



Desiring My Brother's Best Friend (My Brother's Best Friend #2)

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Description: In the heat of summer, the attic isn't the only thing that needs a makeover. When Lena enlists the help of her brother's best friend, Owen, to transform her new space into a photography studio, sparks fly hotter than the paint drying on the walls. Owen has always been the guy who's off-limits, but now that Lena's all grown up, the chemistry between them is undeniable.

As they work side by side, flirtations become more tantalizing. But when a creepy neighbor threatens Lena's safety, Owen's protective instincts kick in, pushing them closer than ever. With her brother Jake's disapproval looming over them, can Owen resist the temptation to claim Lena as his own? Or will he risk it all for a chance at love?

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LENA

The old Victorian doesn't look like much from the outside, but part of being a photographer is seeing the potential in the mundane.

My business has taken off, and it was high time for me to move out of my apartment. I found the old Victorian quickly enough, and it was perfect—bigger and better for where I could both live and build my studio. The neighborhood is quiet and a bit isolated, and that's how I like it. The fewer distractions I have, the better I can focus on my work.

And there's no shortage of things to photograph here. The house is old and quirky, filled with interesting nooks and crannies, but the best part is the attic, which has enormous windows that overlook the neighborhood below. Perfect for capturing photos of the sunset.

I've been unpacking all week, using the time alone to brainstorm how exactly I want my studio to look. It's going to be more work than I expected, but luckily I know just the man to help.

Owen Mitchell. My brother Jake's best friend and the one man I've wanted to date since I was a teen.

Owen is a carpenter by trade, so this kind of project should be a piece of cake for him. He's also sweet, funny, and the most gorgeous man I've ever seen. At twenty-

five, single life has treated me well, but moving into this huge home has made me think about how much nicer it would be if I had someone to share my success with.

And then, even if we didn't get into anything serious, a hot hookup or two would be the perfect way to christen the new house.

I make the call, and Owen answers on the second ring. His deep voice sends shivers down my spine.

"Hey, Owen," I say. "How are you?"

"Lena Carter, it's been a minute. I can't complain," he replies. "What's going on? Haven't heard from you in a few months. Everything okay?"

"Yeah, I'm great! I actually have a proposition for you..."

He pauses. "What's that?"

"Well, as you know, I finally decided to move out of my apartment and buy a house."

"Ah, yeah. Your brother mentioned it in passing. Congrats."

"Thanks! And the best part is it's got a huge attic." I pause for dramatic effect. "Which would be the perfect spot for a photography studio..."

He chuckles, picking up on my train of thought.

"I'm sure you have lots of friends who can help you with that. Or maybe your brother? I've taught Jake a thing or two over the years."

I huff out a sigh. "Are you kidding me? Jake would have the whole place falling apart

in two seconds flat. No, Owen, I need someone who knows what they're doing."

"Flattery will get you everywhere," he teases. "So what's in it for me?"

"Well, how does a hefty paycheck sound? I'll pay you double your usual rate."

He whistles, clearly surprised. "You're doing that well for yourself?"

"Sure am."

I can almost hear Owen's smile over the phone. "All right. I'm in."

My stomach does a happy flip. This is really going to happen. Owen will work under me. And I don't mean that in a sexual way. Yet!

Okay, maybe a little in a sexual way. But also, I need his expertise. If anyone can turn this dusty, dilapidated attic into a functional studio space, it's him.

"When should I come by?" Owen asks.

"Uh..." I glance around at the piles of boxes lining the walls. "How about tomorrow morning? Say 9 AM?"

"I'll be there."

"Great! Thanks, Owen. I owe you one."

After we hang up, I flop back on my bed, sighing dreamily.

If I can convince Owen to take on the renovation project, I'll be able to turn this house into the perfect home...

And maybe, if I'm lucky, it'll bring me a little closer to having my dream man in my life, too.

* * *

Owen is ten minutes early.

I open the front door, and there he is, dressed in jeans and a plain white tee, his work boots covered in sawdust.

He looks good. Really good. He's about 6'3, with his dark hair cropped short and stubble on his face to match. Hazel-gray eyes and a body that shows how hard he works completes the package.

"Hey," he says.

"Hi." I give him a warm smile. "Come on in."

He steps inside, and I close the door behind him. My house is still a mess of half-unpacked boxes, but he doesn't seem to notice. His eyes are fixed on me, trailing down my body.

I'm wearing an old, faded T-shirt and leggings, so it's not like I've made too much effort to impress him. I want him to think this thing between us is happening organically, not something I've planned. Still, his gaze is intense—almost hungry—and I feel a blush creeping across my cheeks.

"It's good to see you," he says.

His voice is like melted caramel. Deep and rich and sweet. I want to bottle it up and pour it all over me.

"It's good to see you, too," I reply.

We stand there, staring at each other for a moment before I realize I'm being rude.

"Right! Uh... come on up to the attic. It's this way."

I lead him upstairs, and we walk into the attic. The room is enormous, with exposed beams and huge windows that let in an abundance of natural light. It's beautiful.

He steps forward, taking it all in. "Wow, this is amazing. You could easily set up your studio here."

"That's the plan," I say with a grin.

He moves around the room, inspecting the walls and ceiling, checking the structural integrity. I watch him from a distance, admiring the way his shirt stretches over his broad shoulders and his jeans hug his muscular thighs. He's gorgeous, but he also looks so at home here, like he belongs in a space like this.

After a moment, he turns back to me.

"I think I can make it work," he says, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "It'll take some time, and you'll probably need to replace some of the insulation..."

As he continues his assessment, I let my mind wander. What would it be like to have him work on me? To feel those strong, calloused hands against my skin? To hear his voice whispering in my ear?

My cheeks flush with heat. This is exactly why I've always had such a crush on him. He's gorgeous and sweet and funny, but he's also a damn good worker. I bet he'd be even better in the bedroom...

Owen snaps me out of my fantasy by clapping his hands together.

"All right," he says. "I'm going to head home and get started on some blueprints."

Oh. I wasn't aware this would be over so quickly, and I'm not ready for it to end. I've got to think on my feet. Thankfully, I have a wellspring of information about Owen after growing up with him, which makes him particularly vulnerable to my genius manipulations.

Or, to put it more simply, Owen Mitchell would go to the ends of the earth for food.

"Why don't you stay for lunch? I was about to order pizza." He turns, and I can see his interest is piqued, but I have to take it one step further if I want to hook him. No national chains are going to do it, but maybe a legendary local spot will. "Giordanos?"

"They still deliver all the way out here?"

Bingo.

"Yep, and I'm starving," I say, stretching my arms over my head to show off some skin. "I bet you are, too, after working hard all morning."

His eyes follow my movement, lingering on the sliver of stomach my shirt exposes. But he shakes his head as if to clear it. "Yeah, that sounds good. I'll just go downstairs and start sketching some plans while we wait."

"Great!" I give him an extra bright smile before turning away. "I'll let you know when it arrives."

Downstairs, I call in the order, then slip off my shoes and pad barefoot over to where

Owen sits at the kitchen island, drawing with pencil on a sketchpad. He looks up at me.

"Do you have any paper towels? I think I tracked sawdust on your floor."

"Oh, no worries. It's just gonna get dirty again anyway. No point in wasting a perfectly good paper towel on it."

He laughs. "If you say so. But if you change your mind, I can help."

I shake my head, my eyes sparkling. "I won't."

I go to the fridge and pour two glasses of lemonade, then slide one across the island. Owen takes a long sip before continuing his work. There's something about watching him draw, seeing how his mind works, that turns me on even more. He's focused and precise, putting all his attention into every little detail. It's sexy as hell.

We sit in companionable silence for a few minutes until the doorbell rings. I go to answer it and, a moment later, return with a large pizza, setting it down on the island.

"Don't burn yourself. I can feel the heat through the box," I warn.

Owen gives me a crooked grin. "I like it hot."

I can feel my cheeks heating up at his double entendre. He must notice because he chuckles and goes back to sketching. I open the box and pull out a slice of pepperoni, biting into it. The rich, savory flavor explodes in my mouth, and I can't help but moan softly. Owen glances up at me again.

"This pizza is so good," I say, scrambling to explain myself. "I'm starving."

He looks ... intrigued. "Me too."

I finish eating my slice and take another long sip of lemonade. Across the island, Owen stretches his arms over his head, flexing his muscles. I watch, transfixed, as the tendons in his forearms and biceps stand out. He's so gorgeous, it's almost unfair.

"Tell me about your decision to buy this place. I always imagined you somewhere brand new and spotless."

I chuckle. "Well, I wanted to live outside the city. I like the quiet." I pause, thinking. "But more than that, I've always wanted to restore something." I look around at the house. "It's full of potential. All this beautiful woodwork, the ornate details. It's like a blank canvas."

Owen nods, looking around the room thoughtfully. "You have a real eye for it. This place is amazing."

"Thanks," I say, giving him a warm smile.

He turns back to me, his expression growing serious. "So why'd you call me? You know Jake would have jumped at the chance to help you with this."

"Because Jake is..." I search for the right word. "Inexperienced. And clumsy. And I wanted it done right." I look at him meaningfully. "You're the best."

Owen's face flushes, and I can't help but grin. It's adorable.

"Well, I appreciate the vote of confidence. But let's see if we can get the room cleared out before we make any grandiose plans for renovations," he replies.

"Fair enough. Can I get you a slice?"

Owen nods, and I pull out another piece, sliding the box over to him.

"How are you holding up?" he asks, taking a bite of the pizza. "Settling in, okay?"

I shrug. "As well as can be expected. I'm slowly getting everything off the moving truck and inside the house. It'd be a lot easier if I had a big, strong man around all the time to help me."

Owen coughs, briefly choking on the lemonade he's taking before laughing. "Guess you're going to need to call your brother, like it or not."

Is this guy really not picking up on a single hint I'm putting down? Or is he being purposefully obtuse? I know there's a chance that Owen simply isn't into me, but I would have sworn I caught him looking at me here and there over the years. He's always been sweet and polite, but sweet and polite isn't what I'm looking for from him now.

"Maybe," I hedge, disappointed that my flirtatiousness isn't getting me anywhere.

After lunch, Owen goes upstairs one more time to make a list of what he thinks he'll need and snap a few pictures, but before I can come up with a reason to get him to hang around, he heads out to his work truck and leaves. As I watch it disappear down the road, I'm struck by a wave of annoyance. What did I do wrong? Is he really that concerned about pissing off my brother that he won't make a move even when I'm being pretty damn clear about what I want?

Or, maybe Owen is simply a man, and the signals I'm putting out just aren't clear enough. Tomorrow, I'll have to kick it into high gear. That thought makes me feel a little better. It gives me a plan and hope for tomorrow.

With a little more pep in my step, I decide to unload a few more boxes from the

moving truck. I've been taking my time unpacking before moving more inside so I don't get too frazzled. I borrowed the truck from a friend of a friend in exchange for a photoshoot so I'm not in any rush, and it's been a great deal for me so far.

As I go to the back of the truck, my eyes catch on something. A man is walking across the street towards my house. His shoulders are hunched, and his head is down. I can't make out his face, but I don't recognize him as any of the few neighbors I've met so far.

"Hello?" I call.

The man stops and looks up. When he sees me, a huge smile splits his face. "Good afternoon!"

I watch as he jogs across the street and stops at my gate. He's middle-aged, with salt-and-pepper hair and a round belly. His cheeks are pink and ruddy, like he's been outside too long in the summer sun.

I open the gate and step through. "Hi. Can I help you with something?"

"Actually, I was wondering if I could help you," the man says. "I saw you were moving in, and I thought you might need some assistance."

Hm. I could use the help, but as a sensible woman, I know better than to accept help from male strangers, especially when we'd be all alone in my house. "Oh, uh. Thank you, but I'm okay for now."

He doesn't move. "Are you sure? Because I have some free time. I could lend a hand or a tool." His grin widens.

Okay, now this guy is starting to creep me out. I glance down the street, praying to

see Owen's truck, but it's nowhere in sight.

"I think I'm okay." I close the gate. "But maybe next time, Mr...?"

"Grayson. But you can call me Thomas." He steps closer, and I take an instinctive step back. "If you ever need anything at all, you let me know. I'm just at the blue house three doors down. I'd be happy to help."

"Will do," I say, trying to keep my voice steady.

As I turn and walk toward the front porch, my skin crawls from Thomas' intense gaze. It's like he can see right through me. I can feel his eyes on me even after I'm inside, and I shiver involuntarily.

That was weird. And a little unsettling. But I'm sure he meant well. After all, I'm new here. Maybe he was just trying to be friendly.

I shake off the encounter and get back to unpacking. I need to cultivate the perfect plan to seduce Owen tomorrow, and no creepy neighbor is going to distract me from that.

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OWEN

I 'm not one to pass up a paycheck, and most carpenters would be thrilled to get paid extra to work with someone they've known for over a decade. It should be even better, considering Lena Carter and I have always gotten along, and she's pretty incredible to look at, too.

The problem is, she's too attractive. Too alluring. And she's my best friend's little sister, which means she's totally off-limits.

It was easy to tell her yes and believe that I was in control of myself over the phone, but as soon as I got to her house and saw her in person, I immediately regretted my decision.

The thing is, this is Lena's first real home. She lived with her parents and then in an apartment with a roommate. She's never really been on her own before. Even though I know she can handle it, I'm concerned about her safety, and I worry she'll get taken advantage of and overcharged if I don't do the work for her. That's the only reason I'm spending so much time here.

Right?

Yeah. That's why I've spent the last few days at her place instead of working on other jobs. There's no other reason for it. It doesn't matter that she looks like an angel or that she smells like strawberries and cream. It definitely doesn't matter that she's

grown into a bombshell—dark brown hair curling over her shoulders, blue eyes with thick, black lashes, the softest-looking lips I've ever seen, and curves that could kill a man.

None of those things matter to me. Nope. Not at all.

"You know, if you worked this fast on all of your jobs, you'd be rich," Lena teases from the step ladder she's on, touching up trim paint.

"You know, if you kept your mind on painting and not on teasing me, the room would be done by now," I shoot back, grinning.

She grins back. "Oh, I'm teasing you, am I?"

"Something like that." I step away from my blueprints, tucking my pencil behind my ear before frowning at her. "I wish you'd wait until I can hold the ladder before you climb up there."

Lena rolls her eyes. "I'm fine, Owen. I can manage." She goes back to painting, and I admire her trim figure as she sways her hips to some unheard tune.

We've been working hard all morning, and I'm already starting to sweat. I wipe my forehead with the back of my hand and sigh. Things are going pretty well, but I really think I'd work faster if Lena weren't here as a distraction.

Just as I start to consider sending her on a pointless errand to the hardware store so I can stop thinking with my dick and start thinking with my brain again, the ladder she's on starts to wobble.

"Lena!" I shout.

She looks down, her eyes widening, but it's too late. With a sharp cry, she loses her footing and comes crashing towards me.

I dart forward and catch her in my arms, bracing my legs to keep us from toppling over.

"Are you okay?" I ask, breathless from the shock.

Lena's arms are around my neck, and our faces are inches apart. Her blue eyes are wide, and her full lips are parted slightly.

I can feel my heart pounding in my chest. All I have to do is lean in, close the gap between us, and press my lips to hers...

Lena's eyes dart down to my mouth. She licks her lips, and I swallow hard, my whole body tense with anticipation.

"You saved me."

"I did."

Then she kisses me, and it's all over. I can't resist her anymore.

Her lips are soft, her tongue exploring. She tastes like the lemonade she's been drinking, and she smells like heaven. I wrap my arms around her waist and pull her closer, our bodies pressed together. She moans into my mouth, and I feel my cock stir. I deepen the kiss, tangling my fingers in her hair. She responds eagerly, wrapping her arms around my neck. I could kiss her forever.

We should stop. It hasn't gone too far yet.

But I can't. I've wanted this for so long.

My hands roam up her back, tracing the curves of her body. She arches her back, pressing her breasts against me, and I inhale sharply. She's so fucking sexy. My hands move to cup her ass as she wiggles, grinding against my growing erection. Fuck.

I break the kiss, panting. "Lena, we can't?—"

"We can," she murmurs, pressing her lips to mine again. "I want you, Owen. Don't you want me?"

Her voice is so soft, so full of desire, that it takes every ounce of restraint I have not to take her right here on this floor. She reaches down and slides her hand over my cock, rubbing me through my jeans and making me nearly bite my tongue off with how hard I'm trying to keep control.

"Of course I do. I'd have to be dead not to."

"I want you," she says, her blue eyes gazing into mine. "I want you to fuck me."

That's all it takes. I'm done resisting. I'm done denying what I want, what I've always wanted.

I lean in and kiss her again, harder this time. She wraps her arms around my neck, pulling me closer, like she can't get enough of me. I pull her against me, lifting her up, then lay her down on the drop cloth beneath us.

Her body is soft and responsive under mine, and I want to feel and taste every inch of it. I break the kiss and move down, kissing her neck, her collarbone. I push up the hem of her shirt, exposing her stomach. She sighs in pleasure as I trail love bites along her skin.

Up or down? Do I want my mouth on her perfect tits or her delicious pussy first?

It's a tough decision. But if I'm going to go to hell for fucking my best friend's sister, I want all of her.

She's breathing like she's run a marathon, her hands coming to rest on my shoulders as I lick a pathway up her ribs, coaxing her to raise so I can undo her bra. She complies, lifting her arms and allowing me to strip her bare.

I take a moment to admire her. Fuck, she's gorgeous. Her creamy skin is flushed, her lips swollen from our kisses, and her pupils are dilated, making her normally sky-blue eyes look dark and sultry.

"What?" she asks, biting her lip. "You're staring."

"I'm committing this moment to memory," I reply honestly.

Her smile is shy but pleased. "Take your shirt off. I want to see you, too."

I don't have to be told twice. I've never been modest—it's hard to be when you've worked construction since you were sixteen—and I'm eager to feel her hands on me. I take my shirt off and toss it aside, and I watch as her gaze wanders over my bare chest. Her eyelids lower as her gaze lingers on my shoulders, my arms, and my stomach. When she looks up at me, her cheeks are flushed.

"See something you like?" I tease.

Lena doesn't answer. She reaches out and runs her fingers down my chest, tracing the lines of my muscles. I shiver as desire pulses through me. I cup her breasts in both hands, brushing my thumbs over her nipples. They stiffen under my touch, and Lena hums softly.

I lower my head and take one of her nipples into my mouth, licking and sucking. Her hands tangle in my hair, pulling me closer, urging me on. I move to her other breast, giving it the same attention.

I sit back, unbuckling my belt and unzipping my jeans. My cock springs free, hard and aching. Lena's eyes widen as she takes in the sight of me. She wraps her hand around my shaft, stroking me from root to tip.

My reaction seems to excite her, and she leans down, licking the bead of precome off the head of my cock. I groan, threading my fingers through her hair. She takes me into her mouth, inch by inch, until I'm fully sheathed in the wet heat of her. I grip her hair tighter, holding her still as I thrust my hips, fucking her mouth. She moans, the vibrations sending shivers of pleasure up my spine. I thrust again and again, lost in the feeling of her lips wrapped around my cock.

But I can't come like this. I have to have all of her because this is going to be the only time I allow myself to do something so insane.

I pull her away, and she looks up at me with a confused expression. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No, baby," I say, stroking her cheek. "You're perfect. But I need to be inside you."

Lena's eyes darken with desire, and she nods. "Yes, please."

I undo the button of her cutoff shorts, and she lifts her hips to let me slide them off. Her panties follow, and I take a moment to admire her naked body. She's so fucking beautiful, lying on the drop cloth in front of me, her skin flushed and her hair mussed. My cock is aching to be inside of her, but I want to savor this moment, this fantasy I've had hundreds of times.

I trail my fingers down her stomach, and she shivers. She spreads her legs, giving me a glimpse of her glistening, pink pussy, and I can't wait any longer.

I position myself over her, fisting my cock and lining up the head to her pussy. She bites her lip, her eyes wide with anticipation. I lean down and capture her mouth in a searing kiss as I thrust forward, just an inch or so at first, wanting to make sure I don't rush her.

But Lena isn't having it. She wraps her legs around my waist and pulls me closer, forcing me deeper inside of her. We both moan as I fill her up completely, our bodies fitting together perfectly.

"Oh my God," she moans, her nails digging into my back. "That feels amazing."

"You feel amazing," I groan, kissing her neck and jawline. "So fucking good."

Lena is hot and tight around me, and I can't believe we waited so long to do this. I start to move, slowly at first, then faster, as we both get lost in the pleasure of it all. My hands roam over her body, touching and caressing every inch of her soft skin, cupping her tits again and flicking her nipples with my thumbs. She arches her back, pressing herself more into my hands as her pussy takes me over and over.

We're both so turned on, so ready for each other, that it doesn't take long before we're both close to the edge.

I thrust harder and faster, driving us both toward climax. Lena cries out and pants beneath me, her fingers tangled in my hair. I kiss her hard as I feel her start to tighten around me.

"Owen," she gasps against my lips. "I'm going to come."

"Come for me, baby," I growl, gripping her hips and thrusting deeper. "Come all over my cock."

And that does it. She cries out as her orgasm hits, her body trembling as waves of pleasure roll through her. It's so hot, so intense, that I can't hold back any longer. With a final thrust, I bury myself inside her and come harder than I ever have in my life. I jerked off thinking about Lena Carter more times than I could count, but the real thing blows every one of those fantasies out of the water.

We collapse on the drop cloth, panting and sweaty, our limbs tangled together. I lean down to kiss her, soft and sweet this time.

"That was..."

"Incredible," she finishes.

"Yeah." I smile. "I should've given in a long time ago."

She laughs. "If only I'd known I could seduce you with a near-death experience."

"Please don't make it a habit," I say, nuzzling her neck. "I think my heart would give out."

"So..." she says hesitantly. "Where do we go from here?"

"Well," I say, stroking her hair. "I think I'm going straight to hell. Or my grave, if your brother ever finds out."

She groans, burying her face against my shoulder. "Please don't talk about Jake right now, Owen."

"Sorry," I laugh. "But hopefully, he won't find out. Now that we've gotten this out of our systems, things can go back to normal."

I try to sound bright and cheery when I say the words, but it hurts my heart to do so. I don't mean them. I want more from her than just this one spur-of-the-moment hookup, but it's foolish to think anything else could come of this.

Right?

Lena stiffens in my arms, and for a moment, I think she'll call me out on my bullshit, but then she rolls onto her back and sits up. She looks at me, gorgeously tousled from the sex. "Yeah. We should get back to work."

I stand, not meeting her eyes, as I pull my pants back on. I can feel the tension between us, and it's awkward and heavy, but there's nothing I can do about it. What's done is done, and now I have to move forward like the professional I am.

"Okay, so I think I'll start with the floor first," I say, trying to keep my tone light and casual. "Once we get that taken care of, we can tackle the walls."

Lena nods, not looking at me as she buttons her shorts. "Sounds good."

I start to gather my tools, feeling a little bit relieved that we seem to be falling back into our usual work routine. But as I'm setting up my saw, I hear her speak again.

"So ... are we going to talk about what happened?"

I pause, trying to think of a response that will satisfy her without things getting even more awkward between us. "I think we said everything that needed to be said."

Lena frowns, folding her arms over her chest. "That's it? You're just going to brush

me off like that?"

I sigh, running a hand through my hair. I don't want to hurt her feelings or make her feel rejected, but I also don't want to get into a discussion about our relationship. Or lack thereof.

"I'm not trying to brush you off, Lena. I just ... I don't know what to say. It was a mistake. We both got caught up in the moment, which shouldn't have happened. I'm sorry if I led you on or gave you the wrong impression, but I can't give you what you want. It would be wrong."

Lena shakes her head, clearly frustrated with my answer. "Owen, you can't just pretend this didn't happen. It did. And it was good. We were good together. Why can't we just see where this goes? I know you felt something too, or you wouldn't have?"

I cut her off, holding up a hand to stop her. "Just because we had sex doesn't mean I have feelings for you. I'm sorry if I led you on, but that's all it was. A physical attraction. That's all."

I hate lying to her, but it's better this way. It'll hurt less in the long run for both of us.

"I should go," I say, turning away from her. "I'll call you later about the next step in the renovation."

"Fine." She folds her arms across her chest, glaring at me. "You can leave."

I pick up my toolbox and start toward the door, trying to ignore the tension between us. This is how it has to be. It's for the best.

As I reach the door, Lena calls my name, and I pause, glancing back at her. Her expression is softer now, and she looks almost sad.

"Yeah?"

"I know you think you're doing the right thing, Owen, but you're wrong."

Her words sting, but I try to brush them off. "It's for the best, Lena. We both know that."

I wish I could believe my own words.

3

LENA

Well, I got what I wanted, and it all blew up in my face.

Hooking up with Owen was mind-bogglingly good, and even if he hadn't meant something to me already, I'd still probably be obsessed. But caring about Owen and now knowing how good of a lay he is has ruined me, and he's all I can think about.

Except for the ugly fact that he basically rejected me as soon as we both came. I should've known better. He said as much earlier that the flirting had been harmless, but I thought it was obvious there was something between us.

I've tried to convince myself over the last week that Owen's rejection doesn't hurt, and that I don't regret my impulsive behavior in the attic. That I don't think about him every minute of the day, wondering what would have happened if I hadn't said anything and let the moment pass.

But I do.

It's hard to stay focused on getting the studio ready, though at least it's a distraction from the gaping hole in my heart. It doesn't help that Owen shows up to work, but he barely speaks to me, treating me more like a client than an old friend. He definitely doesn't speak to me like someone who fucked me right there on the attic floor just last week.

It takes a few days, but eventually, I'm done wallowing in my self-despair, and I jump right back into getting under Owen's skin. He doesn't want me? Fine. But I'm going to make it hell on earth to resist me.

I wear shorter shorts, tighter tops, and lower-cut bras that peek through my shirts. I bend over as often as possible, showing off my ass and legs. I touch him whenever I can, brushing my fingers along his arm or hand when we're talking, even when it's not necessary. I know I'm driving him crazy, and I get a twisted sort of satisfaction out of it.

"What's your problem?" he asks one day, snapping at me after I've dropped my third power drill of the day. "You've never been this clumsy before."

I shrug. "Maybe I'm just distracted by how good you look with all your manly tools."

He huffs his eyes but doesn't take the bait. "Just be more careful, okay? I don't have time to waste fixing your mistakes."

His words are harsh, but he has a point. We're behind on the project because of my silly crush, and I need to get over it. "Fine. Sorry. I'll try to focus."

He grunts in response and gets back to work.

The rest of the afternoon is spent in relative silence, except for the occasional request for a tool or piece of equipment. Owen is focused on his work, and I do my best to keep my thoughts—and hands—to myself. But as the sun starts to set and we get ready to call it a day, something shifts between us. The tension from before is still there, but it feels different now, charged with something else. I might be mistaken, but I think he's getting to the end of his rope. The thought makes me grin.

As we pack up our tools, he catches my eye. "What?"

"Nothing," I say innocently. "I'm just looking forward to finishing the floor tomorrow."

His eyes narrow. "I bet you are."

I give him my best sultry smile. "What can I say? I like watching you work."

He lets out an exasperated sigh, running a hand through his hair. "You're killing me, Lena."

I take a step closer, unable to resist teasing him further. "You've been so distant lately, it's hard to believe we ever hooked up at all."

He shakes his head. "That's what I've been trying to tell you. It was a mistake. I never should have?—"

I cut him off, pressing my lips to his. He freezes in place before groaning and cupping my face in his big, rough hands, kissing me back. It's even better than I remember. He tastes like mint and smells like sawdust and his warm, amber cologne.

When we finally break apart, we're both breathing heavily. Owen rests his forehead against mine, his eyes closed. "We shouldn't be doing this, Lena."

"Why not?" I ask softly. "We're both adults. We both want this."

He sighs, opening his eyes and gazing into mine. "It's complicated. I don't?—"

I press my finger against his lips. "Shh. Can we just put a pin in it tonight? I'm not going to be able to take it if you reject me, and I think we both need some time to think it over."

He nods, letting out a sigh of relief. "Okay. Yeah, that sounds good."

I smile up at him. "Good." I stand on my tiptoes and give him a quick kiss on the lips before stepping away. "I'll see you tomorrow, Owen."

"Yeah," he says softly, watching me head for the door. "See you tomorrow."

I give him a little wave and then slip out of the attic. My heart pounds in my chest, and I feel almost dizzy with excitement. I'm not sure what tomorrow will bring, but I know one thing for sure—I'm not giving up on Owen Mitchell without a fight.

* * *

I leave Owen to pack up his tools while I go downstairs, desperate for a drink after that little confrontation. It didn't go as well as I'd have liked, but at least it's clear he still wants me, and he's willing to think this thing between us over.

I've just opened the fridge when there's a knock at the door, and with Owen occupying every one of my thoughts, I don't even take the time to check who it is before opening the door.

Which quickly proves to have been a mistake.

"Oh, hey," I say, trying to mask my surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"I live down the road, remember?" Mr. Grayson replies, and I instantly regret opening the door without checking. He looks as creepy as before, with his graying hair and watery blue eyes that seem to pierce right through me.

"Right." I force a smile. "Well, I'm actually in the middle of something, so?—"

He cuts me off before I can shut the door in his face. "I just wanted to come by and see how you're settling in. You know, in case you need anything."

"I appreciate the offer," I say, trying to keep my tone polite but firm. "But I think I've got it handled."

He doesn't look convinced. "You sure? Because I don't mind lending a hand. I know these old houses can be a bit tricky to navigate."

I nod, growing increasingly impatient. "Yes, I'm sure. Now, if you'll excuse me..."

Mr. Grayson hesitates for a moment, then steps back, holding up his hands in surrender. "Okay. Sorry for bothering you."

I close the door without another word, locking it behind him. I wait until I hear him walk away before letting out a sigh of relief. It's bad enough that Owen's resisting my attempts at seduction; I don't need some weird guy getting in my face.

"Who the hell was that?" Owen asks from behind me, startling me so much I nearly jump out of my skin.

"Jesus Christ," I gasp, pressing a hand against my chest. "You scared the shit out of me."

He frowns, stepping closer. "Sorry. I thought you heard me come downstairs." His eyes narrow. "Are you okay? What did he want?"

I shake my head, trying to shrug it off. "Nothing, really. He said he just wanted to welcome me to the neighborhood."

Owen raises an eyebrow. "Right. And you locked the door because?"

I look away, avoiding his gaze. I know he won't let this go until he gets a straight answer, but I don't want to admit how much Mr. Grayson creeps me out. "Because I wanted some privacy, okay?"

Owen sighs, running a hand through his hair. "Lena, something is off about that guy. You need to be careful."

"I'm a grown woman, Owen. I can take care of myself."

He shakes his head. "I'm serious. If anything happened to you..." His voice trails off, and he looks away, not finishing the sentence.

I feel a twinge in my heart, touched by his concern. But I also can't help but tease him a little bit. "So what would you do? Come rescue me like some kind of knight in shining armor?"

Owen looks back at me, his expression serious. "If I had to."

I step closer to him, my heart fluttering in my chest. "And then what? Take me back to your castle and claim your reward?"

His lips twitch, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Maybe. If you're lucky."

I pause, studying his face, suddenly feeling like we're not talking about the same thing anymore. I'm positive he's going to kiss me, but after a long moment of looking into my eyes, Owen presses his lips chastely to my forehead and steps back to grab his tool bag. "I'm taking off for the night," he explains, "but I'll be back in the morning. Just do me a favor and make sure all of the doors and windows are locked, okay?"

I nod, trying to hide my disappointment. "Yeah. Sure."

He nods, squeezing my shoulder before he heads for the door, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

I walk out onto the porch to watch him go, but as the truck disappears around the corner, I have the strangest sensation that someone is watching me. Crossing my arms over my chest, I look over and see a figure standing on the porch of the blue house three doors down.

It's Mr. Grayson ... who just saw Owen leave, dammit. With a shiver running down my spine, I step back into the house and lock the door behind me. Wishing desperately that my sexy carpenter was still here, I check every door and window, making sure they're safely latched and locked.

I think Owen is right. There's something seriously off about that guy.

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4

LENA

It's just past 11 PM when I hear something downstairs. This house is undeniably old, and it creaks and groans all the time, but this sound is different. It's too deliberate. Too calculated.

I slip out of bed and creep down the hall toward the staircase. My heart races as I peer around the corner, straining to see anything in the dark. There's nothing there.

But I'm sure I heard something. I take a deep breath, trying to calm my nerves, then I descend the stairs as quietly as possible. I listen for any hint of movement, but it's quiet. Too quiet.

I reach the bottom of the stairs and look around the foyer, my eyes adjusting to the darkness. The front door is still locked. The windows are all shut tight. Nothing seems out of place. But I can't shake that something is wrong. With my hands shaking, I slowly pull the curtains aside from the big bay window in the living room ... and see a figure rushing through the dark away from the house.

I feel like a bucket of cold water has been poured over my head. Panic settles in my chest as I run upstairs, quivering as I grab my phone and open the recent call list, planning on calling Jake, but for some reason, I call Owen instead.

He answers on the first ring. "Lena?"

"Owen, please," I say in a strained voice, "Please come back."

I can hear the urgency in his tone. "What's wrong?"

"Someone was here ... looking in the windows of the house," I whisper, my voice shaking. "I think they're still here."

There's a long pause, then Owen's voice cuts through the silence, calm and reassuring. "I'll be right there, okay? Don't worry, Lena. Just stay put."

He hangs up, and I clutch the phone to my chest, feeling both terrified and relieved that Owen is on his way. Ten minutes later, I peek out the bedroom window and watch as a truck comes racing down the street and skids to a stop in front of the house.

Owen jumps out, looking around frantically for any signs of danger. He sees me at the window, and I can feel the intensity of his gaze even from a distance. He motions for me to stay put, and I nod, watching as he circles around the back of the house.

After a few minutes, he reappears, jogging up to the front door. I fling it open before he can knock, and he immediately pulls me into his arms, hugging me tightly. "Are you okay?" he asks, his voice low and gruff.

"I'm fine," I murmur, wrapping my arms around his waist. "I'm just ... I'm so glad you're here."

He rubs my back soothingly, holding me close. Owen doesn't ask questions, and I don't offer any answers. We simply stand there in the foyer, holding each other. It feels good and right to be in his arms like this. To know that he's here for me, no matter what.

Eventually, Owen pulls away slightly, looking down at me with a concerned expression. "What happened, Lena?"

I take a deep breath, trying to calm my racing heart. "I heard something downstairs. When I checked the windows, I saw someone running away."

Owen frowns. "It was probably just some dumb kids messing around."

I shake my head. "No, it wasn't kids. It was..." My voice trails off, and I hesitate, not wanting to sound crazy. "I think it was my neighbor earlier, Mr. Grayson."

He blows out a long breath, but the tension in his muscles tells me he's beyond angry. "I'm going to go handle that motherfucker?—"

"Wait," I say, laying a hand on his chest. "We don't even know for sure that it was him. I mean, I think I'm right, but I don't want to risk us being wrong."

"I'm not going to leave you alone here with someone potentially stalking around your house, Lena."

"Then stay."

He hesitates, then nods. "Fine. I'll grab some blankets and stuff from the truck."

Before he can turn away, I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him down into a heated kiss. He's momentarily surprised, but his hands land on my hips, and he tugs me closer.

After a moment, I pull back enough to speak against his lips. "You're doing it again."

"What?" he asks, sounding dazed.

I smirk. "Rescuing me."

His eyes fill with something primal, possessive. "Trust me, Lena. I'm not doing this out of some misplaced sense of heroism. You know damn well what's going on here. You're important to me."

"Then prove it," I breathe.

He growls deep in his chest and crushes his mouth to mine, kissing me fiercely. His hands grip my hips tightly as he walks us backward until my back hits the wall. My fingers tangle in his hair as he kisses along my jawline and down my neck, sucking on that sensitive spot just below my ear.

I sigh softly, pressing against him, desperate for more contact. He's pinning me between the wall and his muscular body, caging me in with his arms. I'm wearing barely anything—a matching silk pajama set with just a tank and shorts—and I can feel every inch of him, hot and hard.

"You're so fucking beautiful, Lena," he murmurs, nipping at my earlobe. "So fucking sexy."

His hands trail down my sides, reaching the hem of my tank top and sliding underneath. I gasp as his rough palms graze my bare skin, sliding up to cup my breasts. I'm spinning out, aching for relief.

"Owen..." I breathe, tangling my fingers in his hair. "Please."

He groans, pressing a heated kiss against my neck. "Are you sure?"

I nod frantically, tugging on his hair. "Yes. I need you. Now."

He kisses me again, deeper this time, his tongue stroking mine in a way that sends sparks of pleasure shooting through my entire body. I can't believe this is happening, but I know one thing for sure—it's about damn time he stopped pretending this isn't where we've been destined to end up after our tryst on the attic floor.

I reach down and grab the hem of his t-shirt, pulling it off in one quick motion. I run my hands over his broad shoulders and muscled chest, feeling his skin grow warm beneath my touch.

Owen makes a satisfied groan as he slides his fingers into my hair, tilting my head back so he can kiss a hot path down my neck. His other hand moves lower, gripping my ass firmly, pressing me against him even harder. I can feel his erection straining against his jeans, and the knowledge that I'm turning him on makes my heart race even faster.

His hand slides around my hip, dipping under the hem of my pajamas, finding bare skin. He lets out a low growl as he discovers there's nothing underneath.

"Fuck," he mutters, cupping my ass roughly before sliding his hand down between my thighs to cup my pussy possessively. "You're driving me crazy, Lena. Where is the bedroom? I refuse to fuck you on the floor again."

"Upstairs," I manage to say through gritted teeth. "Second door on the left."

He kisses me fiercely, then scoops me up in his arms and carries me toward the stairs. We make it halfway up before he loses patience and sets me on my feet, pushing my back against the wall.

He kisses me hard, sliding two fingers deep inside me, working them in and out slowly as he sucks on my tongue. I moan, digging my nails into his shoulders, desperately needing more.

He breaks away from the kiss, trailing his lips down my neck and chest until he reaches my breasts. He shoves my tank top up, exposing my bare skin. I'm not wearing a bra, and the hungry look in his eyes as he leans down to suck one nipple into his mouth nearly makes me come right there.

I cry out, tangling my fingers in his hair. His free hand moves lower, grabbing my ass roughly to drag me even harder against him.

The stairs are old and smaller than I'm comfortable with, even if my mind is a haze of lust. "Bedroom, Owen. Bedroom."

He groans in frustration but steps back, pulling me with him up the rest of the stairs. We're kissing again by the time we get to my room, fumbling our way toward the bed.

I tug at his jeans, desperate to feel his skin on mine, and he helps me push them down before stepping out of them. Then his hands are everywhere, touching me, teasing me, driving me crazy with desire.

We fall onto the bed together, and there's no hesitation now, no holding back. He makes quick work of my silky pajamas, and his lips are immediately on my skin, starting right below my belly button, before he licks a line over my hip bone.

"Oh God," I gasp, arching against him. "Keep going."

He doesn't respond, too busy sliding lower until he reaches my inner thigh. His beard tickles my skin as he kisses his way higher, closer to where I need him most. And when his tongue finally flicks against my clit, I nearly come undone.

Two of his thick fingers slide inside, curling upwards until he hits the spot that makes me see stars. I grip his hair tighter, pulling his mouth to where I need him most, and

he obeys by sucking my clit between his lips.

I'm so close. So fucking close. My body is trembling, every nerve ending on fire as he works me with his fingers and tongue. When he adds a third finger, stretching me just right, my entire body shudders. The wet sounds of his mouth on me and the sight of his dark head between my legs make my head spin.

"Come for me, Lena," he murmurs against my flesh, never slowing the motion of his hand. "Let go."

And I do.

I explode around him with a scream, shaking in his grasp as he holds me still with one arm, determined to keep his mouth on me until the bitter end. He keeps going, drawing out my orgasm until I can barely breathe. My heart feels like it's going to beat out of my chest.

Finally, after what seems like forever, I slump back against the pillows, utterly spent. But Owen isn't done yet. He kisses his way up my stomach, pausing briefly to suck each nipple before continuing to my neck and jaw. By the time our lips meet again, I'm ready for another round.

He pulls away with a smile, resting his forehead against mine. "How was that?"

I run my fingers through his hair, giving it a playful tug. "Almost worth the wait."

His eyes darken at the challenge. "Just almost? We're going to have to fix that."

Before I can say anything else, he pulls me tightly against him as he rolls onto his back. Then, without any warning, he flips us over so that I'm straddling him.

"What are you doing?" I ask breathlessly.

He smirks up at me. "Letting you steer the ship."

I shake my head. "You're crazy," I murmur before leaning down to press my lips against his neck. His stubble scratches my cheek as I move lower, kissing along his collarbone before trailing my tongue across his chest. I glance up at him, reveling in the need in his expression. I continue exploring every inch of exposed skin, tracing every line and curve of muscle with my fingertips, unable to get enough.

He palms my asscheeks, massaging them as he coaxes me into position. My Owen is anxious to be inside me, and even though I'm still buzzing from the last orgasm, I feel the same.

"In a hurry?" I tease as he guides me over his cock, pressing the tip against my slit.

"You had your turn already. Now I want mine."

Deciding that I've tortured him enough, I rise and position myself over his cock. Owen is rock hard, and when I sink down on his length, his hands grip my hips tightly. We both exhale shakily as our bodies merge together, and he buries his face against my neck, grunting softly.

He lifts his head, kissing me passionately, swallowing every whimper and gasp. When we break apart for air, his eyes are full of lust and desire, but also something else. Something deeper and far more meaningful.

I lean forward and rest my forehead against his. "Don't overthink this," I whisper, cupping his cheek. "We're exactly where we belong."

His voice is husky and strained. "Lena, I'm going to ruin you for any other man."

And then he thrusts upwards, filling me completely.

My eyes shut as I adjust to him inside me, stretching me deliciously. "You already have," I murmur before kissing him deeply.

Our bodies move together perfectly—just like they did in the attic the first time. Only now there's no hesitation or guilt between us, just pure, unadulterated desire.

"Fuck, Lena," Owen groans, wrapping his arms around me tightly as he kisses along my neck and shoulder. "You feel so goddamn good."

I bite my lower lip to hold back a moan, grinding down on him harder as pleasure courses through my veins. Everything about this moment is perfect—the sound of our ragged breathing, the heat radiating between us. It's almost too much to handle. I'll savor the memory for the rest of my life.

Sitting up fully, I lean back, bracing my hands on the mattress behind me so I can ride him in earnest, working my body so he can see every inch of him sliding in and out of my pussy. His eyes are hooded with lust as he watches me take control, his grip on my hips tightening.

I smirk at him, moving faster, loving how crazy I'm driving him. "Do you think anyone else has ever made you feel like this?"

He shakes his head, pulling me closer. "No one else even comes close, baby."

Ever the gentleman, Owen reaches up to put his thumb over my clit, providing just the right amount of pressure as I fuck him. The addition of the sharp pleasure from his thumb combined with the deep, earth-shaking feeling of his filling me up has me reeling, and it's all I can do to keep in control of my body and not let him just take over. I want to make him feel good. I want to make him addicted.

As I get closer, each time Owen hits home, driving me higher and higher, I can't keep up the slow pace. I come forward against him, hands braced on his chest, legs doing all the work for me as I fuck him hard and fast. He keeps rubbing my clit, watching me with fire in his eyes, sweat starting to glisten on his skin.

"Don't stop," I pant, my fingernails digging into his chest. "Please don't stop..."

I throw my head back as I come again, letting the sensations overwhelm me. My mind goes blank, colors flashing behind my eyelids, muscles clenching and unclenching. I'm vaguely aware that I've stopped riding him, but now Owen has grabbed my hips with both hands and is fucking up into me as he seeks his own release. His grip is almost too tight, but it's what I need right now—something to hold onto when I feel like I might float away on a cloud of pure ecstasy.

Finally, I hear him curse, and he thrusts up into me hard, painting my inner walls as he comes hard. My eyes flutter open to watch him orgasm. There's something so primal about seeing him lose control like this, knowing that I caused it.

Afterward, we collapse together in a sweaty tangle of limbs, still panting heavily. His arms wrap around me instinctively, holding me close.

"Fuck," he mutters against my skin. "You're going to kill me, woman."

I laugh breathlessly, resting my chin on his chest. "If anything, you're the one who's going to give me a heart attack. That was incredible."

He chuckles and presses a soft kiss to the top of my head before relaxing back onto the pillows, stroking my hair idly. "So much for going home and thinking it over."

I giggle, "So much for you coming over to protect me. Someone could have robbed me blind while we were fucking, and I'd have no idea."

"It's always a risk," he says, trying to sound serious, and I giggle harder, pressing my face into his neck.

His fingers continue moving through my hair, and it feels so nice that I can't bring myself to move. I snuggle closer, draping one leg over his hips, smiling. "Stay tonight."

Owen exhales. "I was planning to anyway. Just not in the same bed as you. But you've convinced me, I think."

A tingle of satisfaction runs through me. "So, what now?"

He trails his hand down my side and onto my ass, giving it a firm squeeze. "Now, you're going to sleep."

"And after that?" I ask teasingly.

He gives my butt another squeeze before letting go and kissing my forehead. "We'll just have to see."

5

OWEN

I stayed with Lena for the night. And then the next, and the next after that.

It wasn't what I intended to do, but she's like a drug, so sweet and impossible to quit that it makes it hard to think straight.

It didn't help that I already had feelings for her and that I already knew her as well as I did. We're compatible. We're already parts of each other's lives.

If I'm being honest with myself, I was halfway in love with her way before we slept together. Now, I'm head over fucking heels, and it makes me feel like a fool. Not because I don't want to be in love with her, but because I've fallen so hard. The moment we kissed, probably. It makes me feel like a teenager all over again.

We work on the attic, but our work dynamic has completely changed. It's been less than a week since we first kissed, but my desire for her has only grown stronger. Every time we touch, it sends sparks running up and down my skin, making me crazy with want.

It doesn't help that she flirts mercilessly with me whenever she thinks I'm off guard. She'll bend over in front of me to pick something up or brush against me "accidentally" while walking by. One time, she even took a photo of me while I was working. She just laughed when confronted and said it would make good blackmail material, but I know damn well she plans to use it for other purposes.

I have no idea what I'm going to do. My entire adult life I've fought to avoid Lena because of how much I cared for her already. And now? Now that I've seen the way she looks at me, heard how she moans my name when we're together, felt how perfectly her body fits against mine? How am I supposed to keep my distance now?

How long can I pretend I don't want to be with her officially? How long until I have to tell Jake I've been fucking his sister senseless every night, and now I plan on being with her for the rest of my life?

Well, I can probably leave the 'fucking her senseless' part out, even if it's true.

Now that I've been staying over, Mr. Grayson has left Lena alone. I saw him outside once, and before he could run inside and hide from me, I marched up to his front door and told him that if he came around again, I'd break his legs.

And I meant it, too.

He seems to get the message, at least for now. It might be temporary, but if it happens again, he'll learn I am a man of my word.

Everything comes to a head when it's finally time for Lena to throw a housewarming party and show off the attic we finished. Not to sound too cocky, but it's incredible. We've transformed it into a full photography studio, complete with natural lighting, plenty of space, and everything else she could possibly want. It's decorated in creams and sage green, warm and inviting, just like Lena herself.

I corner my girl in the kitchen while the party—including her parents and brother—is in full swing in the new studio. I kiss her soundly, and when she pulls back, smiling but surprised, she asks, "What is that for?"

"I need to ask you something. Do you want to give this a real shot? With a title and

everything? Because I'm prepared to tell Jake tonight. I want this that badly, Lena."

She grins and kisses me again. "I'd love that. Let's go tell them before we start any rumors."

We head into the studio, where everyone is mingling and chatting away. Before I can even get a word in edgewise, Jake pulls me aside and says, "How long have you two been screwing around?"

Lena and I glance at each other, then back at him. Her expression is slightly worried. "You're not mad?"

He shakes his head and laughs, clapping me on the shoulder. "I've seen this coming since we were teenagers." He pulls his sister in for a hug, whispering something I can't hear, and then hugs me, too.

Everything happens so fast after that. We break the news to everyone else, who all seem unsurprised by the development.

Her mother hugs us both and says, "About time."

She's absolutely right. It's about damn time.

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LENA

Five Years Later

I bought a giant house on a whim half a decade ago, but when I read the two pink lines on the pregnancy test, I'm infinitely glad I picked such a big place back then.

It's my second pregnancy, and I know Owen is going to be thrilled. He'll probably be a bit less thrilled when we have to renovate another room into a nursery, but what's the point of marrying a carpenter if I don't get the perks along with it?

Our daughter, Emily, left for kindergarten hours ago, and it's a rare day when Owen is able to go to work a little late. I find him at the kitchen island, drinking strong black coffee that would give me heart palpitations and sketching something in a thick notebook.

The positive test is in my jeans pocket, burning like a secret, dying to be told.

"Slow morning?" I ask, leaning in to kiss his cheek. His eyes are still tired, but he manages a small smile for me.

"Yep, trying to figure out some ideas for a project." He shows me the blueprint sketches and tells me about how he wants to expand his contracting business to include renovating entire houses. Not just single floors. Not just rooms. Entire homes.

I listen to Owen talk excitedly about this dream, feeling pride swell in my chest. Even though I'm a professional photographer with awards and recognition under my belt,

there's nothing quite like seeing your husband happy at work.

Finally, I can't take the secret anymore. "Babe?" I interrupt him as he's going on about floor plans. He raises an eyebrow curiously and nods for me to go ahead.

"I have something to tell you," I say. I reach into my pocket and pull out the positive pregnancy test. His eyes widen and then soften as he takes the plastic stick from my hand.

His jaw drops. "Really?"

"Yes, really." I laugh breathlessly. "We're having another baby!"

He lets out a whoop and sweeps me up in his arms, kissing me soundly on the lips. When he breaks away, we're both grinning from ear to ear.

"This is amazing." He rests a palm on my still-flat stomach, stroking it tenderly. "When did you find out? How far along are you?"

I explain that I took the test yesterday but wanted to wait until today because of how tired he's been lately. I planned on doing something fancy, maybe putting the pregnancy test in a wristwatch box or wrapping it in ribbon and paper. But it was impossible to keep the secret any longer.

His grin widens even more as he cups my face and kisses me again. "I can't believe you waited this long to tell me. We need to celebrate."

I lean into him, "I was hoping you'd say that."

"I love you, baby. Every fucking inch of you."

Tears prick my eyes, emotions clogging my throat. "And I love you ... every fucking

inch of you.”

Owen picks me up, all of his fatigue gone in an instant, and he carries me upstairs. Whatever projects he has today will just have to wait. Right now, it's just Owen and me, a king-sized bed, and our favorite sort of celebration.

The End

Thanks for reading!