was seated, Lynn opened the discussion of their holiday pick, a romantic comedy set in a snow-locked town in the mountains. Daryl was glad to see Zoey at book club since it was one of the few times a month she saw Zoey sit still for more than five minutes.

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Daryl was certain it was Robin's insistence that kept Zoey attending despite their busy schedules.

Looking at Zoey, Daryl could hardly recall the disapproval she'd felt when Zoey first started hanging around Robin again. She barely knew the girl, but she knew how badly she'd hurt Robin when she left town.

Now here they were two years later, getting ready to start their family.

It had taken them a lot of hard work to get to that point, to be ready to commit to a life together, but the struggle seemed well worth it. Zoey had let go of her life in the city and Robin made space for her in that big, old house. Daryl couldn't stop her mind from wandering to Leah's sweet face. She knew that to build something as strong as her friends had, Daryl would have to be willing to sacrifice something.

But she shook the feeling as Lynn rambled on about the book, about the lumberjack and the billionaire fighting over the main character. Daryl hated to admit that Zoey and Robin had anything to teach her, especially about love.

After the discussion was finished, Lynn clapped her hands together and said, "Okay! Time for Secret Santa. Did everyone bring their gifts?" Daryl raised an eyebrow at Lynn's excitement, forgetting for a moment how much Lynn loved the holiday season.

Everyone in the group nodded as they pulled wrapped gifts from their bags,

In typical Daryl fashion, she hadn't bothered to wrap her gift because it wasn't

something material.

The group began passing out their presents one at a time going around the circle.

Zoey had gotten Lynn a special, imported Belgian chocolate that she had once had as a kid. Daryl had heard her talk about the delicacy countless times.

“Oh my god! I can’t believe you managed to find this. I’ve been looking for it for years!” Lynn exclaimed as she smiled at Zoey from across the circle.

Zoey blushed, happy to see her gift well received, and replied, “Well lucky for you, I have connections all over the world. And apparently, I know quite a few chocolate experts.” The group gave a soft chuckle.

When it came Daryl's turn to present her gift, she cleared her throat and began, “Mine isn’t quite material... yet.”

She turned her attention to Zoey and began, “I’m going to custom design a living sculpture for the Oak Lane house. I’d have made it already, but I want you to have full creative direction over the project so we can make something perfect for you and your hopefully growing family.”

Zoey gasped “After all these years, you’re finally gonna do something for free for me? What a treat!” She laughed and wiped at fake tears as she teased her friend, “How did you know free labor was my favorite present?”

Daryl shrugged as she winked at Zoey.

Zoey continued, “But no, seriously, thank you. It’s a gift only Daryl Price can give.”

Daryl quipped, “Yeah, I know. Don’t get too sappy, though, it’s just so that whatever

kids you have can grow up around some actually good art.”

Daryl would never admit it, but she loved knowing Robin and Zoey’s kids would have a piece of Daryl around every day. She’d worried about it coming across as a half-baked idea, but Robin had promised Zoey would love it.

After everyone finished presenting their gifts, Cleo came around to kick them out, but not before the group presented one last present for their gracious host.

“Oh, you shouldn’t have,” Cleo joked as they wiggled their eyebrows and held out their hands. Though having so many book nerds in the store certainly wasn’t bad for business, the club knew that they monopolized the small store when they met, so it only felt right to make sure Cleo knew how much they appreciated it.

Passing the gift to Cleo, Lynn gave them a hug before impatiently prodding, “Well go on, see what it is.”

Cleo began to untie the delicate silk ribbon and carefully pulled off the beautiful craft paper, careful to keep the wrapping intact. Underneath was a simple cardboard box that raised Cleo’s eyebrow. It was clear they had no idea what this group of weirdos could have gotten them.

Daryl handed them a pair of scissors to cut the tape along the edge of the box.

“Oh, cool!” Cleo gasped as their mouth dropped open in surprise. Out of the box they pulled a specialty copy of *Alice in Wonderland*, handling the book as if it was a priceless artifact.

“It’s a first edition. We thought you could add to your collection behind the counter. Merry Christmas, and thank you for letting us invade your store once a month,” Zoey said.

“Thank you so much, it’s beautiful. I’m speechless!” Cleo went around the circle and gave each of them a hug as they made their way out of the store.

Pleased that the gift-giving had all gone so well, Zoey hooked her arm on Daryl’s as they approached the exit. A night where she wasn’t working was rare nowadays, so she might as well take advantage of the walk to the cars to catch up with her friend. “So, how are things with Leah?”

Daryl rolled her eyes and groaned, “What’s that got to do with you?”

Zoey shrugged, “A certain somebody told me that you might not be appearing for the Vargas family Christmas.”

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Holding open the door for Zoey, Daryl replied, “I just like my traditions and haven’t had a day to myself in a long time.”

As they walked through the brisk air toward the back parking lot, Zoey took a deep breath, “You mean your tradition of staying home alone all day and then tagging along as a third wheel to my family's Christmas?”

“Yes, that one,” Daryl said defensively. The Greenwoods loved having Daryl come for dinner, but considering the other option was spending Christmas with her long-distance girlfriend, Zoey had assumed Daryl would be skipping this year.

But Zoey should have known better. Daryl was a creature of habit, and it would take a real push to get her out of her comfort zone. Zoey just hoped that that push wouldn’t cause too much of a strain on the young relationship.

Daryl really wanted to do right by the people in her life, but if someone wasn’t explicit with her about what they needed and why, she was much more prone to keep doing what she always did. And based on Daryl’s waffling on the matter, Zoey suspected that Leah’s request hadn’t landed with the impact Leah had intended.

Hoping to help Daryl out, Zoey challenged, “Don’t you think it’s worth the change in scenery to make Leah's Christmas special? When I moved back, it took a lot of adjusting, but I’m thankful every day that I took the time to integrate my life with Robin’s. That includes spending more time with you, you grumpy old hag.” Zoey nudged Daryl with her shoulder.

Deep down, Daryl knew that Zoey was right; she owed Leah some more

consideration. Over the last few months, she had seen just how difficult it was to care for John, and it probably would make Leah's day just a little bit easier to have Daryl nearby. Especially since they weren't sure how many more Christmases they'd have with John.

"You're pushy," Daryl grumbled as they neared Zoe's SUV, "When are you gonna get rid of this ugly thing?" Zoey rolled her eyes, "When are you going to finish the wedding florals?"

Daryl reluctantly pulled Zoey in for a hug and whispered, "Oh, and I'll just say a premature congratulations."

Zoey smiled, caught off guard by the comment, but Dar didn't stick around for a response, throwing Zoey a wink as she headed toward her own car.

As she climbed into the truck, she thought over what Zoey had said about Leah and the holidays. She was reluctant to accept her meddling friend's advice, much more comfortable sticking to her usual routine, but everything Zoey had said made sense. Sitting in the silence of her truck cabin, Daryl knew in her heart what she had to do.

10

Dani

With the weekly progress meeting settled and just seven days before Christmas, Dani felt better about the state of the adoption drive. They needed to clear as much space as possible to make room for new rescues next year.

Luckily, a new addition to the family made a pretty popular Christmas present around these parts, and their publicity push had been doing wonders for the pace of pet adoptions.



Dani walked down the hallway toward the back office as the volunteer staff returned to work. Taking a peek into the kennels along the hall, Dani was proud of how much space they'd made so far and was excited to see how much more the adoption drive would do for them. It was always hard to say goodbye to the animals, of course, but it felt amazing to know they were all going to loving homes.

Halfway down the hall, Dani smiled at the photographer who had volunteered to take Christmas photos for the adoptable pets.

"Hey Drew, good to see you again. Thanks for coming in," Dani said, patting her on the back. Zoey's old assistant, Bobbi, had connected the shelter with Drew after the benefit concert, and her contribution played no small part in the recent surge of adoptions. Although she could be a traditionalist when it came to style, her unique perspective made each pet stand out.

Drew smiled, "Anything for a rescue."

Dani made her way to the back office and closed the door behind her. It was the closest thing to peace and quiet she'd had in a few months, and even then, the sound of barking dogs on the other side of the door was inescapable.

She took a deep breath before picking up her phone and checking her texts, certain someone needed her attention. Sure enough, there were a few dozen unread messages and some missed calls from both Zoey Greenwood and Jamie.

Though the messages from Zoey had been a constant fixture on her lock screen since wedding planning started, missed calls from Jamie were unusual. When one of them was working, they tried their best to give one another space to do their thing.

Before she could find out what she had missed, the office door flung open to reveal a flustered Jamie.

“Hi honey, what are you...” Dani began before Jamie interrupted.

“Where have you been? We’ve been trying to get a hold of you for hours,” Jamie said, the annoyance in her voice undeniable.

Dani shrugged, surprised by Jamie’s irritation, “I was in a meeting. What’s the emergency?”

Jamie scoffed, “Apparently there’s a problem with the wedding permits, and Zoey needs both of us to sign some paper or we’ll lose the venue. It’s a whole thing, but we don’t have time to get into it.”

Before Dani could answer or ask any further questions, Arden appeared in the doorway with a puzzled look on her face, not used to hearing Jamie or Dani argue – at least not since they had gotten together.

“Is everything okay?” Arden asked.

Jamie waited for Dani to answer, not wanting to overstep.

Dani nodded, “Yeah, just wedding stuff.”

Arden looked between the two of them and nodded, “Well, I was just coming to recap some stuff from the meeting, but if you need me to take any of the adoption drive stuff off your plate, just let me know. You know I’m happy to help.”

Jamie’s face lit up at the suggestion, relieved someone else was willing to ease Dani’s burden. She always did what she could to help, but with her label up her ass about the next album and her manager constantly trying to schedule new appearances, it could be tricky to juggle.

“No, it’s okay. Thanks, Arden” Dani smiled tiredly, “I’ll catch up with you later, though.”

Jamie couldn’t understand why Dani would turn down the help. Their schedules were both jam packed, and they’d hardly had any time to enjoy the holiday season. It was shaping up to be the first year Jamie would miss watching Great British Bake Off, and at this rate, they’d barely have time to exchange presents with Clarissa before the wedding.

As if she could sense the shift in Jamie’s energy, Arden gave Dani a nod and quickly excused herself from the room. Once the door had shut, Jamie bit her lip and asked, “Why wouldn’t you take her help?”

Dani shrugged and stumbled for an answer, “I don’t know, the whole thing was my idea, and it doesn’t feel right to put the work on someone else.”

Jamie shook her head and took a deep breath before she said anything.

“I just don’t understand,” Jamie finally said, “There’s a team of people here whose entire jobs are to help you with this stuff.”

Dani rolled her eyes and said, “You know how important the shelter work is to me. I just feel better doing it myself. I wouldn’t ask you to delegate writing your album to someone else.”

Jamie rubbed her face for a moment, “Yeah, I get that any other month of any other year. I just don’t understand why you won’t take help planning the adoption drive a week before Christmas and our wedding.”

A dam was breaking inside of Jamie, and there was no space for Dani to argue back, “We already have the wedding. And the album. And the tour. And the holidays. And the mobile grooming business. Now you also won’t let go of the adoption drive, not even a little bit? I thought maybe you’d want to spend time with me, planning our wedding that you’ve insisted we rush to have.”

Dani would be lying if she said that the last part didn’t sting. So Jamie doesn’t want to get married, the voice in the back of her mind whispered. But she pushed the thought back and tried to collect herself – there was too much going on, and letting her insecurity win out wouldn’t help anything.

When there was finally a pause in Jamie’s rant, Dani rolled her eyes and sighed, “Of course I want to spend time with you, baby. I would love to be less busy. But that doesn’t change that I am busy, and I don’t think now is the time to talk about it. Can it wait until I get home?” She stood up and headed for the door.

“Where are you going?” Jamie asked, following Dani through the kennel and toward the parking lot.

Dani sighed and lowered her voice as they passed through the busy shelter, “I have to take the grooming van in for repairs. I really don’t wanna do this right now.”

As they reached the front door, Jamie pushed it open and continued, “Well I do.” Cold air battered their cheeks as Dani led the way through the parking lot, the shelter door slamming shut behind them.

Dani begged, “Please, don’t push it.”

“What does that mean?” Jamie asked as Dani walked towards the van.

“That I’m not in the mood, and I don’t want to say something I don’t mean.” The worry on Jamie’s face was clear, and it took everything in Dani not to be spiteful right now.

Jamie shook her head, “Don’t hold back. If there’s something else going on, you might as well just say it. The way it’s going, this might be the only chance we get to talk before the wedding!” She hadn’t meant to raise her voice, but she was agitated and couldn’t stop the words from sounding meaner than she wanted them to.

“I can’t just wait around for you to leave me!” Dani blurted, each word lightening the weight on her shoulder.

“What?” Jamie asked, stunned.

“I didn’t want to do this now,” Dani said looking at her feet, tears building in the corners of her eyes. She wasn’t ready to admit any of this, to be honest about what she was afraid of. But how could Jamie not see it? Dani wasterrifiedof losing her.

Jamie shook her head, “No, that’s not fair. I’m coming back.”

“You don’t know that,” Dani couldn’t lift her gaze to Jamie’s.

It was clear that the comment had hurt Jamie’s feelings. Was Dani implying that a ring on her finger would be the difference between Jamie coming home to her or running off forever?

Dani mumbled, “You just don’t get it. Can we just talk about this later, please?”

For the first time in their relationship, Dani was begging Jamie to drop it. Jamie didn’t know what to say. She’d never given Dani any reason to doubt her fidelity. What had changed?

Taking the silence as her cue to leave, Dani got into the van without a word. As she adjusted the rearview, she saw Jamie staring back at her. For a moment, she thought about getting out of the car and running into Jamie’s arms, feeling the warmth of her body. She wanted to believe she could trust Jamie, that it would all be okay.

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Maybe it was the bitter winter or her own fear that kept her in the car. But either way, she wasn't ready to face it. Instead, she pulled out of the driveway without looking back.

11

Robin

"That's why I think the nursery should be upstairs, but long-term, the kids' rooms should be downstairs," Robin huffed as they crested the top of the hill at Bear Creek Park.

Zoey smiled, "Well, it's a good thing we have so long to figure it out." Robin had already started picking out paint samples for the nursery, ready to start building their nest. She figured it was one less thing for Zoey to worry about as she adjusted to a lower-stress life.

Robin wanted to keep pitching ideas, but Zoey had gone back to answering texts on her phone. Over her shoulder, Robin could tell she was going back-and-forth with not just Dani but also vendors and Bobbi in the city.

Shaking her head, Robin chastised, "The doctor told you that you have to chill."

Zoey rolled her eyes and said, "Your anxiety is more stressful to me than all of this combined."

Robin wasn't sure what it would take for Zoey to heed her concerns, but she just had

to trust that her partner would do right by their future child. After all, Zoey was the only one who could gauge that line, who would know if something didn't feel right.

They didn't have any more time to argue. At the top of the hill, Zoey could already see Sarah, the kids, Dorothy, and William waiting for them among a throng of sledders. When Sarah spotted them, she waved them down.

It had been a family tradition to come to the Bear Creek sledding hill since they were kids. The only years that Zoey ever missed it was when she was too busy in the city to travel home for the holidays. But since coming back to New Winford, it felt even more important to start the tradition again.

"Hey, you two," Sarah said, greeting the pair

"Hiya," Zoey said as she greeted her sister with a hug. Everyone took turns hugging the couple except for Derek, who had gotten too old to want hugs anymore. They settled on high fives instead.

Zoey plastered on a smile, trying to ignore the nausea brewing in her body, and asked, "Who's ready to get started?"

Ava and Leila cheered as they bounded toward the top of the slope, Derek reluctantly accompanying them with his bright blue sled. Zoey and Robin trailed behind with a sled of their own, smiling as they watched the kids. They always made a point to join the first and final sleds of the day.

Ava and Leila sat together on their small plastic disc while Derek stood to the side, embarrassedly waiting for Robin and Zoey to catch up.

"Are we sure this is okay?" Robin asked as she set down the wooden sleigh.



Zoey laughed as she plopped down onto the planks, “See, more worried than I am.”

Robin settled on the back and wrapped her arms around Zoey, placing one hand delicately over her stomach and planting a kiss on her rosy cheek.

“Ready?” Zoey hollered to the kids.

“Yeah!” They called from down the line.

Robin began the countdown, “Three... two... one... Go!”

They all scooted to the edge of the slope and took off down the hill. The snow was packed down from the hundreds of other sleds that had been here over the last few weeks, making their descent faster than either of them had expected.

Robin watched Zoey’s face light up as they gained speed, remembering this exact same view from a decade earlier. They had always gone sledding together as teenagers, and even then, Robin couldn’t take her eyes off of Zoey’s gorgeous face.

By the time they reached the bottom of the steep hill, Zoey was grinning from ear to ear and their hearts were racing. Robin picked up the sled and the group began the trek back to the top.

Derek threw snowballs at Leila and Ava who teamed up to tackle him in the snow.

At the top, the kids eagerly jumped back onto their sleds, this time Derek taking the large sled and the girls riding their own smaller sleds.

The adults watched as the kids went up and down the slope over and over again. Sarah was glued to her phone, looking up to check on her kids each time she heard a loud squeal.

William put his arm around Zoey, “How are you doing, darling?”

One of the best parts of coming home had been reconnecting with her father. They had been able to spend some serious quality time together, and watching William connect with Robin felt so special.

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Robin had always been the missing link in their family, and having her around again made the house feel complete.

Knowing that they had a baby on the way made it feel even more special. William was already such an amazing grandfather to Derek, Leila, and Ava, and she couldn't wait to see him that way with her own child.

"Good," Zoey said, hoping that if her exhaustion showed, her father would just assume she'd been busy at work. It wouldn't be far off from the truth, after all.

When they first started IVF, Zoey and Robin had agreed to keep the journey a secret from their family until they were certain an embryo had taken. And until they saw the positive test in Dr. Morales' office, they hadn't been sure it would work. Now that they had a positive test, they still hadn't exactly decided on when they would tell the Greenwoods, but Zoey was hoping it would be soon.

"Your girlfriend tells me you're not getting enough sleep," William chastised his daughter.

"I sleep just fine," Zoey claimed, rolling her eyes. She looked at Robin and shook her head as they made eye contact from across the slope; Robin should've known better than to tell her father anything about her work schedule.

William scoffed, always able to read her bluffs..

But he gave his daughter a squeeze on her shoulder and said, "Just remember, you only get one life, and you don't want to waste it working away when you've got

something beautiful right in front of you.” He looked into her eyes, “Trust me on that.”

Zoey opened her mouth to fight him on it when her phone began to ring in her pocket.

“See?” He argued with a wink.

She looked at her screen, which displayed Dani Crawford’s name. She hated to prove his point, but she knew she had to take it. “You win this round, but we’ll talk more later.”

He wiggled his eyebrows, “Sure we will.”

Robin tilted her head as she watched Zoey bring the phone to her ear step away from the group. It must be a call from Dani about the wedding.

“Will she ever stop?” Dorothy asked Robin as they both watched her work.

Robin shook her head, “I’ve tried to slow her down, but you know how she is.”

Dorothy nodded, carefully watching her daughter between rounds of applause for her grandkids’ triumphant returns to the top of the slope.

After a moment Zoey hung up the phone and rubbed her face, then set her hands on her hips and took a deep breath. Robin felt her jaw clench. Something was wrong.

As she thought it, Zoey bent over face twisted with pain. Robin’s brow furrowed as concern washed over her. “I’ll be right back,” she said without looking at Dorothy, instead booking it across the slope to Zoey’s side.

“Fuck,” Zoey groaned under her breath.

Robin placed her hand on Zoey's back, the heat of her body shocking Robin, "Baby, what's wrong?"

Zoey tried to speak but could only manage, "Dani... the heaters... they're wrong." She was heaving for breath.

"Honey, do we need to take you to a doctor?" Robin asked, trying not to alert the family.

"I think it's just a panic attack," Zoey mumbled.

Robin shook her head, "No, we're going to the emergency room."

Zoey shook her head but couldn't muster the energy to fight her partner. Before Robin could say more, Dorothy and William trotted over, unsure what was going on.

"Zo isn't feeling good," Robin explained, "We're gonna go get her looked at."

Nodding, Dorothy said, "We're coming too." But Robin could see Zoey shaking her head. This wasn't how they were going to find out about the pregnancy or whatever complication was arising.

Robin scrambled for a reason they should stay, "We don't want to upset the kids. You guys stay. I'll keep you updated. Okay?"

William wanted to fight it, but the look in Robin's eyes told him it was better this way.

"Seriously, it's probably nothing," Zoey managed, trying to smile through the pain.

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With that, William and Dorothy relented. Robin put her arm around Zoey's waist and helped her down the hill as swiftly as possible, trying to remember this quickest route to the hospital.

12

Leah

Daryl walked back into the room, drawing Leah's gaze up from her gingerbread house.

"Well?" Leah asked, concern on her face.

Letting out a deep breath, Daryl said, "Robin's being vague, but it sounds like whatever was wrong is under control. They're waiting on test results to see what happened, so they're probably going to miss dinner tonight."

Leah nodded, watching Daryl resume her spot on the carpet.

"Where were we?" Daryl said as she picked up another gingerbread wall.

"We were talking about whether the gumdrops are convincing shrubs for the gardens on our houses," Leah said with a giggle.

Daryl nodded and blushed as she looked at her girlfriend, "Right, of course."

They worked on their houses together in silence.

“Weird that there might be a baby around here sometimes,” Leah blurted out after a few minutes of thoughtful construction.

Daryl laughed and raised an eyebrow, “I guess?”

Shrugging, Leah continued, “I just mean that none of my friends have kids, only my brother. It feels bizarre to think there will be one so close, so involved in your life.”

“Yeah, I see that,” Daryl said. “I guess it feels normal to me. Most of my friends had kids long before you were around.” Daryl thought for a moment before asking, “Do you want kids?”

Somehow after all this time, they still hadn’t talked about it. A part of Leah was nervous to hear what Daryl thought about the subject.

She shrugged, “I’ve never felt particularly drawn to it, honestly. I like being an aunt more than I think I’d like being a parent. What about you?”

“I always liked the idea of fostering,” Daryl said as she put up another wall on her house, “Just to be a stable presence for a kid and not feel the need to project my own shit onto them. Ya know?”

Leah blushed; it was a sweet idea. She forgot sometimes how thoughtful Daryl could be. “I think that would be nice, especially for an older kid.”

Daryl nodded as she looked at Leah. Without a word, she leaned across the table and planted a kiss on her girlfriend’s lips, at first soft and delicate. But when Leah placed her hand on the nape of her neck, Daryl went in for a stronger kiss, letting her tongue play at Leah’s lips.

Leah moved toward Daryl, her knees dragging along the rough carpet as Daryl held

her close. Breaking the kiss, Daryl stood up and held her hand out to help Leah get up, “Let’s go to bed.”

“What about the dogs?” Leah asked, seeing out of the corner of her eye that the three pups were keen on snagging some gingerbread from the table.

“To the counter,” Daryl said as she carefully grabbed her house and an armful of supplies. Leah followed suit, bringing her stuff to the kitchen counter.

Daryl threw a few of their frosting-covered tools into the sink while Leah settled the houses on the counter beside it. Coming up behind her, Leah wrapped her arms around Daryl’s waist. She dipped her finger into the white, buttercream frosting and brought it to Daryl’s mouth.

Giggling, Daryl opened her mouth for Leah’s finger. She closed her soft lips around it and sucked off the frosting.

“Oh,” Leah moaned, surprised by how excited the gesture made her.

Daryl turned around in Leah’s arms and raised her eyebrow at her girlfriend's enthusiasm, “Really?”

Shrugging, Leah kissed Daryl and tasted the frosting on her breath. Why wait for the bedroom? She pulled her blouse over her head, revealing her bare chest for Daryl. Following her lead, Daryl pulled off her own t-shirt and unbuttoned her jeans.

Leah wiggled out of her skirt. Daryl stopped her from taking off her tights, instead grabbing them herself and peeling them delicately off of her legs.

“Get on the counter,” Daryl whispered. Doing as she was told, Leah’s ass met the cold stone countertop with a smack.



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“I have an idea,” Daryl said with a cheeky smile as she headed to the fridge.

Leah crossed her legs at her ankles, letting them dangle over the counter while she admired Daryl’s muscular back in the glow of the refrigerator light. What could she possibly be looking for?

Leah leaned forward, resting her weight on her hands. She could feel herself growing wet with anticipation, her pleasure dripping onto the counter.

Finally, Daryl slammed the fridge door closed triumphantly, holding something behind her back with a devilish grin.

“Daryl Price, what are you thinking?” Leah asked, watching Daryl’s eyes wander down to her exposed breasts.

Licking her lip, Daryl revealed what she’d been searching for: a can of whipped cream.

Leah’s mouth dropped open as she shook her head, “You dirty dog.”

Daryl laughed, “Aren’t you a little curious?”

She was nodding before she even processed that she did, in fact, want to know what it would feel like to have Daryl lick the sweet treat off of her body.

“Then, stop questioning,” Daryl said with a wink as she started to kiss Leah’s collarbone, the sensation of her soft lips sending a jolt of excitement straight to

Leah's clit.

Daryl shook the can, maintaining eye contact with Leah as she did. She brought the nozzle to Leah's chest, creating a swirl of whipped cream at the hollow of her throat.

"Oh my god, it's cold!" Leah said with a laugh.

"I can warm it up," Daryl smirked as she brought her lips back to Leah's neck, her tongue slipping out and licking up the cream hungrily.

Leah moaned, "Fuck, Daryl." She couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of the situation. She couldn't believe how into this she was.

Daryl lifted the can and sprayed more onto each of Leah's nipples.

She felt them harden underneath the cold cream immediately, her clit throbbing with anticipation.

Daryl smiled, looking into Leah's gorgeous brown eyes as she cleaned up the swirls on her chest.

"God, you're hot," Leah groaned against the sensation of Daryl's tongue teasing and sucking on her tender nipples.

Once her breasts were licked clean, Daryl sprayed a line down Leah's stomach. She started low and worked her way up Leah's middle, her face landing between Leah's gorgeous tits with the final lick.

The cool air pricked the wet spots Daryl left behind, sending a chill down Leah's spine.

Daryl placed her palm on Leah's chest and gently pushed her onto her back, exposing more of her pussy.

"Spread for me," she gently commanded. Leah obeyed eagerly, making room for her lover between her thighs.

Out of the corner of her eye, Leah saw Daryl opening a drawer near the sink and pulling out a silicone, rabbit toy. "Why is that in the kitchen?" Leah asked.

"In case I needed it," Daryl replied ambiguously.

"Oh, so fucking me on this counter was a plan of yours?" Leah ribbed.

"More like a fantasy," Daryl smirked, teasing Leah's slick entrance with the toy. "Do you want this?"

"I need it," Leah begged. Daryl set the toy on the counter and sprayed another swirl of whipped cream on Leah's thighs, licking them up greedily.

Leah arched her back against the cold counter as Daryl's mouth got closer and closer to her slit. She was on fire with desire for her lover.

Daryl brought the nozzle of the can to Leah's hood, looking up at her for approval. Leah nodded eagerly.

The rush of cold from her clit to her opening was a sensation Leah never knew she wanted to feel, the whipped cream burning against her swollen pussy.

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Daryl got down on her knees, lapping at Leah's entrance before working her way toward the cream. Leah wondered what the two tasted like together. The moan that came from deep inside Daryl told her it must have been incredible.

"Leah, you taste so good," Daryl mumbled into her, a mixture of the topping and Leah visible on her cheeks. She brought her tongue back down to Leah's entrance to get another taste of her pleasure before going back to suck her clit clean.

Grinding along Daryl's tongue, Leah screamed with pleasure.

Daryl brought the toy from the counter to her own center, rubbing the toy between her wet lips and sliding it inside herself.

"Fuck," Daryl moaned as the toy hit her G-spot.

Leah whimpered at the sight of Daryl fucking herself, the taste of her pussy on Daryl's mouth.

Daryl returned to her place between Leah's thighs, all of the whipped cream cleaned up from her hood. She licked firmly, occasionally sucking Leah's clit into her mouth as she rode the toy.

"Oh!" Leah cried as Daryl moaned into her pussy.

Leah could tell Daryl was nearing her peak as her hand tightened around Leah's hips. The thought of sharing an orgasm with Daryl brought Leah even closer to her own climax. She grinded along Daryl's strong tongue as it explored all of her folds.

“I want you to come with me,” Daryl whimpered, trying to slow herself down so Leah could catch up.

Leah nodded and let her head hang back, exposing her neck. Daryl’s hand moved from Leah’s hip up to rest at her neck.

“Fuck,” Leah said as she moved faster against Daryl’s mouth.

They moved in sync, their moans grew louder as their peaks grew closer. Finally Leah gave a loud shout as she felt Daryl’s tongue slip inside her entrance, thrusting into her. Her head fell back and slammed into the overhead cabinets, the pain pushing her to her orgasm.

Daryl moaned as she entered Leah with her tongue. She pushed the toy deep inside herself and rode along it as she tasted Leah.

Their screams melded as they came together, bodies rubbing against each other desperately. They gripped at one another's skin, each seizing up as they released their pleasure.

“Oh fuck,” Daryl whimpered as she pulled her face away from Leah’s center.

Leah’s body released as she exhaled, “Babe. Fuck.” Daryl laughed as she met Leah’s lips for a kiss, the immaculate taste of Leah and the whip cream still lingering on her breath.

After a blissful moment, Daryl pulled away and started to clean up their mess, putting away the gingerbread supplies as Leah pulled on her clothes.

Once they were both dressed and had recovered from the excitement, Daryl turned to Leah, “I forgot to mention that I want to come to Christmas in Sugarties.”

Leah grinned, “Really?”

Daryl nodded, “Yeah. If it’s important to you, I’ll be there.”

Leah’s smile faltered as she considered Daryl’s words. “But that’s not the whole reason, right?”

Her face twisting with confusion, Daryl asked, “What do you mean?”

Leah took a deep breath, “I don’t want you to come to Christmas just because you think it’s what I want.”

“But that is what you want. You asked me to show up,” Daryl argued, confused why giving Leah what she wanted wasn’t enough.

Leah walked back to the couch and scoffed, “It’s not just about showing up, it’s about you wanting to be a part of the family. But you clearly don’t. You’re only there because you feel obligated to.”

Confused, Daryl held up her hands, “Leah, I don’t understand what I did wrong.”

Leah walked back to the coffee table and tried to find a way to explain that Daryl might understand.

“It’s shitty to feel like I’m constantly forcing you to do things for me without any desire on your end to be there. If I hadn’t asked you to come to Christmas, would you have wanted to come?”

Daryl rolled her eyes, “Like you want to do everything that I ask you to do?”

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“Don’t roll your eyes at me, I’m being serious.”

Daryl moved out from the kitchen and toward the living room as she spoke, “This isn’t about Christmas.”

“Then why don’t you tell me what this is about?” Leah snapped.

Daryl shook her head as her voice rose, “This is about you not feeling like anything I do is enough, no matter how hard I try or how often I show up for you.”

Leah raised her voice and argued back, “That’s not true...”

There was a loud bang on the front door, cutting Leah off. The couple listened in silence for a moment as they waited for the visitor to go away.

But another loud knock came from the front door, forcing Daryl to storm over to the entrance of her home.

She swung open the front door and barked, “What?!”

But as soon as the door opened, a loud cacophony of singing drowned her out, the tune of Silent Night filling the otherwise silent home.

Leah appeared behind Daryl to watch the carolers sing, wondering how long it would be before Daryl slammed the door in their faces. To Leah’s surprise, Daryl lasted more than a full minute as the carolers continued their lackluster rendition.

As they sang, Leah could see the tension growing in Daryl's back as she tried not to take out her anger on these random townspeople who were just trying to spread some Christmas cheer.

Leah bit her lip and took the break from the argument to figure out what had gone wrong so quickly. Just a few minutes before Daryl was licking whipped cream off her body. But now, Leah could hardly look at her girlfriend.

They had bickered from the day they met, never quite on the same page. But something about this was different. After a minute the carolers finished their song and Daryl and Leah clapped.

“Thanks for stopping by,” Daryl said through gritted teeth.

Leah called from behind, “Great job all.”

Daryl tried to wait until they were down the driveway to close the door behind them, careful not to slam it. She already had a reputation for being a grumpy old bitch, she wasn't trying to have Scrooge added to the list.

Once the door was shut, Daryl walked back to the kitchen where Leah stood with her arms crossed. As Daryl and Leah looked at each other, neither of them knew what to say.

Daryl opened her mouth to break the silence, but Leah beat her to it, “If you don't wanna be there for Christmas, that's fine. But I don't want you to feel forced either, so just let me know and I'll deal with it,” Leah said, trying to resolve the fight.

Daryl shook her head, “Can't we just talk about it?”

Leah looked to the floor, staring at her feet on the polished wood and shook her head,



“Not right now, I think it’s better if we both cool off.”

Leah bridged the space between herself and her girlfriend on her way to the door, considering how she wanted to leave the interaction. She settled on a soft kiss on the cheek and a whispered, “I love you.”

Daryl muttered, “I love you too,” as Leah walked out the door.

In the car, she tried to stop tears from building in her eyes. Daryl skipping out on Christmas because she didn’t want to be there would be hard, but the thought of Daryl missing Christmas because of a fight broke Leah’s heart.

13

Jamie

Jamie and Malacktrekked their way through Bear Creek Park, passing the sledding hill where dozens of children zoomed down the steep slope. Watching kids play in the snow always made Jamie smile, bringing back memories of her own childhood visits to the hill.

But she and Malack weren’t headed for the slope today; they were looking for the hot chocolate pop-up truck that was stationed in Bear Creek Park every winter. Twin Cones, Malack’s favorite ice cream store, ran the truck, which undisputedly served the best hot chocolate in all of New Winford. As such, it had become tradition for Jamie and her best high school friend to grab hot chocolate in the park once a year.

So when Jamie had texted Malack about the fight she’d had with her fiancée, Malack said she would be happy to talk it over for the low, low price of a local hot chocolate.

Clearly, it was a great value.

“I always hated sledding,” Malack said as she watched the kids play cheerfully.

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Jamie laughed, even though letting herself joke around felt kind of wrong. “Why?” She asked.

Malack shook her head, “You have to wear all the layers to be warm, but going up and down the hill over and over gets you all sweaty. It doesn’t make sense, and it always ruined my cute snow-fit.”

Giggling, Jamie nudged Malack’s shoulder. Her deep adoration for Dani wasn’t the only reason she was glad to have moved home. Being back in New Winford had allowed her to reconnect with some of the most important people in her life, Malack being primary on that list.

“I always preferred the snacks we got after,” Malack added wistfully.

By the time they had made it to the stand, Jamie was sweating, just like little Malack on the snowy hill. But she wouldn’t let that get between her and a steaming cup of chocolate.

Jamie walked up to the counter to order, “Can I get two hot chocolates, one with whip cream, one without?” she asked, offering the woman in the truck a soft smile.

The woman was happy to oblige, a look of recognition crossing her face as she prepared the cups. Jamie tried to ignore the obvious gawking.

But when the woman returned to the counter with two steaming cups of hot cocoa, she asked, “You’re LAWSON, right?”

Jamie nodded as she passed the woman her card, “Sure am.”

“Well it’s great to meet you! How long are you in town?” she asked.

It was still a sore spot for Jamie after her fight with Dani. When Dani had finally come home the night before, it was so late that Jamie was already heading to bed. She couldn’t find the energy to get more information from Dani. Instead, she had opted for a terrible night's sleep on the couch, filled with lots of tossing and turning.

“Not sure yet. Maybe forever,” Jamie said glumly as she stuck her card back into her wallet.

Malack led Jamie away with a pat on the back, shooting the woman a dirty look over her shoulder for asking such an invasive question. Jamie always admired Malack’s ability to quiet the small-town gossips who were always looking for news.

Malack shuffled Jamie toward an empty table by a little campfire a few feet away.

“You really did have a rough night, huh?” Malack said, trying to lighten the mood. Jamie nodded.

They settled into their seats, and after a moment, Malack said, “All right, what happened?”

It was still strange for Jamie to be able to talk openly about her life. When she was in the city, she couldn’t even trust her “closest” friends to keep her secrets. Everyone was always looking to sell a story for some extra cash. But Jamie and Malack still held secrets for each from two decades prior, with no intention to ever spill.

Jamie shrugged, “I don’t even know how it all started. And I just feel like she’s being selfish. I’m not even going to be home in a few months, and she can’t seem to find

any time for me while I'm here."

Malack sighed and looked into her friend's eyes, "What did she say when you raised your concerns?"

Jamie took a deep breath, "She said she didn't want to wait around for me to leave her."

Malack's eyes widened at the implication, "Ouch."

Jamie nodded, "Yeah." But when she thought about it, she still didn't understand what it meant. What would avoiding Jamie now do for Dani?

"I just don't understand why she thinks rushing the wedding would stop me from leaving if that's really what I wanted to do?" Jamie asked, looking to Malack for guidance.

Malack nodded and thought about the question before answering, "Maybe it's just like a way to make you commit right before you leave. Maybe it's more about her than you? To be fair, could you name a celebrity that hasn't cheated on a partner?"

Jamie thought about it for a moment. Of course, Malack was right. Long distance could be hard, and when you mixed it with stardom, few celebrities were able to keep it in their pants for a partner at home.

But Jamie had been cheated on. She knew what it felt like to be betrayed like that. How could Dani think that Jamie would do that to anyone else, let alone her?

"Sure, but isn't that concerning? That she would want to lock me down before I proved my loyalty to her?" Jamie asked.

Malack laughed and shook her head, “No, we just live in a marriage-obsessed society that deludes us into thinking that a ring is all it takes to keep someone around.” She leaned in and slapped Jamie’s knee, “You’re a hot, megastar with women falling at your feet just to get you to glance in their direction. You can understand why your fiancée would be concerned, right?”

Letting a deep breath out of her lungs, Jamie shrugged, “I get the impulse. But I haven’t done anything to make her so worried.”

Malack winced, “I may have heard through the grapevine that you’ve been... uninvolved in wedding planning. And maybe having a rockstar partner who was about to depart on a global tour not be interested in planning their nuptials might raise an alarm?”

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Even though Dani's anxiety about her fidelity was a tough pill to swallow, Jamie knew that if Malack and her mother were raising the same concerns, then clearly she must have missed something. She felt awful that Dani had been feeling unsupported and alone in the wedding planning. Of course Jamie wanted to marry Dani, and she needed to make sure that was never a question in her fiancée's mind.

Jamie took in the cold air of the slope, the fresh winter air mixing with the smell of campfires and hot chocolate. She knew she had to show Dani that she would never leave, that whether they said "I do" or not, Jamie wouldn't be going anywhere. And with a few days left before their wedding, Jamie didn't have much time to fix it.

14

Zoey

"So, all your tests came back in the normal range," Dr. Morales began, "It seems like just a normal panic attack."

Robin let out a huge sigh, knowing that Zoey and their baby were okay.

Zoey took a deep breath as the doctor continued, "But you have to be more careful. A lot can go wrong at this stage and at your age, so I'm going to order a month of bedrest while you recover."

Zoey opened her mouth to contest it, but before she could, Robin nodded, "I think that sounds awesome."

Dr. Morales turned back to Zoey and raised an eyebrow, “Miss Greenwood?”

Zoey caved and groaned, “If you insist.”

“Oh, I do,” Dr. Morales replied, “Besides, you might find that you actually enjoy taking time for yourself if you’d ever try it.”

“That is highly unlikely,” Robin joked. Zoey could tell her partner was just happy to have some backup. But underneath the relief, Zoey could still see Robin’s concern.

After a few follow-up questions, Dr. Morales left the room, sending the duo on their way. While Zoey checked out of the hospital, Robin called Dorothy to let her know everything was alright and they were being discharged. As they walked through the hospital, Zoey noticed the garlands strung around the sterile hallways. She was relieved she wouldn’t be spending the holidays here.

She shook the thought as they walked through the automatic doors and made their way to Robin’s truck. Robin ran ahead to open the passenger door for Zoey

Zoey quipped, “She said bedrest, not fragile.”

Robin rolled her eyes as she looped around to the driver’s side, grumbling, “No one can be chivalrous anymore?”

By the time Robin popped into her seat, Zoey had already settled in. Robin turned on the truck, but before she began to pull out of the lot, she took a deep breath and tried to steady herself to drive.

Of course it was all positive news. But Zoey knew she had pushed her limits; she hadn’t had a panic attack since her first year of university.



This was a far closer call than either of them had been prepared for.

Zoey could barely look at Robin as the guilt set in. She couldn't believe she had made Robin so worried.

"I'm sorry," Zoey murmured.

Robin nodded, only able to manage a whisper. "It's okay."

Zoey shook her head, "No, it's not."

Robin shrugged, "I don't mean to say I told you so..."

Zoey chuckled, "But you can."

Robin waved her off, "I don't understand why you wouldn't listen to me. You know I think you're strong and that you can handle a lot. I just hoped you would really hear me when I voiced my concern."

Zoey couldn't explain herself. She didn't know what part of herself wouldn't stop working like a horse. And it broke her heart to see Robin so worried about her.

"I don't know, I always felt fine. I really didn't think I was pushing myself too far," Zoey said. It wasn't until she hung up the phone on Bear Creek that she realized something was wrong.

Robin nodded, "I know, honey."

They sat in silence for a minute as the truck's heat kicked in, blowing warm air onto their cold faces.

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“What are you gonna do about the wedding?” Robin asked.

Zoey shrugged, “Well, most of it is already done.”

She thought about what was left: the bouquets were in process, the heaters were installed, the caterers and waitstaff had been booked. At this point, it was just following up with everyone and ensuring that everything ran smoothly day of. The call that had set all of this off was Dani requesting a last minute alteration to the dress, and Atlas had already confirmed that they could manage it, so that was handled. Considering how well-managed everything was, Zoey was surprised she’d had the panic attack in the first place.

Zoey looked at her partner and asked “Do you think you could help me with final touches?”

Robin couldn’t help but laugh – she’d been helping Zoey with her projects all the way back in middle school, so why would it be any different now?

She brought her hand to her forehead for a goofy salute, “Baby, it would be my honor.”

Zoey smiled and tried to remind herself that everything would be all right. Robin was reliable and professional. Letting Robin step up to finish the arrangements would be the best thing for the wedding and for their growing family.

As Robin pulled out of the lot, Zoey had an idea, a smile rising to the corners of her mouth.

“What’s that smile for?” Robin asked, unable to stop her own goofy grin from mimicking Zoey’s.

“I think I know how I want to tell my family.”

15

Daryl

The drive went faster than usual, probably because it was the first time Daryl had driven up in daylight in a month. By the time she was pulling off the highway onto Sugarties’ Main Street, it was barely past noon.

Daryl easily pulled her truck into the driveway on Elm Street. For once, she didn’t have to worry about being double parked with Leah or Johnny’s car.

Turning off the ignition and fetching a tote bag full of groceries from the backseat, she headed inside.

“John, it’s me,” Daryl hollered into the house as she closed the door behind her.

From the living room, John called back, “I’m in here!”

Daryl walked into the room, setting the grocery bag down in the doorway. “What are you doing hiding back here?”

“I go all sorts of places when no one’s home,” John muttered, turning back to his newspaper, “What brings you all the way up here all by your lonesome?”

Daryl stood in the doorway, shuffling her feet, “I’m trying to figure out how to make Christmas more special for Leah, and I think your attic might be the key.”

John raised an eyebrow, but wasn't one to ask for details around grand, romantic gestures. Instead, he got a move on, wheeling himself toward the stairs.

Daryl helped him transfer from his wheelchair to the power lift. The machine moved a lot faster than Daryl would've thought from the commercials on TV.

Once John reached the top of the steps, Daryl followed behind, carrying his wheelchair with her. She tried not to look strained by the lifting, but in all honesty, her age was starting to show.

"You really oughta move into a place with less stairs," Daryl teased.

Once he was back in his chair at the top of the steps, John joked, "I'd rather die on the stairs than give up this house." Daryl winced, unsure that he was really kidding.

Across the landing, Daryl found a small rope hanging from the ceiling and yanked it down, unfurling the ladder that nestled into the attic's entrance and releasing a thick cloud of dust with it. Daryl and John retreated slightly, coughing up a storm.

As the dust settled, John stared up at the ceiling, "You'll be on your own up there, kid."

Daryl slapped his shoulder, "Any idea where your Christmas stuff might be?"

John shook his head and laughed, "I can barely remember if I ate today."

Daryl took a deep breath and prepared herself to explore the untouched attic. If the dust storm hadn't been enough of an indication, she knew it must be a mess because Leah insisted on buying new lights for the house instead of digging through the labyrinth on the top floor.

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“If I’m not back in 15 minutes, tell Leah I love her,” Daryl joked.

John laughed a hearty laugh as he watched Daryl ascend the ladder and disappear into the attic.

Once she got her bearings in the attic, Daryl realized it wasn’t as terrible as she’d expected. Mostly it was just dusty and disused.

Her excavation started with the boxes stacked near the attic’s entrance. Based on photos, Leah and Johnny had pulled their childhood stockings from the box a few years prior, so the decorations couldn’t be buried too far back.

A frigid draft moved through the worn boards of the unfinished space, turning her hands and cheeks red. She tried to work quickly to stave off the chill.

“What are you looking for, anyway?” John bellowed from below, reluctantly giving in to his curiosity.

“The Santa suit. You said it was up here, right?”

As she pried the lid off another box and started digging, John called, “I have no idea why you’re bothering to find this crusty old suit. You could probably order one online for five dollars that wouldn’t smell like sweat and beer.”

Daryl shook her head, attempting to ignore the old grouch while she tried a new box. But this one had cookware inside.

“Why did you stop wearing it?” Daryl hollered down to John. For some reason, she found it easier to talk to him when they were yelling at each other through a thin layer of subflooring.

John groaned from below, “The kids stopped wanting to spend Christmas here after the divorce. They spent it with their mother until...” he trailed off.

Daryl knew that the kids not coming here for Christmas was more complicated than just “the divorce”. There were several factors that led to the decision – his attitude toward them, for instance. She also knew that the Christmases since Leah’s mother had passed had been lackluster, to say the least.

Daryl felt a pang of guilt for dragging her feet on the celebration. She felt like she had sucked all of the Christmas spirit out of Leah this year by being such a grump.

“Why didn’t you ever spend Christmas with them at their mom’s house?” Daryl asked. It was a question she never would’ve asked to his face or in front of his kids. But she hated how little he had tried to be around back then and hated how deeply it hurt Leah still. Something inside of her needed to know why a parent would do that.

John stumbled for words for a moment, surprised by Daryl’s boldness. He’d always been a straight shooter, often brutal in his honesty, but he wasn’t sure he knew how to answer something so vulnerable.

Eventually he said, “I couldn’t ever forgive their mother for kicking me out, and I couldn’t stand the thought of spending an entire day playing nice. Even for their sakes.”

Daryl paused her rummaging. It was the most honest about his choices Daryl had ever heard him be. And from what Leah had told her, maybe the most honest he had ever been with anyone.

John was quick to qualify his statement, “I always thought I would be a gentler parent than mine had been, but something always stopped me.”

Daryl cracked open a new box and waited for John to finish his thought, guessing she’d get more out of him by listening to him ramble rather than trying to force information out of him.

“It’s one of the biggest regrets of my life, not being there for them. And I still have a hard time giving that to both of my children. But all I ever really wanted was for them to learn from my mistakes. To end up with someone who treated them with the kind of gentleness that their mother always had, that I couldn’t give them.”

Daryl leaned her weight on the box in front of her. She knew she was close to the correct one, but she wanted to hear more of what John had to say.

He wasn’t shouting anymore. Maybe a part of him hoped Daryl wouldn’t hear his confessions. But he continued nonetheless, “I feel like Johnny got that in Tyler. I see them with their beautiful children and know that whatever I broke in Johnny has been fixed.”

Daryl certainly felt that was true. Johnny and Tyler were so tender with each other, even after years of marriage and parenthood. The more Daryl had learned about them as a couple, the more she admired how hard they worked to be together.

“And Leah...” John continued, “I always worried about her. I knew she never quite forgave me, not the way that Johnny had. And I knew that if she ever found that happiness, it would take her far longer. She’s hard, like her father.”

His voice strained, unable to find the words he wanted.

“But ever since you’ve been around, something about her has changed. You weren’t

at all what I was expecting, but I sit here every day and pray that you can be the thing she needs,” John finished.

Sensing he was done but unable to find the words to respond, Daryl peeled open the box in front of her. As she rifled through it, she considered what John had said.

Daryl knew she had a long way to go before she was exactly what Leah deserved, but she was willing to put in the work because she needed that soft, tender love too. She needed Leah Vargas more than anything in the world.

As her rough fingers brushed against scratchy red fleece, she knew that she’d found what she was looking for. She climbed back down the ladder with one hand and proudly presented her prize to John with the other. “Ta-dah.”



Dani

Juggling grocery bags and her backpack, Dani slammed her car door and walked toward her and Jamie's house. The pathway was well-lit by the Christmas lights that lined it and the festive LED strips laid carefully along the roof of the A-frame house.

It felt odd to spend Christmas Eve not only working but also angry with the woman she loved so deeply.

Dani sighed with relief as she saw the windows were mostly dark. She knew she'd have to talk to Jamie eventually, but she wasn't ready just yet, and some time to herself might help her re-center.

She walked up the front steps slowly, fumbling the bags around until she had a hand free to unlock the door. But when she put the key in, the door was already unlocked.

Weird... she thought.

Pushing open the unusually tall door, Dani poked her head inside and looked around the entryway.

It smelled incredible, like freshly baked cookies and Christmas trees. Dani walked in and peered back toward the living room, lit only by the glow of their Christmas tree.

"Hello?" Dani called out, swallowing a lump in her throat.

She was met with silence, so she let her shoulders drop. Maybe she was just tired.

Before she could get much farther, Diesel ran up to greet her, tail wagging.

“Hi buddy,” Dani whispered, setting down the bags and kneeling to pet him. He spun around in circles, giving her access to every angle, before bolting toward the living room. The faint sound of Christmas music began to drift into the foyer.

Dani tilted her head as the dog retreated. Where was he trying to lead her?

“Jay, are you home?” she called out again.

A face appeared around the corner of the living room doorway, making Dani jump. “Hi, Merry Christmas Eve,” Jamie said softly.

“Jesus. I thought you weren’t home.”

Jamie giggled, “Sorry, I didn’t hear you call the first time.”

She walked out of the living room and approached Dani who stiffened, unsure what the interaction would be. Dani cleared her throat and avoided Jamie’s eyes.

But as Jamie got closer, she leaned down to intercept Dani’s gaze, “I thought you’d smell the Christmas spirits.”

It felt silly how easy it was for Jamie to make Dani blush. She still felt like the most beautiful woman in the world when Jamie looked at her.

Jamie took a deep breath as she stood in front of Dani and said, “Would you want to join me in the living room?”

Dani thought about it, afraid that they might fight again, “What if...”

“We won’t. I have something for you,” Jamie said as she lightly rubbed Dani’s arms.

Nodding, Dani let Jamie’s hand intertwine with hers and lead her to their cozy, sunken living room. It was an original feature of the house that Jamie had insisted they restore.

The room was dimly lit by the Christmas tree and dozens of candles. On the live-edge coffee table were a charcuterie board and two glasses of eggnog with a sprinkling of nutmeg across the top.

Dani shook her head, “Jamie Lawson, how many people did you have to hire to make this happen?”

Jamie lightly punched Dani’s arm, “It was all me, you Grinch.”

She led Dani toward the coffee table where a plush blanket and dozens of pillows were laid out on the floor in front of the stone fireplace.

Jamie began to sit and held her hands out to help Dani lower herself. She passed her fiancée a glass of the eggnog and held up her own, “Cheers to our Christmas wedding and many more busy, crazy years together.”

Blushing, Dani clinked her glass with Jamie’s and said, “Cheers.”

“So,” Jamie began as she set her glass down, “I owe you an apology. I haven’t been doing my part to make you feel secure in our relationship. I’m sorry for not making you feel like I was fully invested in our relationship and our wedding.”

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Dani looked away, trying not to blush too hard or forgive Jamie too easily. But a gentle finger on her chin lifted her gaze to meet Jamie's eyes, "I have never felt hesitant about marrying you. Not for a single second. All I want is to be your wife and to wear that ring on my finger every day."

Past the point of hiding her smile, Dani felt her heart racing as she received Jamie's full attention.

"I mostly felt terrible that you were so busy and stressed that you wouldn't get to enjoy the planning. Because I want this day to be everything we've ever imagined it to be. And I certainly do not want you to feel like you have to marry me in order to lock me down," Jamie said with a smile.

Hearing it out loud, Dani knew she was right. Jamie adored her and had never given her any reason to doubt that.

"I know it's the night before Christmas and there's only so much time before the wedding, but I just want you to know that I'm so goddamn excited to marry you. And I'm going to work harder to show up for you," Jamie said, holding both of Dani's hands in hers.

Dani leaned forward and wrapped her arms around Jamie, "I'm sorry, too. I don't want you to think I'm just marrying you to tie you down. I have to find a way to trust that what we've built is strong and that you'll always come home to me."

Jamie took in Dani's scent as they embraced, closing her eyes as the familiar comfort washed over her.

Pulling back, Dani's eyes flicked around Jamie's face... from her eyes, to her cheeks, to her charming smile. God, she's beautiful.

"We should get going to Clarissa's soon, right?" Dani asked, checking her watch.

Laughing, Jamie took Dani's wrist in her palm and undid the watch. She set it off to the side, a previous year's birthday present that had indulged Dani's obsession with overbooking.

"She can wait, she probably doesn't want to eat until nine anyway," Jamie whispered. She leaned into her fiancée and asked, "Dani Crawford, can I kiss you?"

Blushing, Dani looked down at Jamie's soft lips and nodded. All she wanted was to be absorbed in Jamie, to feel her all around.

Jamie placed her lips on Dani's, gently pulling her in for more as Dani's tongue poked through their liplock to tease Jamie.

"I love you," Jamie murmured between kisses.

Dani moaned, Jamie's rough voice instantly turning her on, "I love you too."

Jamie crawled over to Dani, gently backing her into the couch, "I have one more surprise for you."

"Oh really?" Dani questioned with no clue what her wild woman had in store.

Standing up, Jamie nodded and disappeared into the next room. She reappeared a second later to place a mid-century modern dining chair at the center of the room, facing the doorway. But before Dani could ask, she quickly disappeared again without a word.

Dani was left alone in the living room to sip on her spiked eggnog and listen to the gentle Christmas music and the crackle of the fire.

After a moment, the music switched to the familiar opening notes of Santa Baby. Dani shook her head with a laugh as she tried to figure out exactly what Jamie was up to.

“Santa baby,” Eartha Kitt’s voice sang out as Jamie appeared in the doorway wearing a Santa hat and a bright red, lacy lingerie set.

Dani’s mouth dropped open as she took in the sight, complete with a loose, black neck tie, black fishnets held up by a red garter belt, and five-inch, black Louboutons whose red sole matched the lingerie perfectly.

“Get in the chair,” Jamie ordered with a wink as she danced along to the song.

Dani did as she was told, her eyes exploring Jamie’s body excitedly as she danced. Once Dani was in her seat, Jamie turned away to show her plump ass jiggle in the red, bikini-cut panties.

Dani felt herself growing slick against the chair as Jamie turned her head and winked as the song played, “Been an awful good girl.”

Strutting back toward Dani, Jamie stopped just before the chair and looked down at her with a smirk before facing back toward the door, her ass just inches from Dani’s face. She placed her hands by her feet and began to slowly lower her torso to the ground, spreading her legs for Dani.

“Jamie...” Dani whimpered as she struggled to keep her hands to herself.

Jamie stood back up and straddled her fiancée smoothly, “Since I’ll be on tour soon, I thought I should give you a private show.”

Dani rolled her head back as she felt Jamie's warm center begin to grind along hers.

Placing a hand on Dani's neck, Jamie tilted her head down to her breasts, perfectly cupped by the balconette bra.

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“Plus, I know all about your little Regina George fantasy,” Jamie whispered in her ear.

Jamie did a small shimmy for Dani who could only lick her lips at the sight. Then, bringing her hand to her own neck, Jamie began to loosen the neck tie as Dani watched her hips rock.

When Dani started getting too excited, Jamie lifted herself up and strutted back toward the threshold. She grinded along the door frame as she stared into Dani’s gorgeous eyes.

“Think of all the fun I’ve missed, think of all the fellas I haven’t kissed,” the song continued as Jamie mouthed along.

She walked just a bit closer as she displayed her stunning back to Dani, reaching her hands around to unclasp her own bra. As the horns played, Jamie slowly peeled a strap off of each shoulder.

Scooping her exposed breasts with one hand, Jamie held out her bra with the other, giving Dani an incredible view of the shifting muscles in her back.

Jamie dropped it on the ground and bent over again. This time, Dani could see Jamie’s red panties were soaked with pleasure as she danced.

As Jamie turned around to reveal her gorgeous breasts, Dani felt like the wind had knocked out of her. “Goddamn,” she moaned as she squirmed in the chair, her own slick center making it hard to sit still.



Jamie began to squat, jiggling her ass as she went down. Dani watched her strong abs flexing as she moved. When she popped back up, Jamie sashayed over to Dani and threw her leg up onto the chair, her heel resting between Dani's legs.

She grabbed Dani's hand and held eye contact as she led it to her soaked panties, letting Dani's hand push the fabric aside.

"Oh fuck," Dani whimpered as her hands slipped into Jamie's slit through the crotchless panties. It never stopped surprising Dani when Jamie would wear them.

But before Dani could really enjoy Jamie's entrance, Jamie pushed her hand away and walked around the chair, letting her long, strong fingers graze Dani's soft skin.

Jamie laughed at Dani's desperation as she moaned, "Jamie, please."

When she stopped at Dani's side, Jamie bent over her lap as Santa Baby played, "Been an angel all year."

Dani brought her hand to Jamie's ass and smacked it, feeling the lace under her palm.

Jamie moaned as she arched her back against Dani's hand. It felt too good. She looked up into Dani's eyes, burning with desire.

The song played on as Jamie got on top of Dani again, still in her fishnets, heels, and garter belt.

Dani ran her hand down Jamie's torso and over her red panties, letting her hand slip between the fabric to meet Jamie's slick folds.

"Fuck," Jamie growled in Dani's ear as she grinded along her fiancée's hand, desperate to have Dani's fingers inside of her sooner rather than later.

With her free hand, Dani gripped Jamie's thigh and felt the fishnets in her fingers. She was tempted to rip them off, but then she wouldn't be able to see how gorgeous Jamie's thighs looked in them.

Instead, she massaged Jamie's clit which was already slick from her pleasure. Dani found her hood quickly and let her finger trace small circles around it, teasing Jamie with just less than what she really wanted.

Jamie rocked her hips, trying to slip Dani's fingers inside of her.

"Eager, aren't you?" Dani laughed.

Only able to nod, Jamie kept up her attempts. Her body was begging to feel Dani's fingers inside her.

Eventually, Dani relented, sliding her fingers into Jamie's warm pussy. The moan that escaped her lips was beyond her control, her head falling forward onto Jamie's chest at the feeling. Jamie whimpered under her touch.

As the song continued, Jamie reached her hand down and gripped Dani's wrist, pulling her fingers from inside of her and pressing Dani's ring finger to her lips.

"Santa baby, forgot to mention one little thing: a ring," played over the speaker as Jamie pulled Dani's soaked finger into her mouth and sucked the pleasure off of it.

"Oh dear god," Dani winced in pleasure, her own pussy flexed at the feeling of Jamie's lips around her fingers.

Jamie laughed as she brought Dani's hand back to her pussy and let her continue to thrust inside of her. As she rode Dani's hand, she lifted just slightly and unbuttoned Dani's pants, sliding her fingers below the waistband of the underwear beneath.

Dani watched breathlessly as Jamie bounced on her fingers, unsure how much more she could take. The feeling of Jamie's strong fingers against her clit was enough to get Dani screaming with pleasure, throwing her head back while Jamie started sucking on her neck. It was Jamie's smiling face looking down at her as she lifted her head again that really sent her hurtling toward the edge, though.

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“Fuck, Jamie, I need you to make me come,” Dani moaned.

Jamie brought her face closer to Dani’s, letting their lips meet. She kissed her deeply, tongues and lips mingling in a blissful heat. Just as Dani was about to pull away, though, Jamie gently sank her lip into Dani’s lower lip.

Dani’s fingers inside of her and her palm massaging Jamie’s clit had Jamie growing closer and closer to climax by the second as they grinded together.

“I’m close,” Jamie whimpered, tangling her free hand in Dani’s hair as she used her muscular thighs to keep bouncing on Dani’s fingers.

When she grew too weak to keep her own pace, Dani began thrusting into Jamie, using her hips to pump her fingers deeper inside Jamie.

“Baby, please,” Jamie cried as her head fell onto Dani.

She bit into Dani’s shoulder, unable to control her excitement. She whimpered an apology, but Dani just grabbed her thighs even harder. “Don’t apologize, Jay.”

That was enough to send Jamie over the edge, fully shuddering against Dani’s hand as her screams filled their house.

When her body slowed against Dani’s hand, Jamie lifted her head, sweat dripping down her forehead.

“Did you like that?” Dani whispered.

Nodding and biting her lip, Jamie met Dani's gaze. She looked hungry for more: an insatiable animal.

She got off of Dani's lap and knelt between her legs, placing a hand on each thigh and spreading them as she lowered herself to kneel on the pillows.

Once on her knees, Jamie began tugging at Dani's jeans. Dani lifted her hips to let her peel them off, but to her surprise, Jamie took her simple, black thong off along with the pants.

Tossing the pants and thong to the side, Jamie kissed up Dani's thighs. Watching Jamie move, her back flexing as she neared Dani's center, Dani couldn't help but grow more excited.

Dani's eyes wandered down toward Jamie's ass, the lingerie framing her ass beautifully. All Dani wanted to do was grab it.

But before she could reach for it, Jamie pressed her face between Dani's thighs, starting at her entrance and licking up toward Dani's clit.

"Oh," Dani cried out as she gripped the seat of her chair.

Jamie buried her tongue under Dani's folds, tasting her fiancée sweet pleasure with a deep moan.

Normally, Jamie loved to make Dani wait for her tongue inside her. But she couldn't stop herself from slipping into Dani's entrance, eager to taste all of her. Dani screamed out, "Jamie, fuck!" as she pulled Jamie's head closer to her center.

Laughing, Jamie kept plunging her tongue inside, eliciting a moan with each pulse.

“I need you to be my wife,” Dani whimpered as she rocked her hips.

Jamie smiled and brought her free hand to her own pussy, lightly massaging her sensitive clit. She pulled away from Dani’s pussy just long enough to say, “I can’t fucking wait to marry you, Dani.”

Dani screamed with pleasure at the words as Jamie’s tongue sunk back into her. She watched ecstatically as Jamie’s back arched with pleasure from fucking her.

Jamie brought her lips and tongue back up to Dani’s clit and began sucking lightly on her hardened pearl, teasing it with the tip of her tongue. Dani’s body responded immediately, clenching and writhing under her fiancée’s touch.

“I’m coming,” Dani screamed, her body tensing and shaking as Jamie’s tongue pushed against her clit.

“Fuck!” she exclaimed, opening her eyes to watch as Jamie made her come. She rocked her hips against Jamie’s face until her body gave out, finally releasing its tension.

Jamie sat up, kissing a trail up Dani’s sweaty stomach. She placed a hand on Dani’s soft sides and carefully guided her down to the blankets.

“Come here, honey,” she whispered as they laid down on the blankets in front of the fire.

Dani tried to steady her breathing as she turned to lay on her side. Jamie cuddled up behind her as they faced the fireplace, cradling Dani’s back.

Feeling Jamie’s warmth so close behind her, Dani reflexively rubbed her ass against Jamie. No matter how hard Jamie made her come, she couldn’t help herself from

wanting more.

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“How are you not exhausted?” Jamie smirked as she kissed along Dani’s neck.

“I’ll never have enough of you,” Dani confessed as she settled into the cuddle.

Jamie smiled and whispered, “Well, lucky for both of us, I’m all yours.”

17

Robin

Truck tires on gravel had become a familiar sound for Robin and Zoey. And as they pulled up to Dorothy and William’s house on Christmas morning, Robin realized just how comforting it was to hear the sound of the Greenwood’s driveway.

Robin parked the car and pulled the key from the ignition, taking a deep breath as she thought about the day ahead of them.

“Are you ready?” Robin asked.

Zoey nodded, a nervous smile taking over her face, “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

It was hard for Robin to imagine just how much their lives were about to change. Telling Zoey’s family meant that it was all real; they would be parents in just short nine months.

“Okay then,” Robin said as she opened the driver’s side door and walked to the bed of the truck where a massive, red sack full of boxes awaited her.



Zoey hopped down from the truck and shook her head at Robin, “You’re ridiculous.” She laughed as she watched Robin try to get a good grip on the comically large bag.

Robin threw the sack over her shoulder, “You’re just jealous because I’m their favorite.”

Sarah’s kids did love Robin; up until the last few years, they knew her better than their actual aunt.

Robin put her arm around Zoey as they walked toward the old farmhouse. But before they could knock on the door, Dorothy opened it with a loud exclamation “Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas, Mama!” Zoey and Robin replied in unison.

Dorothy shuffled them inside as Derek, Ava, and Leila careened through the house, screaming as they ran into the living room.

From inside, Zoey could hear her sister's tired voice call out, “You guys, please calm down. We haven’t even started presents yet.”

Robin and Zoey took off their coats and made their way to the living room, where Robin set down the massive sack of gifts next to the eight foot tall tree. William had been insistent on a real tree, saying that it was a crucial element of his grandkids’ childhood memories. He’d needed Robin’s help putting it up, but he made sure it happened.

Used to Robin’s antics, the kids gathered around and jumped on top of her as they screamed, “Santa’s here!”

Robin giggled as the kids climbed all over her, and she couldn’t stop herself from

throwing Zoey an excited look. She couldn't believe they would have a family of their own next Christmas and that all the kids would finally have a cousin.

As Zoey and Robin sat down, William waddled in from the kitchen with two cups of steaming hot coffee and set them down next to them.

"You're going to need at least one of these. And mom put some cinnamon in, so it's extra Christmas-y," William said as he leaned down to give them hugs.

Robin had no idea how to intercept Zoey's cup without ruining the reveal, but Zoey simply smiled up at her dad and said, "Thank you," before setting it on the end table next to her.

Robin tried to think of a way to drink both cups without anyone noticing. It would probably mean a day full of jitters when she was already anxious, but if that's what needed to happen to cover their tracks, she'd have to take one for the team.

With Dorothy and William in their seats, the kids began to open their gifts one at a time per their mothers instructions. Despite their obvious desperation to rip open all of the gifts at once, it was the one time of the year that they actually practiced self-restraint successfully.

The adults took their turns opening gifts from one another, too, along with the sweet, homemade gifts from the kids.

Robin had gotten a few of the kids' craft projects since she and Zoey had been dating, and she treasured each one, keeping them in a specially labeled box in the attic of Oak Lane.

When everyone was on their final round of gifts, Zoey raised her hand and said, "We actually have a present for each of you to open at the same time."

Zoey opened the tote bag she had brought in and left at her side, pulling out six small, identical boxes. Robin stood up and passed a box to each person, including the kids.

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Dorothy smiled at her daughter before even beginning to unwrap her gift. Robin knew that she had already had suspicions, especially after the day at Bear Creek.

But as they each sat there, waiting for someone to rip the paper first, Robin prompted, “Well, go on.”

Sarah was the first to undo her ribbon, saying, “I don’t have time to wait around.” She winked at Robin and Zoey as the rest of the family began to open their boxes.

Dorothy was the first to get through the tissue paper, and her mouth fell open as she processed what she was looking at: the first sonogram of her next grandchild.

Sarah was next, “You’re joking.”

The kids stared at theirs before looking to their mom, unsure what exactly the black-and-white image was.

It wasn’t until William had the sonogram in his hand that Zoey finally confessed, “We’re having a baby.”

The sentence was barely out of her mouth when Dorothy rushed across the living room and scooped both of them into a tight, warm hug. She hadn’t stopped squealing when Sarah and William joined in on the group hug.

“Congratulations,” Dorothy said, kissing Zoey’s cheek.

William grumbled, “I was starting to think you’d never have any.”

Sarah was giddy, “I can’t believe it’s finally happening.”

The kids joined in on the hug, their little arms weaving around Zoey and Robin’s legs.

“It’ll be a summer, baby,” Zoey said as she walked with her mother to the kitchen.

Dorothy grabbed the coffee cup from the end table and shook her head, “You better not have had any of this.”

Zoey laughed and said, “I’m not taking any risks.” She looked back at Robin with soft eyes as she spoke.

Robin joined Dorothy, Sarah, and Zoey in the kitchen while William watched the kids play with their new toys. Christmas music played through the house.

Sarah asked, “How long have you been trying? I had no idea.”

Shaking her head, Zoey said, “Not that long, egg retrieval took a few months, so it was a bit before we were ready to implant, but we just got kind of lucky from there. It took really fast.”

Sarah nodded with wide eyes. She knew that IVF was an option, but she and her ex-husband, Jason, hadn’t used it, so she was curious about the process

Dorothy looked at her daughter with kind and gentle eyes, “It’s not just you anymore, is it?”

Without Dorothy needing to say anything else, Robin could see the recognition on Zoey’s face. It was all Zoey needed to hear to know taking a step back was the right option for her family. And she was lucky to know that her work would always be

there when she was ready to go back.

Robin put an arm around Zoey, her other hand resting where their baby was growing. She looked into Zoey's warm eyes, still just as happy as ever to have finally found each other again and to get to do this every year for the rest of their lives.

18

Leah

Waking up next to Daryl on Christmas morning felt like a dream. It wasn't until Daryl rolled over and kissed her that she realized her girlfriend really was there.

They'd talked everything over a few days before, and Daryl had assured Leah that she really wanted to be there, not out of a sense of obligation or pity, but because she really loved being a part of Leah's family. It was all Leah needed to agree to have Daryl at the Vargas family Christmas.

Now, laying there with flurries of snow passing by the window behind the bed, everything felt right. All of her hesitation had evaporated in the bright light of Christmas morning.

Faster than Leah had expected, Daryl sat up in the bed and said, "Merry Christmas! Are you ready to go out there?"

Leah giggled as she wiped the sleep from her eyes and looked up at her girlfriend. She nodded, yawning as she stretched.

Daryl put her feet on the ground first and slipped on her comfiest pajamas, passing Leah hers from her bag. Leah slipped on the big t-shirt Daryl had passed her and looked around the room.

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She rarely ever slept at Johnny's place, but when she had, it was always in the downstairs guest room. Today, though, they were upstairs in the spare bedroom that rarely ever saw guests. Tyler had turned it into a small office for when he needed to be home with the girls.

Daryl and Johnny had gathered all of John's things and brought him over on Christmas Eve so that he had time to settle in before heading to bed.

Leah wasn't sure how long it had been since her father had slept somewhere other than his own house. She wondered if he had managed okay.

As Daryl got dressed, her dogs jumped off the bed and sat at the door, ready to spend the day with so many friendly faces.

As soon as Daryl's hand met the door knob, the dogs got excited, barely able to stand still. "Okay, then go ahead," Daryl said. When she flung the door open, the the pups sprinted out of the room. She turned to look at Leah with confusion, she had no idea why they were so excited.

Leah slipped on a pair of pajama pants and followed behind Daryl who was eagerly waiting at the bedroom door.

"Who knew you would be up first on Christmas morning?" Leah asked looping her arm and Daryl's.

Daryl shrugged, "I never said I didn't love Christmas morning, "

Once they were in the hallway, Leah snuck a peek toward Tyler and Johnny's room, whose door was wide open, meaning that Daryl and Leah were the last to wake up. Except for the girls who must have still been asleep since the house was strangely quiet.

Daryl and Leah made their way downstairs moving slower than usual as their bodies woke up. When they made it downstairs, John was already in his chair. And much to Leah's surprise, he was donning the discolored, old Santa suit that she hadn't seen in nearly two decades.

"Where the hell did you find that?" Leah said, trying to hide her excitement. Seeing him the suit was strange, it felt like she was ten again... and she felt like she might be enjoying the surprise.

John made his way down the hallway toward his grandchildren's bedrooms with Daryl's dogs in tow, proudly plodding behind him, as he called back to Leah, "Your woman sifted through the attic to find it."

In shock, Leah turned to Daryl and nudged her shoulder, "Did you really?"

Daryl offered a shrug, "I just thought it might be nice for you to see him in it again."

"Plus I kind of love making John do stupid shit," Daryl joked.

John knocked on Simone and Charlotte's doors, "Merry Christmas! Santa has a delivery!"

Leah turned to Johnny, "And you're okay with him ruining the illusion of Santa for your kids like he did to us?"

Johnny smiled, "At least you'll have a good memory with their grandpa, right?" Leah



couldn't be sure but he looked like he might have a tear in his eye.

Leah nodded as she watched the girls run out of their room and jump onto John's wheelchair. He started to wheel them down the hallway, finding more strength than he had in weeks in order to make their morning special. The dogs followed along with goofy grins as they all settled in the living room.

As the girls opened their stockings, Daryl and Leah headed to the kitchen to pour themselves some coffee and grab a pastry before the present unwrapping began.

Leah shook her head as she watched Daryl dig through the cabinets for two large mugs, "I can't believe you did that. When did you have the time?"

She really couldn't figure out when Daryl had made it all the way up to Sugarties, especially with the wedding just days away.

"I found some time after I finished the last of the planting," Daryl shrugged off the obvious surprise. She always could find time, she just had to really want to. And for Leah, it all felt worth it. "Did you like it?" Daryl asked, hiding her worry.

Leah smiled, "I really did. I never thought I'd see him in it again. Seeing him like that with Charlotte and Simone, just feels so..." She trailed off, unable to find the words to express watching her typically ungentle father be so soft for kids. Leah needed it more than she ever could have known.

Leave it to Daryl to make her Christmas just the right amount of special.

"Can I give you your other gift now?" Daryl asked as she poured the karaffe of coffee into a mug for Leah.

Leah looked around and asked, "Is it an R rated present?" She winked.

Daryl laughed and shook her head. “No, that’s for later,” She teased as she wiggled her eyebrows.

Excited to get her gift, Leah hopped up on the counter and swung her legs, “Should I close my eyes?”

Daryl walked closer and put her hands on the counter. She looked up at Leah and began, “I decided to hire someone for the shop.”

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Leah was about to explain that it didn't really feel like a gift for her, when Daryl raised a finger to shush her and continued, "And I'm going to spend two full days a week coming up here to help take care of John, and to minimize the amount of driving we have to do back-and-forth."

It was an immediate relief. Having more people around to help would make everyone's lives easier. And especially Daryl who John had taken such a liking to. Leah smiled, proud that Daryl had thought so much about what would make her life easier on a day-to-day basis.

"Thank you, darling. I know it's a lot of change and I appreciate you thinking about me and my family," Leah said as she leaned in to give Daryl a kiss.

Leah pulled away, "My gift isn't material either."

Surprised, Daryl gasped and asked, "Can I have it now?"

"I got a new apartment that has a yard and a dog run so the pups will have more space when they come to visit," Leah said.

Daryl hugged Leah and kissed her cheek. Having the dogs with her and Sugarties would make it feel more like home, and that was all Daryl ever wanted.

Daryl raised her hand, "Oh, and one more thing! My last gift to you is that I'm never agreeing to a joint work assignment ever again."

Leah laughed as she planted a kiss on Daryl's forehead. As much as she loved

working together, it complicated their relationship in a way that Leah didn't want to do forever, even if it was fun on occasion.

From the kitchen living room, John hollered, "Can you two saps get in here already?"

Daryl helped Leah hop off the counter and held her hand as they walked into the living room where their family was chatting loudly.

19

Jamie

Jamie stood in a large white tent with Clarissa as they watched their guests settle in their seats. Everyone looked comfortable under the heaters.

Even though there wasn't much left to plan by the time Jamie had apologized to Dani, the pair had a lot of fun putting on the finishing touches to the wedding.

And now, as Dani stood in her evergreen suit fitted with a Merino wool lining, everything felt just right.

Zoey zoomed into the room with Robin in tow, "How are you feeling?"

"What happened to laid back?" Robin asked as she delicately rubbed Zoey's back to make sure she was taking some deep breaths.

Jamie couldn't help but smile at the couple, feeling like she and Dani might be in the same spot a few years down the line. "I feel great. Everything looks exactly right, and Robin did a great job filling in for you these last couple days."

Dani and Jamie had been surprised to learn about Zoey's pregnancy so early. But

because of her involvement in their wedding and her need to step back, Dani and Jamie were among the first to know their new baby.

“See? I told you I knew what I was doing,” Robin jabbed as she smiled at Zoey.

Zoey blushed, “Well I’m glad everything is to your liking. I just checked on Dani, and she’s had a message for you.”

Jamie raised an eyebrow and gestured for Zoey to go on.

“She told me to tell you that she didn’t give up on you in Montana and she isn’t ever going to stop fighting for what you have,” Zoey said. She took Jamie’s hand and gave it a squeeze.

Robin shook her head, “If you had told me back in high school that Jamie Lawson and Dani Crawford would be getting married while Zoey Greenwood was pregnant with my baby... I probably would’ve called you a liar.”

Jamie smiled and opened her arms to hug the duo. They really did feel like a perfect pair, complementing each other every day and being sure to lift each other up. Jamie knew she could learn a lot from them. She hoped that as they all settled into their lives in New Winford they would be able to be more than just Zoey’s client.

“Alright, we’re going to wrangle the guests and make sure everything’s perfect. But we’ll be ready for your walk down the aisle in a few minutes,” Zoey said, careful to take a deep breath before leaving the room.

Jamie paced around the tent as they got closer to the ceremony. Of course she was still nervous, but not the way she had been a week ago. Instead it was replaced with a fear that she wouldn’t be able to say everything she wanted to without embarrassing herself and crying in front of all of their friends and family.

Clarissa stepped closer to her daughter and placed two firm hands on Jamie's shoulders, "What are you thinking sweetheart?"

It was hard to think of a way to sum up everything she felt in her heart. But Jamie settled on, "Just excited to make her my wife and spend the rest of my life with her."

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“That’s the only right answer,” Clarissa said. She brought her daughter in for a hug and continued in a whisper, “I am so proud of the person you are today and every day. And Dani... Well, I couldn’t pick someone more perfect for you myself.”

Jamie tapped her foot as tears welled in her eyes, “Mom, seriously don’t make me cry right now. I have a stupid amount of make up on.”

Clarissa patted her on the back, and headed toward the entrance of the tent where she stood at attention for whenever Jamie was ready.

An assistant popped her head into the tent and said, “Miss Lawson, they’re ready for you.”

Taking a deep breath and looking at her mom, Jamie said, “Let’s do it.”

They exited the tent and made their way down the gravel path, freshly shoveled after the Christmas day snow fall. Daryl had insisted they use salt and pepper stone because it would be softer on everyone’s feet, even though it was late December and everyone would be wearing thick shoes.

It brought a smile to Jamie’s face to think about how much her friends and the people of New Winford cared about her and Dani’s perfect wedding.

They rounded a bend in the path and the crowd stood to see Jamie and her mother. A soft piano ballad played over speakers as Jamie walk down the aisle and waved at the various guests. Including Daryl and Leah, who were sat in the middle of the crowd and whispering about their work on the floral arrangements.

Jamie could hear them as Daryl questioned, “Do you think I should’ve made the new kid finish the planting?”

Leah shook her head and whispered, “No, you have plenty of time to train her, but I do wish we had insisted on a bouquet for Jamie.”

Jamie shot them a look, shaking her head, as she slowly made her way down the aisle to the altar.

When they made it to the arch at the end of the aisle, Jamie hugged her mom, “Thank you for everything, mom. I love you more than you will ever understand.”

Clarissa held her daughter's arms, “Congratulations, my sweet.” She walked to her seat in the front row next to Malack, Arden, and Dani’s Aunt Dee.

Facing down the aisle, Jamie waited to see her bride. She tapped her foot anxiously as she waited, thinking about their love story as she stood at the altar.

Really, she had Clarissa and her manager to thank for their relationship since it was their idea for Jamie to return to New Winford to fix her reputation. But no one could’ve predicted that Jamie’s attraction to Dani would be as strong as it was.

Just as Jamie was thinking about the way Dani made her heart feel like it was on fire, an instrumental of Make You Feel My Love played. Jamie knew that it was Dani’s cue to walk into the venue.

Jamie cleared her throat and folded her hands together in front of her. Dani appeared from the same bend in the path that Jamie had just a few minutes before.

Jamie’s hand flew to her own mouth as the shock of Dani’s beauty and her gorgeous dress washed over her.



The dress clung to Dani's gorgeous curves, the silk shimmering in the December sun as she walked down the aisle. Jamie couldn't stop her eyes from wandering down Dani's figure, the sleek gown fitting her perfectly.

Jamie held back the tears in her eyes, knowing that once she started she wouldn't be able to stop.

Her bouquet was perfect, largely winter blooms with hints of bright color to pop against her cream colored dress.

And at her side was none other than Diesel, wearing a handsome bowtie and looking sharp.

Jamie laughed at the sight, not knowing that was Dani's plan. Last she had heard, Dani was walking solo since she had lost both of her parents.

When Dani approached the altar, Arden stood and helped her up, grabbing her bouquet and standing to the side with Diesel.

Malack took her place between the happy couple as the officiant, holding a large, padded leather folder in her arms.

No one knew their relationship quite like Malack, who had played intermediary for many years.

With a smile on her face, Malack began, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today to celebrate the union of Dani Crawford, and Jamie Lawson."

Jamie beamed at her bride and mouthed, "I'm never gonna stop fighting for you either."

Malack read a brief speech, “I remember the first time I heard Jamie talk about Dani. It was freshman year of high school and Dani wouldn’t ever say “excuse me” when she would push past Jamie in the hallway. And I knew it was love.”

The crowd laughed as Malack continued, “But seeing them together now, it all felt so cosmically destined because I’ve never seen a couple so in love or so willing to do right by each other every day.”

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“Dani, would you like to read your vows?” Malack asked.

Dani nodded and cleared her throat, “Jamie... I will admit it was rude of me to not say excuse me.” The crowd chuckled at the confession as Dani blushed and looked into Jamie’s eyes.

“But I think it’s because we had seen the nastiest parts of each other before we ever knew how to love each other, that made falling for a you that much easier. I know our lives will always require a certain amount of flexibility, but I’ve never met a more kind and loving partner. Or someone more willing to meet me in the middle. It’s an honor of a lifetime to stand before our friends and family and say I do.”

Jamie wiped the corner of her eye, trying to stop a tear from falling.

Malack turned to Jamie and said, “Would you like to read your vows?”

Jamie nodded and began, “I’ve been all over the world. I’ve met all types of people. Good, bad, and everything in between. And all that time no one has ever stood a chance next to you. Dani, I loved you from the moment I met you and I never stopped. I think it’s why I always wanted you to like me.”

Taking a moment to breath, Dani squeeze Jamie’s hand as she continued, “I came back here broken and lost. I had nothing left to give and no idea who I was. Until you made me care about a goddamn dog. And everyday I’m so grateful that you saw what I was missing.”

She continued, “I know it’s a lot to ask a partner: to trust someone whose job requires

them to be away so often. But I wouldn't make that ask of someone I thought didn't know how deeply I needed them in my life. Dani, I can't live without you and I wanna be yours forever. I want to wear that ring on stage every night and in bed with you every morning, to get coffee and pastries on a Sunday, in interviews in the shower. Everywhere. Today and every day, I'm thrilled to say I do."

Malack paused before presenting the rings. Jamie and Dani placed them on each other's fingers delicately. Once they were secure, Malack said, "It's my pleasure to introduce: Jamie and Dani Lawson"

Jamie grabbed Dani's hand and dipped her into a deep kiss as the crowd cheered. She couldn't wait for whatever lay ahead.

As they danced their way up the aisle, Jamie looked around at the beautiful life she built. And now she got to spend it with Dani for the rest of her life. Halfway down the aisle Jamie pulled Dani in for another kiss just as snow began to flurry down.