



Intoxicated (Billionaire Bachelors Club #3.5)

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Chapter One

* * *

Archer

“I’M GOING TO have a baby,” Ivy declares as she stops directly in front of me. Well, her belly stopped directly in front of me, the rest of her soon followed.

Yes, indeed, my wife is definitely going to have a baby. Soon.

I’m getting ready—staring at the mirror as I mess with my tie, making sure it’s perfect—when she approaches me. I shoot her a grin, feeling good, feeling on top of my game. Life couldn’t get any better, you know? We’re celebrating today and with good reason.

“I know, sexy mama.” I turn away from the mirror and wink at her. “Trust me, I haven’t forgotten that I’m the one who knocked you up.”

She stares at me, no reaction to my wink or my words. She usually slaps my ass and kisses me. Says something sarcastic at the very least. But I’m getting nothing. And it’s kind of disconcerting. “Archer. I’m dead serious. I’m going to have the baby.”

“I know, babe. And I can’t freaking wait.” I study her, noticing that she looks a little pale and her pupils are dilated. Hmm. “You feeling okay?”

Rolling her eyes, she rests her hand on top of her protruding stomach, rubbing it

absently. Then, not so absently. As in, she's clutching her belly like she's in pain. "I'm in—" She sucks in a harsh breath, holding it for a few seconds. "—labor, damn it."

"Oh, Christ!" I lurch toward her, both of my hands landing on her stomach. The baby kicks at that precise moment, and I feel the hit against my palm and start to laugh. "Seems like she's ready to make her escape."

We have no idea what we're having. Ivy wanted it to be a surprise and I went along with her plan but deep down, not knowing is driving me crazy. I'm dying to meet this little booger of mine and find out if I have a son or a daughter.

My guess is it's a girl who'll look just like my wife.

Ivy shoots imaginary daggers at me with her eyes. "This is the worst possible time for me to go into labor. You do realize this right?"

I shrug, rubbing her belly. I can't resist it. My wife is f**king sexy when she's pregnant. Even when she's big and miserable, like she is now. Knowing that her body is working hard, growing a child within her, my child . . . I can't help it. It turns me on.

She's told me more than once I'm a sick f**k, but whatever. I'm allowed to find Ivy sexy when she's pregnant. She's my wife, after all.

"Your brother will understand." And he will. Because Gage's about to become an uncle, and I know he's pretty excited by it though he would never admit that to anyone.

"But it's his wedding day," Ivy stresses. "You're Gage's best man. I'm Marina's matron of honor. This is not good, Archer. She's going to kill us."

“Bridezilla needs to take a chill pill.” I reluctantly release Ivy and go to the closet where her suitcase for the hospital has been packed and waiting for the last two weeks. My girl is efficient, I gotta give her that. “We need to go now, babe. Let me change out of my monkey suit and then we’ll head to the hospital.” I pull the suitcase out and set it on top of the bed. Nerves bubble up inside me, but I ignore them. I need to be the steady one. I made that promise to my wife weeks ago. I don’t want her to panic or freak out while she’s in labor, so one of us has to keep their cool.

Ivy tilts her head, contemplating me. She’s still in her silky white robe that now barely wraps around her front. She can hardly fit into her dress for the wedding, so she should be glad she doesn’t have to make an appearance. “Marina is going to be furious.”

“She’ll get over it. She’s hours away from being part of our family for good. We can disappoint her, make her mad, whatever, but there’s nothing she can do about it because we’re family. So don’t worry.” I tug the tie that I’d been patiently working on only moments ago from my neck, letting it fall onto the floor, then start unbuttoning my shirt with one hand as I grab my cell and quick-dial Gage with the other. I keep an eye on my wife as she moves about the room, her hand going to her stomach every few seconds, as if she’s in pain. Which she probably is.

Worry seeps into me, thick and sluggish. What if something goes wrong? What if there are complications and something happens to the baby? Or worse what if something happens to . . .

Yeah. Can’t go there.

“You are the last person I want to hear from at this moment,” Gage says when he answers, sounding amused. And slightly irritated—but more amused, thank God; the news I’m about to deliver might not go over so well if he’s in a bad mood. “Your ass better be on its way over here. This wedding has to start on time or Marina’s gonna

flip.”

I frown, let my hand fall from my now unbuttoned shirt. “My ass is nowhere near where you’re at.”

“Why the hell not? You better get over to the winery stat.” Gage and Marina are having their wedding at our friend Matt’s winery, which he’s considering opening up to various private events, thanks to the idea from his girlfriend, Bryn. We’re the first to use the facility. “The ceremony is in a little over an hour. Shit is going down, man. This is it.” At least he doesn’t sound like he’s being led to his doom.

“Yeah, about that . . .” I pause, listening to someone chat him up for a brief moment. “Something’s come up.”

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There's an uneasy quiet over the line for a beat too long before Gage explodes. "What the hell do you mean, something's come up? What could be more important than your best friend and brother-in-law getting married, ass**le?"

"Your niece or nephew finally making its way into the world?"

Again I'm greeted with more silence, which is really starting to get on my nerves. "I don't get it," Gage finally says.

I start to laugh and that earns me a stern look from my wife, who's slowly changing into regular clothes, an oversized sweater and black leggings. I immediately sober up. She's moving like an old woman and that isn't her usual style. "Your little sister has gone into labor. We're leaving for the hospital now."

"Wait a minute. Now? How long has she been in labor? You're not at the hospital yet?" Gage asks, going all concerned big brother on me.

"No, she only just told me she was actually in labor. We're leaving now. But you realize what this means right?" I pause, feeling guilty but knowing there's nothing I can do about it. "We're going to miss the wedding."

Thankfully, Gage doesn't even hesitate with his answer. "That's okay. We completely understand," he says, excitement lacing his voice. Just as I'd hoped, Gage is fine with our not making the wedding. How could he hold this against us? A baby was being born for Christ's sake. My baby. His sister's baby. His future niece or nephew. This is a big freaking deal, as is his marriage to Marina. And it's all going to happen on the same day. "Just make sure to call and keep us updated."

“We will but via text,” I say. “Don’t want to interrupt the ceremony, right?”

“Right,” Gage confirms. “Good luck, man. Tell my sister I love her.”

“I will. Promise.” I end the call and contemplate what’s about to happen.

Our lives are changing completely. It won’t just be Ivy and me anymore. We’ll have someone to take care of—someone who solely depends on us.

Scary.

“Oh, Archer,” Ivy says, pulling me from my thoughts.

Turning to face her, I see that her eyes are filling with tears and her face looks ready to crumple. I go to her, grabbing hold of her hands and giving them a squeeze. “What’s wrong, baby?”

“I feel bad.” A little sob escapes her as she shakes her head. I tug her in as close as I can, slinging my arm around her waist. “I’m going to ruin Gage’s wedding.”

“No you’re not. It’s going to be one of the most memorable weddings ever. No one will forget this day,” I say, smoothing my hand over her hair. I want her reassured, not worrying about wedding plans. Everything we know is going to change in mere hours.

“Exactly. It’s supposed to be Gage and Marina’s day and instead it’s going to turn into our day. Our child’s day. How selfish are we?”

“We’re not selfish. We can’t help it if you’re going into labor right now. It’s not like we did it on purpose.” I shed the rest of my clothes quickly, throwing on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. “Speaking of labor, we need to get going. Are you ready? Get

some shoes on, babe.” I give her a gentle push out of my embrace and toward the closet door across our bedroom.

“We? Who’s the one who’s about to give birth?” Ivy mutters as she shuffles toward the closet. A little snort escapes her. “You won’t have anything to do with this labor stuff, Archer. This is all on me.”

“And I think you’re going to do an amazing job. You’re the strongest women I know,” I say.

At those words, my wife promptly bursts into tears.

Gage

“YOU’RE NOT GOING to believe this,” I say into the phone. I’m pacing the room, distracted by the news my best friend just gave me.

My sister is hours away from becoming a mom. I’m both excited and . . . nervous. She’s my little sister, and I’ve always protected her. What if something happens? It’s a helpless feeling, and I don’t envy what Archer is experiencing at this very moment. He’s expressed his worries before, but always glossed over them quickly, like they were no big deal.

They linger, though. I know it.

“What’s going on now?” Marina sounds anxious, but that’s nothing new. My fiancé has been on edge for weeks. Months even. I’m more than ready to get married and get this whole ceremony thing over with.

Moving on to the honeymoon is what I’m looking forward to. I haven’t touched my almost-wife sexually—her choice, not mine—in weeks. I’m dying here.

“Archer called. Ivy went into labor.” I keep my voice calm, but deep inside I’m a bundle of nerves. I’ll admit it to no one. Not even Marina. This is the first baby in the family and even Archer’s coldhearted parents are excited. Ivy won’t tell us whether she’s having a boy or a girl and it’s making me nuts. It’s making everyone nuts. “They’re on their way to the hospital.”

“WHAT? Are you serious? Oh, my God! This is going to ruin everything,” Marina practically screeched.

I’m offended. I can’t help it. The way Marina’s been acting these last few weeks, she’s become unrecognizable. I blame the wedding planning. It’s stressing her the hell out which, in turn, is stressing me the hell out. “Are you serious? We knew this could happen. What’s the big deal? Didn’t you put a plan B into place or whatever?”

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“You really expected me to have a secret plan B? Gage, I work full time and I’ve been planning this wedding. I’m barely keeping it together as it is.” Marina blows out an exasperated breath.

“We’ll figure something out.” My wife-to-be is at the hotel Archer owns, getting ready. I’m already at the winery, in a private room Matt arranged for me to get dressed in. Our wedding is in approximately ninety minutes.

Marina is probably on her way to legitimately freaking out.

“The ceremony is almost here.” Her voice lowered to a harsh whisper. “What are we going to do? Who’s going to replace them? This is bad, Gage. Super bad. My mom is going to lose it.”

“Why?” I’m incredulous. Her mom likes to lose it over a lot of things. It’s the Italian in her. They can be sort of . . . dramatic. Marina too.

“It’s bad luck when things don’t go right on the most important day of your life.” Marina blows out an irritated breath. “No, I’m not ready for my hair to be curled yet. Hold on,” she tells someone else. Some poor, innocent soul whose job it is to take care of her today.

Good luck with that.

“We create our own luck,” I say, going for positive. “Come on, baby. It’s our wedding day. Don’t worry about the small stuff. I’ll talk to Matt. You should talk to Bryn. I bet they would step in for Archer and Ivy since they’re already a part of the

wedding party.”

Marina remains quiet but I know she’s still on the line. I can hear the soft murmuring of voices in the background, all of them female. I’d guess that hotel room is full of women getting their hair done, makeup done . . . whatever. Sounds like my worst nightmare.

Glad I’m all alone in this quiet room, though I know Matt will show up any minute.

“What do you think?” I prompt when she still hasn’t said anything.

“You’re right. I can’t let this get me down. I mean, Ivy is having a baby. We should be excited. I shouldn’t act like such a selfish bitch worrying who’s going to be my maid of honor.” Marina sniffs, and I immediately feel like shit.

“Come on, babe. Stop being so hard on yourself. We’re getting married. I know you’re emotional with everything going on today but focus on the positives. You’re going to be my wife.” I lower my voice, desperate to make her laugh. “And I can’t wait to violate my wife tonight.”

She laughs softly, and I smile, relief flooding me. I can’t stand the thought of Marina upset. But I also can’t wait for this wedding to be over. So we can focus on living our lives.

Together.

Matt

I KNOCK ON the door and enter as I hear Gage say come in. He finishes up a phone call and slips his cell into his front pocket, smiling at me. But the smile looks forced. Not the sort of thing a man should be doing on his wedding day. “What’s up?” I ask.

“Everything okay?”

“Naw, it’s cool. I’m thankful you let me get ready here, man. A lot simpler than being at the hotel with my future wife worried that I might see her some way, some how. She’d freak out. Bad luck and all, the groom seeing the bride before the wedding,” Gage says, waving a hand.

Marina had been on a tear the last few weeks. Wedding stress was spilling over like a pot of water on full boil and making the bride turn a bit . . . angry.

I’m trying to be kind here. Gage is my best friend. And I like Marina. Bryn’s grown incredibly close to her. Planning a big wedding is stressful. I know this. I also know my woman wouldn’t act like this when planning our wedding.

Because that’s going to happen. I’m determined to make that woman mine in the most official way. Soon.

“It’s almost over, man.” I clap Gage on the shoulder, letting him know he has my sympathy. He’s been good, never really complaining about Marina, but both Archer and I know Gage is ready for the wedding to be over so his almost-wife will return to her normal self.

“Yeah.” Gage rubs a hand across his jaw, then drops his head, staring straight at me. “So get this. Archer called me. Ivy’s gone into labor.”

“No shit?” I grin. Finally, that baby is going to be here. I have a bet going with a few others over what they’re going to have, a boy or a girl.

My bet is a boy. And I hope like hell I’m right since five hundred dollars is riding on this.

Yes, I've turned into a cheapskate, considering the million dollar bet I made with Archer and Gage. A bet that still doesn't have a true winner.

But we all know it's me. After all, I was the last bachelor standing. Those two fell for their respective women like a house of cards. I just lucked out that their relationships happened before mine.

"No shit. This throws off the wedding though. Marina almost lost it when I told her." Gage is still watching me closely, and I almost want to squirm. I feel like I've done something wrong.

"Yeah, I bet." I wouldn't want to be in this guy's shoes right now. Despite how ready I am to make the permanent move with Bryn, I know that for us, we don't want a big elaborate wedding like Gage and Marina are having. Her giant Italian family, which must make up half of the Napa Valley, is part of the problem. I don't have a big family and neither does Bryn. We could run away to Vegas and get married without offending a soul.

Well, maybe her grandma would get mad. She might sick her mean rooster on me. She's a woman I don't necessarily want to mess with. But I'm willing to take the chance.

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“Want to step in and be my best man?” Gage asks suddenly.

I glance up and see that my friend is dead serious. “Of course,” I say automatically. I was never offended that Gage chose Archer over me. They’ve known each other longer so it made sense. “I’d be honored, man.” And I meant it.

“Great. Okay.” Gage nodded, smoothing a hand along his jaw, a contemplative look on his face. “You paid attention at the rehearsal last night? I don’t need to tell you what to do as best man, do I?”

“I think I can handle it,” I drawl, laying the sarcasm on thick. “What do I need to do? Hand over the ring? That’s about it.”

“You’re going to need to give a speech at the reception,” Gage points out.

Ah, shit. I’m not big on giving speeches, but I hold my own when I have to. “No problem.”

“Marina’s going to ask Bryn to be her maid of honor.”

“So we’ll be a matched set.”

“Yep.” Gage nods. “You cool with this, bro? We’re having to change it all up at the last minute, and it’s not like you two are second choice but . . .”

“We’re second choice,” I finish for him. “And I’m not offended. I’m sure Bryn won’t be either.”

My cell dings at that very moment punctuating my sentence, and I pull it out to see it's a text from Bryn.

Maid of honor now. Are you the best man?

Smiling, I type her a response.

You know it.

Nervous?

Not with you by my side, I answer.

And that's the truth.

Chapter Two

* * *

Bryn

I'VE SEEN MATT in jeans and a T-shirt, a suit, shirtless in a pair of sweats, and I've seen him naked. A lot.

But I have never seen him in a tux before, and oh my God, he's gorgeous. He only wore a suit to Ivy and Archer's wedding, so I didn't get to see him in his full tux glory. And he is just flat out glorious.

My heart is tripping over itself as I make my way toward him. I struggle to keep the giddy smile off my face, but it's no use. I'm full-on grinning by the time we reach each other.

“You’re beautiful,” he says before I can even get a word out. His eyes practically smolder as he drinks me in.

My cheeks heat up. It’s so ridiculous, but I’m still not used to Matt’s praise; that a man like him would be interested in a woman like me. Silly but true.

“You look amazing.” I barely get the words out before Matt’s dipping his head, his mouth brushing against mine. We’re in a small building on the property that Matt’s assigned as wedding headquarters for the day. This is the first wedding we’ve held at the winery, and I told Matt if it’s a huge success, we should consider putting together some advertising and marketing plans so we can rent the winery out to the public for events. Aside from this wedding and happenings for the winery, so far, we’ve only put together small parties for people we know.

He said he wasn’t sure he’s ready to go big, but I’m excited at the thought. I could become a wedding planner. I love putting together events, and I’m always doing that sort of thing for the Matt’s winery business anyway, trying to draw attention to the DeLuca Vineyard.

“You’re pretty damn amazing yourself,” he says once we break apart. He grabs hold of my hand and gives it a squeeze. “Love that dress on you.”

I glance down. The dress is pale yellow and strapless, with a snug bodice and a flowing skirt that hits me just above the knee. I love it. “I like it too which surprises me. I’m not a fan of yellow.”

“I’m a fan of anything on you.” Matt tugs me close and drops another kiss on my lips, but I put my free hand on his chest, giving him a little push.

“Stop,” I say without much force—like I’d deny this man anything, especially affection. I love it when he kisses me. Touches me. I’d pretty much let him do

whatever he wants to me.

I'm that far gone over him.

"We need to focus on our new tasks and keep the bride and groom calm," I remind him. I sent him a text when I arrived along with the rest of the bridal party and he immediately asked me to meet with him for a few minutes. So here we are.

Figures he tried to cop a feel. Not that I stopped him.

"Gage is fine," Matt says, still gripping my hand. "He's more worried about Marina. How is our bride?"

"She's better." Once she'd calmed down about the whole Ivy going into labor situation, Marina seemed good. Calmer, which she needs to be in order to get through this day. She's been amped with the wedding plans, but I know she's waiting for it all to be said and done. Not that she won't enjoy her wedding, but . . .

I think she's really looking forward to their tropical honeymoon where she can relax. And get wrapped up in her husband.

"Wait until you see her. She's a gorgeous bride," I say dreamily. Marina is the quintessential bride all little girls dream of being. Her gown is something straight out of a fairytale, with the full skirt, a sparkly bodice, and feathers.

Yes, white feathers. The dress is hand beaded and ruched, made of tulle and silk, and the look is completed with a tiny tiara on her head. Marina will probably make everyone's jaw hit the floor the moment they see her walk down the aisle. I could almost cry just thinking about it.

"You'll be a gorgeous bride someday too, you know." Matt lifts our linked hands to

his mouth and kisses my knuckles.

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Panic rises within me, but I bat it down. He's been talking so seriously lately. We've been together for only a short time, but I know what he wants. Me. Us. Together.

Forever.

Am I ready for that sort of commitment? I know I can't do much better than Matthew DeLuca. That sounds cold, but it's true. We're madly in love with each other. Not only does he treat me like the woman he worships and loves, but he also respects my mind and work ethic. He values my opinion. We work well together at the winery. We have an amazing relationship. I'm a lucky girl.

It all still feels unreal, us being together. And this scares the crap out of me.

Marina

I SIT IN front of the mirror and take a deep breath, shrugging off Mom as she tries to hug me. Again. She's been a regular waterworks the entire morning, but now that I'm in full makeup, I refuse to shed another tear until the actual ceremony.

"You look so beautiful," Mom says on a wistful sigh. "I can't believe my baby girl is getting married."

She's said that multiple times this morning too. I understand she's feeling nostalgic, but her tears and trembling voice are doing me in. I'm an emotional, exhausted wreck. Wedding planning is hard, and I've been such a control freak, I hardly let the planner Mom and Dad hired for the wedding make a move without consulting me first.

The room Matt provided for the bridal party to wait in right before the ceremony is perfect. Bryn had a hand in putting it all together, and I can tell. I really love that girl. So glad we've become such good friends.

"I hope everything goes smoothly," I murmur to myself, but the way Mom just straightened, I know she heard me.

"It will be perfect. I just know it. You've already had your one flub for the day. Everything else will be fine," Mom says with a steely voice that tells me she's not in the mood for contradictions.

Now it's my turn to straighten. I meet her gaze in the mirror. "What do you mean, 'your one flub'?"

"Ivy and Archer having to back out." Mom waves a hand, dismissing our friends just like that. "I understand we can't predict when a baby will decide when he or she is ready to make their way into the world. It threw us off a little, but Matt and Bryn have stepped in and everything's going to be just fine."

As if she heard her name mentioned, Bryn glided into the room, quietly closing the door behind her. Her lipstick is completely smudged, so that means she must've snuck off and met with Matt.

A spark of jealousy lights inside of me. I wish I could secretly meet Gage and let him kiss my lipstick off.

But I can't. We're getting married in a matter of minutes. I'm going to be Mrs. Marina Emerson. I'm excited. More than ready to be Gage's wife. After all—the stress from planning will fade away like a bad dream.

"Hey."

I blink and shake my head, realizing that it's Bryn standing behind me now instead of Mom. She has her hands on my shoulders, a reassuring smile on her face. If she wasn't such a good friend, I could almost hate Bryn for how beautiful she is. She's gorgeous—her face and body such flawless perfection, she could be a movie star.

The bridesmaid's dress looks amazing on her. It's going to be a beautiful wedding. Everything has been planned, down to the finest detail. So why do I feel like such a wreck inside?

"What's up?" I say, offering Bryn a quick smile. "You snuck off and met Matt, didn't you?"

"Yeah. How could you tell?" Bryn looks embarrassed which is cute.

"You walked out with lipstick and came back with none. That's a dead giveaway," I say.

She rolls her eyes, her cheeks turning the faintest shade of pink. "I think he wants to ask me to marry him soon."

"Wow. Really?" I'm surprised, yet not. If any of those guys were a not-so-secret romantic, it'd be Matt. He's never tried to hide it either, but his worshipful side has come out big time since Bryn came into his life. "That's wonderful."

"Yes." Bryn shrugs, her expression turning miserable. "It is."

I stand up and peer at her, noting the way she tilts her head so her gaze is cast downward. Like she doesn't want to look me in the eye. "What's wrong?"

Bryn shakes her head. "Nothing. Let's focus on you. It's your wedding day. You don't need to worry about my insecurities."

Beautiful Bryn has insecurities? “You’re worried about your relationship with Matt and whether he loves you or not? I don’t think you should be concerned. That man is so gaga over you it’s sort of disgusting.” Matt is always shooting Bryn moony looks, like he can’t believe she’s with him. “He’s madly in love with you.”

“And I’m madly in love with him but . . . I’m scared.” Bryn whispers the last two words and lifts her head so I can see the tears welling up in her eyes. “So stupid. I know we have a great relationship, but it’s moving so fast. We haven’t been together that long but all of a sudden he wants to marry me? How can he be sure? Does he even know the real me? Do I even know the real him?”

“Oh Bryn.” I give her an awkward hug because I don’t want to wrinkle our dresses or mess up our hair. “Don’t worry about the what-ifs or how fast your relationship has moved. You love Matt. He loves you. Be happy that he’s so willing to commit to you.”

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“I know. You’re right. I should be happy.” Bryn fans her hands in front of her eyes, like that’s going to stop her from crying. I can feel my own eyes answering the call to cry with her, but I try my best to ignore it. I do not want to ruin my makeup. “And it’s your wedding day which means I need to shut the hell up and quit whining.”

I start to laugh and shake my head. “I think weddings make everyone emotional. You’re not the first person to fall apart on me. Still”—I wag my finger at her, my voice turning stern—“you need to stop crying before you ruin your makeup. The ceremony is going to start soon and the only one allowed to hold it up is me.”

“Okay. Right. You’re so right.” Bryn sniffs and wipes delicately beneath her eyes with the tips of her fingers. “I’ll touch it up and pretend we never had this conversation.”

“No.” I shake my head and take her hands, squeezing them gently. “We’ll resume this conversation later, all right? I’m here for you. You’ve been such a support to me through all of this. I’m not about to ignore you during your time of need.”

Bryn smiles. “You and Ivy are the best friends ever, you know that?”

I smile in return. “Right back at you, sweetie.” My smile fades. “I miss Ivy though. We need to call her. I hope she’s okay.”

Ivy

“GET IT OUT! Oh, my God.” I let my head fall back against the pillows. My entire body aches, especially my back. My water broke about twenty minutes ago and the

nurse said I'm transitioning, whatever the hell that means. I can't pay attention; that's Archer's job. I'm too busy birthing his baby.

"Babe. You need to calm down. Reserve your energy." He's right by my side, smoothing my hair away from my forehead, offering me water or ice chips from a little paper cup the nurse brought by earlier. What I'd really like is a sandwich but they're not giving me anything to eat until after the baby comes.

Ugh. I'm starving.

Shivers move through me to the point where I can't seem to stop shaking, and I have no idea what's wrong with me. "Y-you're r-right," I say through chattering teeth. Archer slips his arm around my shoulders, and I lean against him, my forehead pressing into his jaw as he comforts me. He's been sitting on the edge of the hospital bed since we arrived, always with an encouraging word or a kiss on the forehead.

I really, really love this man. And I would really, really love to have this baby. Now.

"You cold?" He rubs my shoulder and tugs me even closer which makes me wince. I don't want to protest since I love nothing more than being in my husband's arms, but I am incredibly uncomfortable. In pain. I feel like I'm about to drop a two ton brick from my vagina—not that I would ever repeat that to Archer—and I'm tired. I didn't sleep well last night, and now I think I know why.

I was in labor. Duh.

"No." I shake my head, my teeth chattering so bad I clamp them shut and try to get myself under control. "I'm actually pretty hot."

"Yeah, you are," he murmurs with a soft laugh. I laugh too because he's always saying things like that.

“Considering that I feel the farthest thing from hot and sexy, I appreciate the compliment,” I say as the door opens and we both glance toward it.

A nurse comes in, a pleasant smile on her face. She takes one look at me and the smile fades as she rushes toward the bed. “Ooh, I think we should check you.”

“Why?” Archer asks as he stands. Worry radiates off him, and I love that he’s always my knight, standing up for me no matter what. “Is she okay?”

“She’s probably close.” By my side, the nurse’s voice is gentle as she asks me to lie back. I spread my legs, and she peeks under my gown, a little sound escaping her before she pops her head back up. “I think we’re ready to call the doctor in. Do you feel the urge to push?”

“Sorta,” I say just as another contraction grips me. My voice fades, but a groan escapes as I hold my belly with one hand. Since monitors are attached to my belly, the steady thump of our baby’s heartbeat fills the room, and I concentrate on the sound which reassures me that he or she is trying to get out.

“Let me go fetch the doctor. I’ll be right back.” The nurse hurries out of the room, leaving Archer and me alone once more. He takes my hand the moment she’s gone, interlacing his fingers with mine.

“You ready?” he asks. “Feeling okay?”

“I’m . . . f-fine.” I’m overcome with shivers again, and I press my lips together, trying to keep it all under control. I feel like I’m having an out-of-body experience, I swear. Like this isn’t really happening to me, though it so totally is. “D-do you think Marina and G-gage are mad at us?”

Archer’s jaw sets in that way it does when he’s being stubborn. “I don’t care if

they're mad or not. You're about to give birth, Ivy. It's not like we said, 'hey, let's f**k up Gage and Marina's wedding day on purpose.'"

"I know, I know." I sigh and lean my head against the pillow. I stare up at the pale green ceiling and wonder how many other women have been in this very room doing the same thing I'm about to do. "I can't help the twinge of guilt I'm feeling though."

"Hey, they understand. I know they do. Gage told me to tell you that they're thinking of you and can't wait to meet the baby."

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“I hope they can stop by before they leave for their honeymoon. If the baby will even be born by then,” I say with an exasperated sigh.

“The baby will be here by then,” Archer says assuredly, leaning over so he’s looking me directly in the eyes. “Have faith, babe. It’s all going to come together. Trust me.”

As I stare into my husband’s eyes, I know I trust him one hundred percent. I’m just tired and scared and eager. Eager for all of this to be over with, so I can hold my child in my arms and welcome him or her into this world.

“Hello.” The obstetrician strides into the room, the tails of his white coat flying behind him as he approaches the bed. “I hear you’re about to have a baby. You ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” I answer, offering a smile in Archer’s direction.

He smiles in return, handsome despite the circles ringing his eyes and his messy hair. “Me too, babe,” he says, not even looking at the doctor. No, my husband’s gaze is only for me. “Me too.”

Chapter Three

* * *

Gage

I’M NERVOUS. I didn’t think this would happen. I’ve been the cool, easygoing eye

of the storm that has been my poor stressed-out fiancée. But now that the moment has come, and I'm standing with Matt by my side, in front of our guests, as we all wait for Marina to make her appearance, I feel like I might faint.

Yeah. Not good.

Locking my knees, I swallow hard and try not to fidget as the music plays. A crisp breeze washes over us, cooling my sweat-dampened forehead, and I give it a subtle swipe, noting that my palms are clammy.

I'm a freaking mess.

"Calm down, dude," Matt whispers out of the side of his mouth. We're standing so close our shoulders are practically touching. Wonder if he'd catch me if I fall. "You look like you're gonna drop."

"I feel like I'm gonna drop," I tell him, feeling like an idiot but not really caring. He's my new best man, so I need him to step it up. If I pass out, it's on him.

"Your girl is going to make her appearance at any minute." Matt nods toward the beginning of the aisle where no one stands. Where are the girls? We already made our walk down the aisle, Matt walking Marina's mom to her seat, me walking my mother.

"Hope she shows up soon," I mutter, meaning it. I feel antsy. My suit is too tight. My throat is dry. I'm dying for a drink. Preferably booze.

Probably not a good idea.

The flower girl suddenly struts down the aisle, cute as can be in a white lacy gown. Louisa is one of Marina's cousins. She has about a bazillion of them.

Almost all of them are sitting in the crowd, watching me. Probably pissed because Marina and I both agreed that we didn't want a huge, ridiculous wedding party. We blew their chance to wear bridesmaids' gowns.

Then Bryn appears, a freaking vision in pale yellow. She walks down the aisle slowly, a coy smile on her face as she shoots me a glance, then trains her gaze on Matt. As her smile disappears, her eyes widen, and I look at Matt, who's staring at Bryn like she's the most beautiful creature he's ever seen in his life.

Poor dude is straight up in love with Bryn. Like a complete and total goner. I get what he's feeling.

The music fades and a new song starts—a low, melodic tune played to perfection by the small group of musicians set up off to the right. I straighten my spine, clasp my hands behind my back as I wait for my bride to make her appearance.

And then . . . there she is. Her arm curls around her father's, who looks respectably intimidating in his tuxedo. A frothy veil covers her face, and the skirt of her gown is wide, nearly as wide as the aisle they're walking down.

Tears threaten, and I blink once. Hard. Damn it, I'm not going to cry. I'm happy, not sad. But I'm also overwhelmed, filled with love for this woman whose about to become my partner in life.

They approach and stop just before us, turning to each other so her father can lift the veil, revealing her face to me for the first time. He leans in and kisses her cheek as the minister asks who gives this woman to this man, just as we rehearsed yesterday. Her father says I do, his deep voice a little shaky and my sympathy goes out to him.

I'm still feeling pretty shaky myself.

Marina steps up to stand beside me, and I take her hand, unable to stop from leaning in and brushing a quick kiss against her cheek. “You look beautiful,” I murmur, my voice just as shaky as her dad’s.

But I don’t care. I have no shame. I’m getting married, damn it. I’m allowed to cry. To smile. To laugh. I’m making this woman mine.

Forever.

Marina

WE STOP AT the beginning of the aisle, waiting for the cue from the music. Dad lays his hand over mine and gives it a squeeze. “You look beautiful, Marina. Your mom and I are so proud of you.”

I nod, not trusting my voice. I’m afraid I’ll start crying, and I don’t want to do that. Not yet.

“I’m going to have a talk with Gage. Tell him he better treat you right or he’ll have to answer to me,” Dad continues.

“Oh, Daddy.” My voice cracks, and I press my lips together for a brief moment to keep the sob in. Once I have it under control, I whisper, “He loves me. I know he does.”

“I know he does too, princess.” Dad pats my hand just as the music gets louder. “That’s our sign, sweetheart. Let’s do this.”

I let Dad lead me down the aisle toward Gage. He looks so handsome, the sun shining down on him, making his dark hair glint. He smiles when our eyes meet, though I know he can hardly see me through the veil.

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That was the plan. I wanted to draw it out. Make him anticipate me.

When Dad lifts the veil and kisses me, I see the way Gage's eyes widen, the sheen of tears in their depths. Oh God, if he's going to cry, I'm definitely going to cry, and I don't know if I can take this.

Dad hands me over to Gage, and I take my place beside him, surprised when he drops a kiss on my cheek.

"You look beautiful," he murmurs, his voice trembling. My heart skips at his words and the sincerity behind them, the love shining in his eyes.

"So do you," I say, because he does. My groom is gorgeous in his tux, his hair perfect, his expression nervous. "I love you."

"I love you too." He brings our clutched hands to his mouth and kisses my knuckles, earning a disapproving noise from the minister that makes us both smile.

The ceremony starts with words of love and commitment, the sanctity of marriage, the importance of sticking together through the good times and the bad. We turn to face each other to recite our vows, and I'm overwhelmed with love for Gage as I repeat the words the minister says to me. I mean every single thing I say to Gage, and I know he feels the same way.

Matt hands over the ring, and Gage slips it on my finger, a breathtaking diamond band he chose for me months ago. Then it's my turn, and I take the simple platinum band from Bryn and slip it on Gage's shaking finger. He's still nervous. Excited. I

feel the same.

“I now declare you husband and wife. Gage, you may kiss your bride,” the minister says.

There’s a roaring in my ears as Gage pulls me into his arms, his face, his scent so familiar, so dear to me. I tilt my head back and close my eyes, sucking in a harsh breath when his lips light upon mine. The touch is faint and damp, a simple brush before he presses harder, deepening the kiss with a quick and eager swipe of his tongue.

I cling to him, ignoring the hoots and hollers from the crowd because oh my, God, I know we’re putting on a show. But I don’t care. Neither does Gage. I want to remember this moment forever. Want to make this one of the most memorable days of my life—of his too.

“You’re mine now, baby,” he says once we finally withdraw. I smile because he’s grinning at me, looking almost as if he’s in a daze. “It’s official and everything.”

I burst out laughing and throw my arms around his neck, giving him a sound kiss on the lips. “Whether I like it or not?” I whisper against his mouth.

“Oh, you’re going to like it.” He kisses me one more time and then steps away from me, my hands still clutched in his. “I’ll definitely make it worth your while.”

“Promise?” I tease.

Just then, the minister yells, “Introducing Mr. and Mrs. Gage Emerson!”

“For you, baby? Anything.”

Chapter Four

* * *

Archer

MY WIFE HAS been pushing for the last hour and a half and it's killing me that I can't help her. That I can't solve this problem she's having, that I can't be the one having the baby for her. I wish I could take on her pain, take on her exhaustion, take on her every burden so she doesn't have to suffer.

I hate that I have to witness this. Not the birth of my child, oh no. I'm beyond ready to meet that baby of mine. My poor wife though?

She's suffering, my Ivy. Hunched over, her face is red, her forehead sweaty and long wisps of hair are matted to her skin. Her eyes are wild with a mixture of anticipation and exhaustion and they go out of focus every few minutes. Like she's here, but not.

Her feet are in stirrups, her knees bent as the doctor and nurse hover at the end of the bed, checking her between the legs. She freaked out a little bit when they laid her down on the birthing table. Panicked. She's been saying for weeks that she wants the baby out, but now that we're at the final moment, I think she's having regrets about the entire child-birthing process, though I know that's just nerves talking.

Anyway, too late now. There's no going back. She knows this but . . . pregnant women can be a little irrational sometimes. Not that I would ever, ever admit that to Ivy. Or any other woman who's given birth.

The only thing that reassures me in the midst of the chaos and the worry is the sound of my child's steady heartbeat coming from the monitor, filling the room with a relentless beat that tells me they're doing just fine.

Wish I could say the same about Ivy. She's worn out.

"You okay?" I ask her, tracing my fingers down her forearm, drawing her attention.

"You've almost got this, baby. You're doing so good."

"I'm okay." She nods but her voice wavers, and I wonder how okay she really feels.

"I just want this to be over with. I'm so tired."

"Maybe . . ." I let my voice trail off, not sure if I should say what I want to say to her or not. I clear my throat. "You've been going at this for hours. Maybe you should consider a C-section? I know we discussed natural childbirth, and you didn't want to have a cesarean, but—"

"I've only been pushing for two hours, if that. The baby isn't stressed. I'm not a quitter, Archer." She sits up straighter, her expression determined. "I've got this."

Aw, man. She's set out to prove me wrong now.

This is usually my cue to give up the fight but, damn it, I'm scared out of my mind something could happen to Ivy. And I'm not about to lose her. I can't even fathom the thought.

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My phone starts ringing, and I see it's Matt calling. I walk over to the farthest corner of the room so I can answer it and talk without Ivy hearing me.

"What's up, man? Don't tell me you bailed on Gage and Marina too."

Matt chuckles. "You a father yet or what? Everyone's dying to know what's going on. How's Ivy? Is she okay?"

"The baby's not here yet," I say, glancing over at Ivy's bed. She's got her hand resting low on her belly and her chin is tilted down. I swear her lips are moving, and I think she might be either talking to herself or the baby. Probably telling that the baby they're going to prove Daddy wrong and make an appearance sooner rather than later—which would be fine with me. "She's been pushing for almost two hours," I say, my voice lowering. "I'm worried about her."

"She'll be fine," Matt says. "Women have babies all the time. Your girl is tough."

I know what Matt's saying is true, but I still worry about Ivy. She's my life. I want what's best for her and never want to see her in pain. I had no idea watching her in labor would be so difficult. I need to change the subject for a bit and focus on something else. "So how was the wedding?"

"Great. Everything went off without a hitch and Marina was a beautiful bride. I swear, Gage cried when he first saw her."

"Get the hell out." Gage was turning into a regular sap.

No big deal considering I was too. So was Matt. I blame the women folk.

“Hand to God, dude. I wanted to tear up when I saw Bryn coming at me down the aisle in her bridesmaid dress, she looked so beautiful clutching her bouquet,” Matt says, his voice soft.

What a goner he is. He’s madly in love with that former assistant of his, not that I can blame him. I would never admit this to Ivy but Bryn is pretty damn hot plus she’s so nice.

Christ, she’d tear my head off if she knew I even thought that.

“You’ve turned into a complete pu**y,” I mutter just to get under Matt’s skin.

It works. “Fuck you,” he replies cheerily. “Mister I’m so worried about my wife as she gives birth to my baby, though I get it man. I get it.” Matt pauses for a brief moment, and I hear a cheer in the background. Sounds like they’re all having fun, and I wish Ivy and I could’ve been there to celebrate with everyone. But our baby had different plans. “What do you think you’re having anyway? Boy or girl?”

I want to roll my eyes. How many times have I answered this question? Hell, how many times has Matt himself asked me? “It doesn’t matter as long as the baby is healthy,” I say.

“That’s such a bullshit answer. You can tell me the truth. I won’t reveal it to anyone. What do you think you’re having? What do you want?”

“I really don’t care dude, okay?” I glance over at Ivy who’s glaring at me. Damn, she looks pissed.

I swallow hard, prepared for the verbal blow I’m about to get.

“Archer,” she practically hisses. Her eyes are narrowed, but she looks scared too. And so, so, tired. “I need you.”

“I gotta go,” I tell Matt. “Pray for my wife,” I say before I end the call. I rush toward Ivy, who lets out a long groan as she clutches her belly with both hands.

We’re going to need all the help we can get.

Matt

THE RECEPTION IS in full swing, and I can finally relax. During the ceremony, I stood by Gage’s side and handed over the ring. I gave a rousing speech during the dinner that made practically every female in attendance cry. And now I’m slow dancing with my girlfriend, holding her close in my arms as we sway to the music.

Since when did my life get so perfect?

Since the first time you saw Bryn.

Right. Exactly.

“They look so happy,” Bryn murmurs, breaking through my thoughts.

I glance down at her to see she’s watching Gage and Marina dance nearby. Their gazes are locked, arms wrapped around each other as they float slowly about the dance floor, surrounded by other couples. But they aren’t paying attention to anyone else, acting as if they’re the only two people in this room. They look that lost in each other.

“That’s what love does to you,” I say because I can relate. I feel the same way. Completely and totally lost in Bryn and what we share. It just flat out doesn’t get

much better than this, and I'm finding that I count my lucky stars more and more often the longer I'm with Bryn.

I want to make this relationship permanent. We belong together. I know it. She knows it. So why aren't we facing facts and taking our relationship to the next logical step?

"You're right." Bryn smiles up at me, the sight of her pretty face momentarily stealing my breath. "Love makes you do crazy things."

"It does." I nod and swallow hard. This is it. I want to say the words, but they're lodged in my throat like I've turned into some sort of coward. When have I ever hesitated to ask for what I want? I'm a go-getter, and I always have been. If I've learned anything from my pain-in-the-ass dad, it's that you've gotta make shit happen for yourself, not wait for it to happen to you.

Sound advice. Even in relationships.

"You did an amazing job with the best man speech," Bryn continues, smoothing her hand along my shoulder. My skin tingles at her touch, even through the layers of clothing. "Did you even plan what you were going to say? Or was it completely unrehearsed?"

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“Considering I had less than two hours to prepare for that speech, and most of that time I was doing other stuff,—yeah completely unrehearsed,” I say. I’m not the best when it comes to speaking in public, but I held my own. Unlike now when I’m losing my nerve just trying to talk to my own girlfriend.

It’s only the most important question of my life. What’s the big deal?

I break out into a cold sweat. Jesus, this is a huge f**king deal.

“Well, you did great. And you look good too,” she says appreciatively. “Though I think I’ve told you that about a thousand times already.”

I raise a brow. “Only good?” Looks like I can still flirt at least. That’s good because I feel like I’m losing my grip and fast.

“Better than good.” She grins. “Hot. Mega hot.”

“That’s better.” Leaning in, I drop a quick kiss on her forehead.

“I love you,” she whispers and my heart cracks with her words. Rarely does she say it first; it’s almost like she’s scared to confess she may have more feelings than I do at any given moment.

I’ve lived most of my life always trying to be on top, but this relationship isn’t a competition. We’re two equals, Bryn and me, and I wish she could realize that. When it comes to relationships and love, I know she hasn’t had the best examples in life, but I want her to be confident knowing that I love her.

“I love you too,” I say, my voice—and my courage—growing stronger. “Bryn.”

“What?”

I stare into her eyes, memorizing the way she looks at this very moment. Happy, beautiful. Perfect. “Will you marry me? Be my bride?”

She stops dancing and so do I, my heart racing a million miles a minute. She’s gaping at me, her eyes wide, lips parted, staring at me like I have two heads. Then she takes a step back, her hands dropping away from me as she slowly shakes her head.

“I-I’m sorry. I can’t,” she whispers, just before she turns on her heel and runs away from me as fast as she can.

Leaving me standing in the middle of the dance floor. Alone and devastated.

Hell. What just happened?

Gage

“GAGE?”

My wife’s sweet voice rings through me, and I glance down at her, offering her a soft smile. “Yeah?”

“I love you.” Marina smiles at me, radiantly beautiful. I want to f**king cry all over again just looking at her. When I saw her poised at the end of the aisle on her father’s arm, ready to walk toward me and begin this journey called marriage, tears sprang to my eyes. The dress she wore was stunning. Her hair, her smile, the way she clutched her bouquet so tightly the flowers trembled—she did me in.

Flat out wrecked me.

All the stress and joy and arguments and worry and anxiety in planning this wedding had proven worth it in that one single moment.

“I love you too,” I whisper, bending down so I can kiss her, even slip her a little tongue which she responds to eagerly. Hey, this is our day. If anyone wants to give us grief for tongue kissing on the dance floor at our wedding reception, well they can suck the big one.

She breaks the kiss first, her smile wobbly, her eyes a little dazed. “Thank you.”

“For what?” I laugh and shake my head. “Kissing you?”

“For putting up with me these last few months.” Her smile turns immediately into a frown. “I’ve been a complete bitch. I don’t know how you put up with me.”

“You’re not a bitch.” I kiss the tip of her nose. “You might’ve been a bit . . . touchy but hey, you’ve been under a lot of stress. Planning a wedding isn’t easy.”

“Planning a wedding for a demanding bunch of Italians all expecting the party of the century is definitely not easy,” she says, her voice tinged with sarcasm.

I laugh. There’s something about her boisterous Italian family that I love. Even her dad who still sometimes treats me like I’m scum on the bottom of his shoe. I love that guy. I love her mom too. I love her whole damn family and I know my family embraces her fully, especially my sister.

Shit. My sister. She’s having a baby right now, and I haven’t contacted her. Our parents already left and headed to the hospital so they could be with her and Archer. I should do the same. We should leave right now and check up on her. We have time

before we have to get to the hotel. Hell, we're not even flying out to the Caribbean until tomorrow morning.

"I texted Archer a few minutes ago," Marina says like she can read my mind or something.

Which she probably can. I used to think that crap was scary. Now I just roll with it.

"What did he say? How's my sister?" I hear the panic in my own voice, and I tell myself to calm down. If something crazy were going down they would've contacted us. Otherwise, they're leaving us alone—those were Archer's exact words to me via text right before the ceremony. They want us to enjoy our wedding, not worry about Ivy the entire time.

I appreciated the gesture, and of course, I was able to get wrapped up in the ceremony and reception but still, I'm thinking of my sister and hoping like hell she's all right.

"She's good. Still in labor. Archer's worried about her," Marina says.

"Should I be worried about her too?"

"No. It's normal. I spoke to your mom a few minutes ago. She called right before you dragged me out onto the dance floor," Marina says, laughing when I scowl at her. "They'd just arrived at the hospital and said Ivy was looking good. Well, she was looking tired and a little grumpy and more than ready to give birth, but still good. There are no complications, and the baby should make his or her appearance soon."

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“Good.” I’m thankful to hear my sister is okay. The timing on all of this wasn’t the best, but hey, it’s definitely going to be memorable. Especially if the baby is born today of all days. Talk about a celebration. A wedding anniversary and a birthday for the family—you can’t beat that.

“I was wondering.” Marina sinks her teeth into her glossy lower lip. Damn, she’s sexy when she does that. It’s been a while since I’ve had her naked and beneath me. Not only because of stress, but because she actually wanted us to keep our hands off each other for a while.

It’ll make the wedding night that much better, she’d insisted.

Whatever. I went along with it, but we’re done with that. I’m eager to take her back to the hotel room and strip that dress off her. And whatever else she’s got going on beneath it, because I know it must be complicated.

I’m more than up to the challenge.

“Wondering what?” I ask.

“Maybe before we go to the hotel, we can stop by the hospital to see Ivy and hopefully the baby? We won’t be leaving here for another few hours, and I’m guessing the baby will be born by then,” Marina says.

“Another few hours?” Shit. How long is this reception supposed to last?

“Well, we haven’t cut the cake yet, and I haven’t tossed my bouquet. And you need

to throw the garter. So yes. A few more hours to go at least,” she stresses.

At least. Well, that sucks. I’m ready to bail. “But I’m ready to get you alone now,” I whisper, squeezing her hand as I step in closer to her. So close our chests brush and our legs momentarily tangle.

Her smile turns sultry. “I know. Trust me, I want to get you alone too but just a few more hours here. I promise. Then we’ll go to the hospital, then the hotel. They probably won’t let us stay long at the hospital anyway. We’ll be lucky to see Ivy, what with visiting hours and all that.”

Yeah. I need to do the right thing and try and see my sister. At the very least, hopefully see the baby and Archer.

“You’re right.” I glance around and notice that no one is really paying any attention to us. Lowering my voice, I say, “Let’s sneak off for a quickie.”

Her jaw drops open. “Are you serious?”

“As a heart attack.” Just thinking about it has me hard. “I want you, Marina. It’s been too long. I don’t know if I can wait another two or three hours or whatever it is before I get you naked in bed.”

She glances down at herself, then up at me. “It’ll take twenty minutes just to get me out of everything I’m wearing.”

I can only imagine what she’s wearing. I bet every bit of it is sexy as f**k. “Can’t I just toss up your skirt?”

Her cheeks go the faintest shade of pink. “God, Gage you’re awful.”

“You love it. It’s why you married me.” I kiss her, letting my lips linger on hers. She needs to know how much I want her. A quick grope and fumble will at least take the edge off. “Come on, baby. Let’s sneak off somewhere. We’ll disappear for ten minutes tops. No one will notice we’re gone.”

“You’re only giving me ten minutes?” Her eyebrows rise.

I laugh. “So greedy. How about you get five, and I get five.”

“Now only five?”

Lowering my voice, I brush my lips against her ear. “I can make you come in less than five and you know it.”

She shivers and I smile. “You’re awfully confident in my skills then, giving me only five minutes.” Still, she doesn’t deny that I can make her come in less than five because she knows it’s true.

“I’m already half-cocked. Emphasis on the word cock,” I whisper, making her laugh.

“Fine,” she says but she doesn’t sound put out. She’s just as excited as I am. “Let’s go.”

“Where?” I let Marina take my hand and pull me off the dance floor. The music changes, a fast song comes on and three quarters of the crowd stands, ready to flood the dance floor. Perfect.

“There’s a room just down the hall. The room where we all waited for the ceremony to start,” she tells me as we walk side by side, nodding and smiling at guests as we pass. Her family is nowhere in sight, and my parents already left to be with Ivy and Archer, so I think we’re in the clear.

“Ah, I got ready just down the hall too,” I say. “Let’s go there. Less chance of someone trying to bust in don’t you think?”

“There’s a lock on the door, Gage.” She rolls her eyes and smiles at me. “There’s no way I would fool around with you at our freaking wedding reception without a locked door.”

We both laugh over that, not paying attention to where we’re walking until I bump right into someone.

A visibly upset, teary-eyed Bryn.

“Sorry,” she mutters when I reach out to steady her after sending her stumbling back.

“Bryn.” I give her shoulders a little shake, forcing her to look up at me. “Are you okay?”

She sniffs and flashes me the fakest smile I’ve ever seen. “I’m fine. Great. Sorry to run into you. I’ll let you guys go.” She extracts herself from my grip, looking ready to dash away when Marina reaches out and grabs her arm.

“Bryn, what happened?” Marina shoots me a look, one that says she has to find out what’s going on, and I feel my erection deflate just like that.

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Damn. But hey, I get it. I give her a brief nod and take a step back, letting the two women walk away from me as Marina asks Bryn more questions, trying to get information out of her.

Guess I should go in search of Matt, so I can find out what's up.

Chapter Five

* * *

Bryn

THE LAST THING I want to do is dump all of my misery and problems on the bride, but Marina's the one interrogating me. Gage stepped away and gave us some privacy, which blew my mind. I protested when Marina took me over to an empty table in a dark corner so she can question me further, but he waved us off. I'm so lucky to have such great friends.

"Okay." Marina sits across from me, her expression serious, her gaze imploring. "Tell me what happened to make you so upset."

I press my lips together. She's going to tell me I'm the biggest idiot ever when I confess what I did to Matt. I just know it. "I said something stupid."

Marina offers me a little smile. "Don't we all? I say stupid stuff all the time."

"I said something stupid to Matt."

“I always say something stupid to Gage, so no worries there.” She’s trying to tell me that whatever happened has to be no big deal, but I know the truth.

It’s a very big deal.

“Matt asked me to marry him, and I said no,” I blurt out, figuring it’s best to just get it over with because, oh my God.

It feels really good to tell my friend what I did.

And I must hand it to Marina—she hardly bats an eyelash. “Give me exact details. Well, whatever details you want to give, that is.”

I sigh and launch into the story, not bringing up the fear that has hung over me like a dark cloud since last night’s rehearsal dinner. Matt’s always had a romantic streak, but he’s seemed extra loving since he witnessed the mock ceremony between Gage and Marina. “I think—no I know—seeing you guys rehearse your ceremony and the vows and all that put ideas in his head. Ideas that he wants to marry me,” I say, finishing my explanation.

Marina reaches out and clutches my hand tightly. “And what’s wrong with that? You two seem so good together.”

“We are. Definitely.” I say, nodding. “But don’t you think it’s happening too fast? We haven’t been together that long. Not even a year. And he’s already asking me to marry him?”

“When you know, you know,” Marina says gently. “Gage and I had been together only a little while before we knew we wanted to get married.”

“See that’s the thing. I don’t know if I want to ever get married,” I confess, hanging

my head. I feel terrible admitting such a thing, but it's true. I've had terrible examples when it comes to relationships. My mom ditched me, and though I've come to terms with it, the abandonment hurt. I don't really know my father, but whatever. I have no siblings. And I know my grandma loves me, but she's always so gruff. My grandpa died before I was born, and she's rarely had a man since, so I haven't seen her in romantic relationships much.

Matt is the first good thing to happen to me. The most loving, extraordinary man I've ever met. He treats me like a queen.

And like a complete idiot, I told him no. I didn't want to marry him.

What's wrong with me?

I don't even realize I'm crying again until I feel a tear drop on the skirt of my dress. Swiping at my eyes with shaky fingers, I sniff loudly, wishing I had a tissue.

Marina shoves a cloth napkin at me, and I take it, dabbing at my eyes. My girlfriends are the second best thing to happen to me since I moved to the Napa Valley. What would I do without Marina and Ivy? These girls take care of me no matter what, no questions asked. They laugh and cry and get mad when I do, and I do the same for them. They're like family.

"You're scared," Marina says. "And it's understandable. If anyone should understand, it's Matt. He lost his mom. His dad is a complete jerk. Gage told me Matt used to be kind of a jerk too, when he was playing pro ball. But then he got injured and it changed him completely. Like, altered his life both in his career and the way he thought and behaved. He quit being such a womanizer and focused on bettering himself. Then he found you." She smiles. "You helped change him too. You changed each other."

“So as a thank you, I reject him and ruin my chances with him completely. That’s just great,” I wail, feeling like a complete idiot.

“You didn’t ruin your chance,” a familiar male voice says from behind me.

I freeze, recognizing that voice anywhere. Closing my eyes, I breathe deep, searching for courage. I need to be brave and face him. He came back for me. Maybe he’s telling the truth, and I didn’t blow it after all.

Slowly I turn in my chair to find Matt standing there, an unsure smile on his face as he watches me. “What are you doing here?” I whisper, earning a shove from Marina, undoubtedly for yet another stupid question.

“Go to him,” she whispers, and I do. I stand and walk toward him as if I’m in a trance, everything fading away until it feels like it’s just him and me in the room and not another three hundred or so people.

“I’m so sorry, Matt,” I say, shocked when he takes my hands in his and holds them between us. “I shouldn’t have run away.”

“I shouldn’t have asked you that question yet,” he says, his voice serious, his gaze searching. “You’re not ready. I should’ve realized that.”

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“It’s not your fault. It’s mine. Going so fast . . . it sometimes scares me. We’ve moved at an accelerated pace you know,” I tell him, entwining my fingers with his. “Like Marina, I feel like I’ve been on edge with this whole wedding thing. Then you dropped that question on me, and I panicked.”

“I know.” He sighs harshly and shakes his head. “I’m the type of guy who goes after what he wants. And I know what I want, Bryn.” He steps closer and dips his head so our foreheads press together. “You.”

“I want you too,” I whisper. “I love you. I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry too.” He kisses me. Soft and warm and so lovingly I want to weep all over again but not because I’m sad.

But because I’m so incredibly happy that my man didn’t let me walk away from him without a fight.

“I’ll ask you again,” he whispers against my ear once we end our kiss. “Later. When you’re not so scared anymore. But I’m warning you now; I’m determined to make you mine in the most official way possible.”

A deep sigh moves through me, and I close my eyes, pressing my face in the crook of his neck where he’s warm and smells so good. “That sounds perfect,” I murmur against his skin.

Marina

I FEEL GOOD leaving Bryn with Matt because if anyone can work this out, it's those two. They're so in love with each other it's sort of disgusting.

But I feel that way about Archer and Ivy too. Even me and Gage.

Put all six of us together and we're all like . . . super disgusting.

Laughing quietly to myself, I leave the reception and sneak down the hall to the room where Gage told me to meet him via text not five minutes ago. Anticipation curls through me when I slowly open the door to find the room dark and seemingly empty.

I know it's not though. I can smell him. Sharp and clean and so deliciously Gage. Closing the door behind me, I lean against it, my sight adjusting to the darkness until I finally make out his silhouette. He's coming toward me, his strides animal-like, his gaze penetrating as it settles over me. "You made it," he says, the timbre of his deep voice seemingly vibrating through me. "I missed you."

"I was gone maybe ten minutes?" He slips his arms around my waist as I stepped in close, eagerly going into his arms. "I had to help Bryn."

"I know," he murmurs against my forehead, his lips tickling my skin. "Is everything okay?"

"Nothing that can't be fixed." I had faith it would be too. Matt understands Bryn, maybe even better than she understands herself. She needs to put more trust in him and their relationship.

"You're a good friend." Gage's hands are wandering. Along my arms, to my waist, slipping down to my hips. The gown I'm wearing has a fitted bodice, but the skirt is huge. Like fairy princess, layers of tulle and silk and lace, Cinderella-at-the-ball giant. I fell in love with it the moment I saw it.

My husband—God, just thinking that word gives me a serious thrill—probably hates it.

“Where’s my wife?” I glance up to find him grinning down at me, his hands getting lost in the voluminous skirt. “I can’t find her underneath all the fabric.”

“I don’t know if he ever will,” I say with a dramatic sigh, hoping it will spur him on. “Especially when he only has five minutes to find her.”

That comment kicks him into action. He’s down on his knees in front of me, lifting the layers of my skirt until he’s buried beneath them. His hands go to my thighs and I giggle, his touch tickling me.

“Nice garters,” he murmurs, his voice muffled as he traces them. His fingers skim the exposed skin of my thighs and I’m thankful he somehow positioned us so I’m close to the wall. I lean against it, a soft sigh escaping me when his fingers explore upward, along my thighs, tracing the seam of my very lacy, very white panties.

I may not be a virgin, but I can certainly pretend to be one on my wedding day.

“Sexy.” His voice deepens right when his fingers slip beneath the lace, touching my bare, heated skin. I close my eyes and spread my legs a little, already lost in his touch when I feel him trace my soaked folds. “Baby, you’re wet.”

“I want my husband,” I say, wanting to both laugh and moan because, oh my God, what a picture we must make: me braced against the wall, my husband underneath my wedding gown, hurriedly trying to get me off with a few strokes of his fingers.

“Well, you’re getting him. Any way you can have him,” he says just as he circles my clit with his finger. I’m already primed and eager, ready for him to push me right over the edge and send me straight into an orgasm. Hopefully it will ease the incessant

neediness that's been raging within me for the last few days. Weeks.

I hate how distant we've been lately. But I'm going to rectify that too, with one incredible wedding night and an amazing honeymoon.

Gage touches me in a particular way that I love and a gasp escapes me. That familiar sweet sharpness echoes through my body, telling me I'm close, and I clutch the wall behind me as his touch becomes faster, a little rougher, his lips pressed hard against the inside of my thigh.

And then his mouth is on me, his fingers buried deep. I shriek and he pinches my thigh to remind me where we're at, I'm sure. So I place my hand over my mouth to stop from yelling as the orgasm sweeps over me, leaving me a trembling, panting mess as I'm left slumped against the wall.

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The man is good. I will give him that.

Within seconds he's out from under my skirts, his face flushed, his lips damp. He's smiling at me, looking mighty pleased with himself, and I can't help but return the grin.

"My turn," he declares happily, and I laugh as he stands so he's looming over me. He takes me into his arms and kisses me senseless, the taste of me on his lips and tongue.

I don't care. I eagerly accept his kiss, my knees shaky as his tongue plunders my mouth and when he breaks the kiss first, I follow him, my mouth still seeking his.

"Feel this," he tells me as he takes my hand and places it over the very firm erection straining against his black trousers. I stroke him slowly, from base to tip, can feel almost every blessed inch and nuance of his flesh, and I smile up at him when I see the blissed-out expression already crossing his face.

"I think my husband wants me," I murmur as I stroke him again. A little quicker this time.

"You're damn right he does."

"Think I can get on my knees in this getup?" I kick out my foot, making my skirt flare, and Gage chuckles.

"Are you serious?"

Oh, that's a challenge if I've ever heard one. That's one thing Gage and I like to do—constantly challenge each other. “Watch me,” I say as I gather my skirt in one hand and get down on my knees in front of my now very shocked husband.

Without hesitation I reach for him and unzip his fly, impressed by his thick c**k straining against the damp cotton of his underwear.

“Five minutes, baby?” he asks, his fingers sliding into my hair and pulling me closer to his erection. “Think you can do it?”

“I know I can,” I murmur just before I wrap my lips around the tip of his cock, his low hum of pleasure sending a shot of arousal through me. Just like that I'm turned on again.

And just like that I make my husband come in less than five minutes with only my mouth. On our wedding day, down the hall from where our reception still rages on.

Yeah. Life can't get much better than this, can it?

Ivy

“BABY. BABY, BABY, baby, baby.”

I let my head flop against the pillow, my chest aching with the ragged breaths I've been struggling to take. This pushing a baby out of my vagina business is f**king hard. Why didn't my mom ever tell me this?

Probably because she knew I'd refuse to do it if I understood the truth.

“Are you talking to me or your future son or daughter?” I ask Archer when I finally find my breath once again. My mouth is dry. My skin is soaked with sweat, and I feel

like I'm going to collapse which is sort of funny considering I'm lying down. Well, half lying down, since I bend forward every few minutes to try and push the baby out.

"You. I'm talking to you, babe. Trying to encourage you." Archer takes my hand and gives it a squeeze. God, I love this man. I really hope with the next few pushes I can produce that baby he's so eagerly awaiting. "You've got this, babe. You've been working so hard."

"I know," I whisper, closing my eyes when I hear the doctor start talking. He keeps saying all the right things, but those things are irritating the crap out of me right now. The only one I want to focus on is my husband. That's it.

No one else.

"One more push, Ivy, and you could be holding your baby in your arms within minutes," the doctor says, making me want to punch him.

He's a guy. He has no comprehension just how damn hard this entire endeavor is.

"Ivy." Archer squeezes my hand again and my eyes pop open to find him watching me, an encouraging expression on his handsome, albeit tired face. "Let's do this, baby. One more push. You're so damn close. I can see our baby's head. So much dark hair and a little scrunched up face." He was just down there with the doctor, checking me out in all my naked, pushing a baby out of my vagina glory and at any other moment, I might've been slightly freaked out.

But not now. I just flat out don't care. I want the baby out. I'm done. I'm tired and worn out and burned out and done, done, done.

"One more giant push, and we're a family of three," Archer continues. "Isn't that what you want? Your mom and dad are waiting in the lobby, and they can't wait to

meet their grandchild. Gage texted me and said he and Marina are going to stop by before they head to the hotel. Let's go, babe. You ready?"

Archer knows exactly what to say to pump me up. That my parents are waiting, that Gage and Marina are going to stop by in the hopes that they see the baby, spurs me on. "Yes." I struggle to sit up and he helps me. I'm bent forward, my knees pointed toward the sky, my legs spread wide for God and everyone to see, and I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and push with all my might.

This is it. I gotta make this happen. I'm tired, and my baby needs to be in my arms.

Within seconds I feel the baby spill out of me. That's what it feels like at least. A baby just slipped right out of my body and ended up in the doctor's hands.

"It's a boy," he declares just as a piercing cry fills the room.

"I knew it," I mumble as I watch Archer look at his son for the first time.

"Cut the cord," the doctor encourages, and Archer does, looking like he's in a daze as the doctor hands me my baby. I'm crying, cuddling the baby close to my bare skin. I bend over him and sniff his damp head, feel his little face root against my chest like he's looking for a nipple already.

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Greedy little thing. Just like his father.

“A boy.” Archer settles his hand over our son’s head, his palm covering it entirely. His tone, his expression is full of awe and disbelief. He lifts his head, his gaze meeting mine. I see tears glimmer there and that spurs my tears on, until the both of us are smiling and crying and cuddling our baby close.

“He’s beautiful,” I say.

“Like his mama,” Archer agrees, solemnly. “Thank you, Ivy.”

“For what?”

“For giving me a son.”

“You had a hand in it too.” I smile and stroke our son’s downy soft hair. The nurse will take him soon to clean him up, so I need to cherish this moment for as long as I can.

“What are we naming him?” Archer asks.

I tilt my head, contemplating him. “Didn’t we talk about this already?”

“Well, yeah.” Archer shrugs, his gaze dropping to our baby once more. “But a woman is allowed to change her mind.”

“You mean that? Okay, I want to name him Oscar then,” I suggest.

Archer grimaces. “Hell. No.”

“Pauly.”

“Gimme a break.”

“Jeffrey.”

“That name is just . . . no.” Archer shakes his head.

“Fine.” I roll my eyes, cradling my son close as I stare down at him with wonder. My fingers drift across his cheek, caressing his tiny little rosebud lips as I murmur, “Welcome to the world, Jackson.”

We’ve been discussing names for months, arguing back and forth. One of us would come up with a suggestion we loved just as the other would shoot it down with both barrels. It became a point of contention, made worse because we didn’t know what we were having, but I wouldn’t budge on finding out early.

It was kind of fun, keeping it a surprise, though deep down inside I knew Jackson was a he. We kept going round and round with girl names but looks like that didn’t matter. A few weeks ago, we agreed on Jackson as a name if he was a boy, and I loved the choice.

So did my husband.

Jackson Archer Bancroft has a nice ring to it.

Archer scoots closer to us, sitting on the edge of the bed as he reaches out and strokes the baby’s cheek just like I did only moments ago. “Welcome, little man. We’re glad to finally meet you.”

Turning, I lean in and kiss my husband's cheek, overwhelmed with love for both of these men in my life. "I love you," I whisper. "So much."

"Love you too, babe. More than you'll ever know," he murmurs.

I feel exactly the same way.

Chapter Six

* * *

Gage

One week since the wedding

"I DON'T WANT to go home. Can't we just live here forever?" My wife crosses her arms in front of her bare chest and pouts, looking sexy as hell wearing a skimpy little white bikini bottom and nothing else. Her skin is golden from the sun, her blonde hair piled up on top of her head in a messy knot. Giant sunglasses obscure her eyes and a thin gold chain hangs from her neck. The wedding band on her ring finger is the only other piece of jewelry she's wearing.

She's bare and simple and so freaking gorgeous it almost hurts to look at her.

Almost.

"I would love to live here forever," I agree, looking around at the view of the crystal blue ocean spread before us. We're staying at an exclusive resort in a three-room suite with a giant balcony that has the best view of the ocean I've ever seen. "Maybe I'll move my business over here. I can sell luxurious vacation homes to the rich."

“Ooh, are you serious?” The excitement in her voice makes me smile. She lifts her glasses and peers at me, as if to see if I’m for real or not. “And I can open a bakery here. But I won’t call it Autumn Harvest. How about Tropical Harvest instead?”

“Sure. Whatever. It all sounds good as long as I have you with me.” I lean back against my lounge chair and slip my glasses down so the intense sun doesn’t blind me. We haven’t done anything our entire honeymoon besides eat, swim, have sex, lounge around, lay on the beach, have sex, eat—

Yeah. It’s been great. Relaxing. My stressed-out bride-to-be has completely disappeared and in her place is my relaxed, happy wife. I don’t want to go home either.

But the reality is we’re flying back tomorrow. Another reality? I’ll be glad to see everyone. Happy to see baby Jackson and watch my sister and best friend lose their minds over one tiny human being.

“I wonder if Jackson’s changed at all,” Marina muses, reading my mind as usual.

“It’s been a week,” I say. “He’ll be what? Eight days old by the time we see him again? Nine? I’m sure he hasn’t changed much since we met him at the hospital.” We’d lucked out when we were finally able to stop by. Along with the baby, we got to see Archer and a very exhausted Ivy. Marina had held the baby and cried along with Ivy, which had moved me because I’d had a sudden image of Marina holding our baby someday.

Crazy.

“I’ve heard they can almost double their weight in the first week. He’ll be a completely different baby.” I glance over to see more pouting from my wife. “He won’t even recognize us I bet.”

I bark out a surprised laugh. “You gotta be kidding me. He didn’t recognize us before.”

“He heard my voice a lot when he was in the womb. I know he knows me. I’ll be his favorite aunt.” She drops her arms to her sides and relaxes against the overstuffed lounge cushion, her glasses once more in place over her eyes, her smooth skin glistening beneath the sun.

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“You’ll be his only aunt,” I say, my mouth going dry as I study her. Seeing her like this, wearing the tiny white bikini bottom and nothing else is making my c**k rise to the occasion. You think I’d be exhausted from all the sex or at the very least, somewhat immune to seeing my wife half naked.

Guess not.

“Do you want a baby right away, Gage?” she asks suddenly.

And there goes my erection. “Uh . . . not really. Unless you do,” I add quickly though I kind of, sort of, don’t mean it. We only just got married. We have lots of time before we need to start making babies and creating a family.

We can definitely practice all the time but actual babies? Not yet. For now, I’ll leave that up to my sister.

“I don’t,” she says as she tilts her face up to the sun. Damn, she’s pretty. “I mean, I do want them someday, but not yet. We have plenty of time. If I get baby fever, I’ll just find Jackson. I bet he’d let me cuddle him all I want.”

“I’m sure he would,” I drawl, my gaze locked on her br**sts. She has no tan lines on her upper body. It’s all golden skin and hard pink ni**les. My mouth starts to water just thinking about sucking on them.

She looks over at me, raising her sunglasses to the top of her head once more. “Are you checking me out?”

“Always,” I say with a grin. I’m not going to be ashamed by my appreciation of my wife. She’s a work of art. Beautiful and sweet and so giving. I lucked out and I know it.

“You going to do something about that?” She waves her hand at the vicinity of my swim trunks.

Glancing down, I look at my erection and then her. “Are you going to do something about it?” I ask pointedly.

Marina can barely hide the grin on her face. “What would you like, O husband of mine?”

“Hmm, I don’t know.” I settle my hand over my c**k and give it a firm stroke, my gaze cutting to hers. She’s watching me closely, her eyes locked on my hand, her lips parted seemingly in fascination. That we haven’t grown tired of constantly having sex kind of blows my mind.

But I am definitely not tired of her. And I’m pretty sure she’s not tired of me either.

“Would you like me to come over there and join you?” she asks as she stands, tossing her sunglasses on the chair before she takes the few steps and stops at the edge of my lounge. “You’re looking lonely.”

“I am lonely.” I grunt in surprise when she settles right on top of me, warm and soft as she straddles my hips, her bent knees on either side. “I’m not so lonely anymore though,” I murmur.

She rests her hands on the top of the lounge chair, her br**sts right in my face. Tilting my head up, I capture one nipple with my lips and suck, earning a gasp for my efforts.

A warm breeze washes over us, doing nothing to cool the incessant sexual fever raging within me as I place my hand on the center of her back and bring her chest closer to my lips.

This is our last day. I need to make the most of this experience. Getting naked outside, the ocean waves crashing in the distance, I need to revel in this.

And so does Marina.

Marina

MY HUSBAND HAS the best mouth ever. A talented mouth too, which he's currently using on me quite perfectly. I'm grinding against his hard c**k as those talented lips suck and lick my ni**les. If he keeps this up I'll be coming in seconds, no joke.

Our Caribbean honeymoon has far exceeded my expectations. I'd been secretly afraid of arriving an exhausted mess, wanting only to sleep the days away while Gage's typical workaholicism kicked in.

But no. We've excessively indulged in each other sexually, we've relaxed, we've hung out at the pool and the beach, and we've eaten fine cuisine on a nightly basis.

The sex, though . . . has been amazing. I feel more connected to this man than ever before. That Gage is my husband, the constant in my life, is both overwhelming and exhilarating.

"Mmm, you taste good," he murmurs against my skin, his lips moving over the tops of my br**sts, licking and kissing my skin.

I shiver when his fingers skim down my back so that his hand settles at the waistband

of my bikini bottoms. “You feel good,” I whisper, a little sigh escaping me when he slips first one hand then the other beneath my bottoms and touches my naked flesh. He squeezes my backside and tugs me against him, his erection rubbing between my legs, driving me crazy. Unable to control myself, I lean forward, crashing my mouth on top of his.

Our kiss is wild, frantic. Our tongues tangling as he works my bottoms off. I help him out, contorting my body in all sorts of awkward positions before I finally fling the skimpy fabric onto the deck. I love that we can make love so freely outside without worrying that others can see us. The suite offers us plenty of privacy, and Gage and I indulge outside every chance we can get.

“You need to get naked,” I whisper once he breaks away from me to scatter damp kisses along my neck.

“Help me out, wife,” he says, his voice rough with want.

I comply, standing so I can tug his swim trunks off and tossing them close to where my bottoms lay. I sprawl out onto the lounge once more, lying between his legs, my lips right at his cock. Slowly I draw him deep between my lips, my gaze never leaving his as he watches me suck and lick him. His lids grow heavy and he reaches out, his fingers cradling my cheek.

I could do this for hours. I get off getting him off, I swear. Never before have I received so much pleasure when I’m giving it to someone else. Only for Gage.

He's my everything.

My everything is also incredibly impatient. He pushes me off him within minutes, growling about coming too fast, before hauling me into his arms as if I don't weigh a thing. I'm back in the same position I was originally, only this time there's no clothing separating us. I can feel him, thick and insistent, brushing against me and I shift my lower body, reaching down so I can grab hold of him by the base and guide him inside me.

"Hold on," he says, stopping me. "You touch me, and I'm afraid I'll go off like a rocket."

I lean back so I can look him in the eyes. He's dead serious. "Really?"

"Really," he says firmly as he wraps his fingers around his c**k and brushes the head against my damp folds. I stifle a groan by biting my lips, and he stops the movement, depriving me.

"Don't stop," I whisper and he presses his fingers against my mouth.

"Don't hold back then," he says just before he resumes stroking me with his cock. Driving me crazy.

A moan falls from my lips and finally he adjusts, so I can lower myself onto him. Slowly I take him inside, until he's filling me completely, every inch of him inside of my body. Thick and pulsing, I close my eyes and wrap my arms around his neck, my hands buried in his hair as I clutch him close.

He feels so unbelievably good. I'm afraid to move for fear my body will start convulsing, and I'll come too before we've even started.

"You're so damn beautiful with the sun shining on your skin," he says as he leans back against the cushions to watch me. I start to move at a languid pace, as if we have all the time in the world. My br**sts sway with my every movement and he reaches out, circling his thumb around one nipple, then the other.

Gage lets me have my way with him like he's my plaything. Up and down, slow. Slower. Then I increase my pace, going fast. Faster. Until I'm practically bouncing in his lap, riding his c**k as I strive toward my orgasm that hovers so close yet is still out of reach.

"So . . . close . . ." I say as I move faster, leaning forward to get that friction I so desperately want that will help me come.

Gage reaches between us, his fingers settling on my clit as he deftly circles it again and again. "Like that, baby?"

I toss my head back as his fingers stroke me, his mouth on my skin, my br**sts. The first waves of my orgasm threaten to wash over me. A whimper escapes and then I'm coming, my entire body trembling around Gage's as he lifts his hips and thrusts deep inside. He shouts as he erupts, my name falling from his lips as he holds me so close I almost can't breathe.

"I love you," I whisper into his hair as he slowly relaxes his hold on me. "I can't believe our honeymoon is almost over."

"Baby." He slips his fingers into my hair and tugs, forcing me to look at him. I stare into his eyes and can't help but smile in response to the grin that's on his handsome face. I press my forehead to his. "It's only just begun."

Chapter Seven

* * *

Matt

Two weeks since Gage and Marina's wedding

“HEY.”

I'm glancing at my phone but the sound of Bryn's voice makes me stop short. My eyes widen in surprise when I find her in my office, sitting behind my desk in full-on assistant mode.

Not that I think of her as my assistant anymore. No way. She's my business partner and she knows it. She has her own office and manages the administrative assistant plus organizes the winery's social events.

But at this very moment, having her back in my office, looking like she does, it's taking me right back to when she worked under me. How bad I wanted to keep her under me . . . but not to work. Oh, no.

More like keep her under me in bed. Naked.

I let my gaze wander all over her, drinking her in slowly. She's got her hair pulled back into a long braid, wispy dark strands frame her face, reminding me of the way she wore her hair the first time I saw her after the famous Ivy-and-Marina makeover. She's wearing a sleeveless black dress that emphasizes the lush curve of her br**sts and leaves her long slender arms exposed, a delicate silver bracelet around her wrist.

She looks . . . stunning.

“What are you doing sitting behind my desk, Miss James?” I shut the door behind me and turn the lock, ensuring no one will bust in on us. I can’t remember the last time we fooled around at work, especially once we moved in together and it was no longer really necessary.

Not that it was ever really necessary to get it on at work but . . . yeah. It sure as hell was a lot of fun. So I like the direction Bryn is going now.

A lot.

“Why, I have good news, Mr. DeLuca. Tremendous news, in fact. I couldn’t wait to share, so I thought I’d wait in your office for your return from the vineyards. You don’t mind, do you?” She folds her hands on top of my desk and smiles at me, again reminding me strongly of those first few agonizing months I worked with her. How badly I wanted her.

How I deprived myself of her since I knew our relationship would be viewed as inappropriate. I was her freaking boss.

Yet here I am, now her freaking boyfriend. Glad I pushed past my worries. Then I wouldn’t have this amazing woman in my life.

“Of course I don’t mind.” Like I would. And she knows it. “So what’s the good news?” I ask as I approach my desk.

I stop by her side, and she turns in the chair so she’s still facing me. The skirt of her dress is short, hitting her about mid-thigh and offering me a glimpse of slender flesh. My gaze locks there for a bit too long, and she clears her throat, drawing my attention back to her face.

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“Well, we have four weddings lined up so far,” she says, beaming at me.

Ah, yes. I relented the night of Gage’s reception, finally giving in to her request that we advertise our event facility. Within twenty four hours of agreeing, she showed me a few mockups of print advertising, which just went to show me that she was bound and determined to make it happen, no matter what it took.

That’s one of my favorite things about Bryn. All that steely determination in such a sexy package.

“Four already, huh?” I smile at her, loving how pleased she looks. “That’s great.”

“It is. And I collected deposits from all four of them too,” she says, her expression going the slightest bit cocky. “This is going to be an excellent source of extra income, you know.”

“I know.” I lean over her, resting my hands on the arms of the chair, blocking her in. “It’s going to be a huge success, I’m sure.”

She smirks. “I’m sure too.”

I brush my face against her hair, breathing in her distinct floral scent. A little hum of pleasure escapes her when I nuzzle her cheek with my nose, then press my lips against her cheek. “Why are you so incredibly smart?” I ask.

“I’ve been hanging out with you too long,” she replies.

Jerking away, I stare at her, hating that she puts herself down. Why does she still do that? “This has nothing to do with me and everything to do with you, Bryn. You don’t give yourself enough credit.”

Her smile fades and her gaze dims. She offers up a little shrug. “You know how I am.”

“Yeah, I do,” I say vehemently. “You’re too humble. You act like all the great things you do are by accident or whatever. You accomplish so much.” I shake the chair arms, startling her. “You’re amazing, Bryn. I wish you could actually see that.”

She licks her lips and gives me a tremulous smile. “You make me feel amazing,” she admits softly.

“You do the same for me.” I grip the chair arms and brace myself as I move in to kiss her, again and again. Simple little brushes of my mouth against hers. “I love you,” I whisper against her lips. “So damn much. And I believe in you. I wish you could believe in yourself just as much.” I want to reassure her. Convince her how f**king unbelievable she is. Try to make her see how much I love her, how much she means to me.

How much I need her.

Bryn

I’M COMPLETELY SURROUNDED by Matt, and I love it. He looks so good in his white button-down shirt and dark jeans, smelling of the outdoors, his hair a little mussed, his skin burnished from the sun. His mouth is on mine, firm and insistent as he continues to kiss me. I part my lips, his tongue delving inside, meeting mine, and a little moan escapes me at first contact, a riot of butterflies seeming to flutter just beneath my skin.

“I love you too,” I say when we break apart. Our breathing is accelerated, and I stare at his mouth, wishing it was back on mine. He reaches for me, his hands gripping my waist as he plucks me from the chair and places me on the edge of the desk.

He settles in his chair directly in front of me and reaches beneath my skirt, his hands gently gripping the inside of my knees as he slowly spreads my legs apart. “Remember that time I f**ked you on my desk?” he asks, his eyes full of wicked intent.

A shiver moves through me at his choice of words and the memories. There have been plenty of times when we’ve messed around in his office. We’ve always been so hot for each other, especially at the beginning of our relationship . . .

We’d just started dating and he’d pulled me into the office, locking the door behind us. I’d been facing the desk, and Matt had pushed me forward over it, taking me from behind. I quickly discovered he liked it that way, which was unbelievably hot. But he likes sex pretty much any way, as long as the two of us are involved.

He’s done amazing things, that Matthew DeLuca. Always making me feel wanted and boosting my ego.

“From what I remember, you’ve f**ked me on your desk a couple of times.” I reach out and trace my fingers down the front of his shirt, along the row of buttons. I slip the top one undone, and then the next, my gaze locked on his chest as his skin is slowly revealed behind every button that comes free. “You did lock the door, right?”

Matt chuckles, massaging my inner thighs with the tips of his fingers. “Oh yeah. Because I definitely plan on f**king you on this desk again.”

I finish unbuttoning his shirt and push it off his shoulders. He takes over, shaking it off so it lands on the floor, and I’m confronted with a wall of solid masculine flesh. I

love how he's built. All broad shoulders and firm muscle, the faintest amount of hair at the center of his chest—he's beautiful. Warmth radiates from his skin, and his scent wraps all around me as I inhale deeply, breathing him in.

He's addictive. Intoxicating. I can't get enough of this man.

"We need to hurry," I whisper before I press my lips to his chest, just above his right pectoral. "I have a meeting in fifteen minutes."

"I'm afraid you're going to miss it," Matt says as he pushes the fabric of my skirt up until my thighs are completely exposed. "Or at the very least, you'll be late. I'm sure your business partner won't mind though."

"My partner is supposed to be in this meeting too so we can't miss it. And we really shouldn't be late." I reach for the waistband of his jeans and slowly undo his fly. "The people meeting with us are known to be very punctual."

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“Damn,” Matt mutters, shaking his head. He stands, grabs hold of my waist and pulls me to the very edge of the desk so my ass is half hanging off. “Guess I’ll have to make it quick then.”

His mouth returns to mine before I can say another word, his punishing kiss deep and hot and wet. I wrap my arms around his neck, gasping when he reaches for my panties. We make quick work of each other’s clothes, hands and mouths everywhere, and his erection probing at my entry within seconds.

“Please,” I whimper, spreading my legs as wide as I can. “Matt. I need you.” I feel greedy. Empty without him inside me.

He doesn’t answer. He doesn’t have to. Matt pulls me forward as he thrusts, his c**k imbedding deep. I lean back and rest my hands on the desk, wishing I was completely naked, wishing I could feel every blessed inch of him against me.

But this is going to be quick. Fast and easy and delicious and wicked. I watch him as he starts to move, his expression pained, his movements deliberate. He always puts such care into what we do, and I love it. I love him. I’m overwhelmed with the emotion that I have for this man, and I close my eyes. Losing myself in the way he rocks against me over and over, filling me completely, his hands everywhere at once.

“So beautiful,” he murmurs, his voice deep and thick with tension like it usually is just before he climaxes. “I love you so much, Bryn. I can’t get enough of you.”

“Yes,” I whisper, cracking my eyes open to find him watching me. “I love you too, Matt.”

“I wanna make you come,” he mutters as he starts to move faster, his breathing choppy as he hovers above me.

“Make me come, Matt. Touch me,” I whisper, urging him on, loving the appreciative growl he gives in response to my provoking words.

He touches my clit, circles it with his thumb before he presses hard. I concentrate on the way he moves inside of me, how thick he feels, the friction that’s created between us like we’re trying to spark a fire. I feel like we really could almost light a blaze, the attraction is so strong.

Murmuring encouragement, he circles my clit harder as he increases his pace. I move with him, desperate to find that delicious feeling again. Matt is the only one who can make me feel so good, so right. So completely, utterly myself.

I was never comfortable in my own skin; not until I met Matt.

“Don’t stop,” I say, my breath hitching when he touches me in a particular way, in a particular spot. “Just like that,” I encourage, whimpering with every stroke of his fingers, every stroke of his tongue. “Oh God, Matt. Please . . .”

“Come for me, Bryn,” he commands as if he knows just how close I am. I explode, my entire body wracking with shudders as the orgasm takes me completely over. I shudder and shake in his arms lifting away from the desk, so I can grip him and hold him close. He lets me but never slows his pace, pushing again and again until he’s the one who’s shouting and coming inside of me so hard, I swear at one point I’m afraid he’s going to collapse on top of me, and I won’t be able to move ever again.

“Well,” he says a few minutes later. “That was . . . good.”

I start to laugh. “More than good.”

“We’re good for each other,” he says softly, his fingers threading through my already mussed-up hair. “Don’t you think?”

“I don’t think, I know.” I smile and snuggle close to him, loving how cherished he makes me feel, how much he loves me. “I love you, Matt. I’m glad you crossed the line and decided to pursue me.”

Now it’s his turn to laugh. “I love you too. And I’m real f***king glad I decided to cross that line. I owe a lot of my pursuit to Ivy and Marina.”

“I know. The makeover and all that.” Those girls worked their hardest to put the two of us together and for that, I’ll be forever grateful to them.

“Not just that. They talked you up before the makeover,” he says, shocking me. “Once they nabbed their men, they decided I needed someone too. Which means I’m the one who won that damn bet, and I intend to finally collect.”

Oh God, the bet. How could I forget? I assume Archer and Gage wish Matt would forget about it. “When are you going to collect? And how?”

“I already put in a call to both of those jackasses and made my request.” When I remain quiet, he sighs. “I asked them to donate the amount to their favorite charity and be done with it.”

“Awww.” I kiss him, loving how thoughtful he is. Someday I am definitely going to marry this man. “You’re the best, you know that?”

“No, you are. Seriously.” He rests his hand against my cheek, forcing me to stare into his eyes. “You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me, Bryn. You helped me turn my life around. Helped me find love. I owe it all to you.”

“Matt.” My voice trembles and we kiss, his lips lingering on mine. “I love you.” I can’t say it enough.

“I love you too. You’re mine, Bryn. You’re stuck with me.” He grins. “I hope you don’t mind.”

I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Chapter Eight

* * *

Archer

One month since Jackson’s birth

I WALK INTO the living room to find my wife curled up on the couch, little Jackson nestled in her arms as she feeds him. When I realize she hasn’t noticed me yet, I stop short and watch them for a quiet moment.

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She looks good, still carrying a little extra weight, but I think those curves are sexy. Her hair is loose, falling far past her shoulders, and she's wearing an oversized pale blue T-shirt and black leggings. The shirt is yanked up over her chest and Jackson's dark head is pressed close to her breast. She's staring down at him, cooing unintelligible sounds as she strokes his hair and face.

Love overwhelms me and sticks in my throat, making it impossible for me to speak. I'm damn lucky to have these two in my life. I don't know what I did to earn this.

But I'm not questioning it. I'm eternally thankful for my Ivy and my Jackson.

"Why, Daddy . . . are you spying on us?" Ivy asks, her quiet voice interrupting my thoughts.

Chuckling, I settle on the couch beside her. "What if I am?"

"I might call you a creeper." She shrugs with a little smile just as Jackson falls off her nipple to blink up at me with wide, fathomless, blue eyes.

"You don't think I'm a creeper, do you, Jackson?" I reach out and touch his lips, then trace his chubby little cheek. He's a beautiful baby—though I'm probably biased—and he's fairly easy. Though when he's mad or upset, he definitely lets us know. The kid has a set of lungs on him that won't quit.

I try my best to help, which still kind of blows my mind since I didn't have a good fatherly example growing up. My dad was never around, but I'm determined to be the complete opposite of him. He acts like I'm a nuisance most of the time, even now,

though he does dote on his grandchild. Somehow, Jackson has brought my family closer together.

Jackson has also brought Ivy and me closer. I'm stunned at how much I love my wife, how much my love grows for her day in and day out. She's a wonderful mother, a great wife—my passion for her is at an all-time high.

Yet I haven't touched her in weeks. I can't. It's been over a month—since before Jackson's birth. I miss feeling her naked skin against mine, miss burying myself inside of her.

The doctor said six weeks, and I don't want to hurt her or put her at risk. It can't be easy, pushing an eight pound baby out of your body. She moved like an old woman those first few weeks when she came home from the hospital, but now she's acting so much more like her pre-baby, normal self, that I'm hopeful.

But I won't push. I'll wait the six weeks. It's the right thing to do, no matter how much it's slowly killing me.

"Jackson loves his daddy." Ivy hooks her nursing bra back together and pulls her shirt down, then lifts the baby up so she can burp him. Jackson's struggling to lift his head already and look at me. A surge of love flows through me, and I touch his head, stroking his soft dark hair as Ivy pats his back repeatedly. A huge burp escapes him, making me laugh, and Ivy grimaces at me.

"Don't encourage him," she murmurs. "He'll turn into such a guy."

"Babe, I'm afraid he is a guy." I take Jackson from her and hold him close, breathing in his sweet baby scent, loving the way his head knocks into my jaw as he struggles. Little noises escape him, snorts and coos and funny sounds that make me smile.

Man, I love this kid. I can't believe Ivy and I created him, that he's a part of me. I hope only the good parts.

"You're going to teach him all your bad habits aren't you?"

"Nah." I shake my head. "I don't want him to be anything like me." Well, the bad me. The old me. I'm not that man anymore. Ivy changed me. More like, she made me want to change so I'd be a better man for her.

"What? You don't want him to be sweet and funny and hardworking?"

I turn my head to look at her. "You think that about me?"

She rolls her eyes. "Duh. Why do you think I married you? You're smart and sexy and thoughtful. You're a good husband and father. Why wouldn't you want your boy to be just like you?"

My chest swells with pride. "I like hearing you say that," I admit. "I feel the same way about you."

"You think I'm a good husband and father? Gee, thanks." She punches me in the arm, making me laugh.

"You know what I mean." I kiss Jackson's forehead, then his cheeks. I can't stop kissing my baby. Matt and Gage make fun of my ass, but I don't care. "You're a good wife and mother. You amaze me every day, what you do for me and for Jackson."

"Aw." She leans in and goes to kiss my cheek, but I turn my head at the last minute so she kisses my lips instead. "You are too sweet. And speaking of doing something for someone else . . . did you make that donation yet?"

“Yeah.” Gage and I finally conceded that Matt won the million dollar bet. Arrogant f**ker really rubbed it in our faces too. But then he came up with the brilliant idea that we donate our share to a charity of our choice. “I received the official letter of thanks from the organization in the mail a few days ago.” I contributed to a local charity that assists pregnant women in need. Gage chose a local low income housing project.

“That’s wonderful, honey.” She kisses me again on the lips, this time on purpose. “I’m so proud of you for turning your stupid bet into something for good.”

I laugh. Leave it to my wife to put it so succinctly. “Yeah well, Matt showed us both up and looks like a total hero.”

“How?”

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“He made donations too. Two hundred fifty thousand to each of the charities Gage and I chose.” Smug ass**le. I think this jokingly because while he made us look like chumps and himself look like a hero, yeah, I’ve gotta give it to him.

Matt did the right thing. He has a good heart, my friend.

“Matt is so amazing.” Ivy shakes her head, a dreamy expression on her face. Not good. I want to be the only one who puts that look on her. “I just adore him.”

“As much as you adore me?” I ask like a jealous idiot.

“I adore you so much, it’s kind of ridiculous.” Another kiss, this one longer, a little sweeter, a lot hotter. “But you already know this,” she murmurs against my lips.

Jackson struggles between us, giving a single cry like he’s saying “pay attention to me” in baby language. I withdraw from Ivy reluctantly and stand, holding Jackson to my chest. “Want me to put him down? He’s due for a nap, right?”

“Right.” She stands and flashes me a sultry smile. “You should meet me in our bedroom.” Taking a step closer to me, she presses her hands against my chest, her fingers caressing lightly. Her gaze is full of intent. “I miss my husband.”

Hope lights up inside of me, but I tamp it down. “Aren’t you still recovering?”

“I feel good. Perfect, in fact.” Her fingers curl into my T-shirt and give it a little tug. “Don’t you want to rendezvous with your wife in the bedroom?”

Her choice of words makes me laugh—and sweat. “I’d love nothing more but aren’t we supposed to wait at least six weeks?”

“It’s up to you; do you trust your wife or a doctor who has no idea how she’s feeling physically?” She releases her hold on my T-shirt and backs up a little. “See you in a bit?”

Hell. “Okay,” I say lightly, feeling like a jackass.

But not so much of one that I’d miss out on the opportunity my wife is presenting me.

Ivy

I’M WAITING FOR my husband in our bed, naked. He’s taking an extraordinarily long time putting Jackson in his crib, and I’m starting to think he’s stalling.

Silly man. He’s worried I’m not recovered enough for any physical contact. The doctor informed me I could engage in sexual activity approximately four to six weeks after childbirth. I’m focused on four.

Extremely focused, considering Jackson is exactly a month old as of yesterday.

Besides, I feel like my body has bounced back from childbirth pretty quickly.

Parenting, however, was a difficult adjustment at first—always having to get up every few hours to feed the baby. After a while, I felt like a baby-feeding machine and that was it. I was tired, I was cranky, and I felt decidedly unsexy. As in, I felt like a mama. That’s it.

The last week and half though, something has changed. I’ve got a routine going on, and Jackson is doing well. I’ve slowly started exercising, and it’s reenergized me. My

body's not in perfect shape, but I think Archer will ignore any imperfections. It's been too long since we've had sex. His horniness will most likely outweigh any notice of my lingering flab or stretch marks.

"There you are," I say when Archer magically appears in the doorway of our bedroom. But suddenly it's like he can't even cross the threshold. "What took you so long?"

His expression is uneasy. "I . . . Babe, are you really okay to do this?"

"Do what?" I blink up at him innocently as he moves into the room, stopping at the foot of the bed.

He shoots me a skeptical glance. "I can tell you're naked under that sheet, Ivy. You brought me in here to seduce me."

"You're so perceptive. Don't tell me you're protesting?" Because if he is I'm calling bullshit. The guy usually can't keep his hands off me. Now he's all Mr. Shy. He needs to get over it.

"I'm not." He steps closer, reaching out to grab at my foot beneath the sheet. "But I don't want to hurt you if you're not up to this."

"Oh, my God." I reach out and snag his hand, pulling him until he's practically collapsing on top of me. With a strength I didn't even know I had, I push him onto his back and straddle him, completely naked. "Stop being such a weenie and just do me."

He stares up at me with a frown, looking startled. "You just had a baby. You're exhausted. You might have postpartum or whatever."

I rest my hands on my hips. "Do I act like a woman who has postpartum?"

“No.” His gaze falls to my chest and heats to a sexy smolder. “Your boobs are huge.”

Rolling my eyes, I shove at his shoulder. “So romantic. Glad to see you haven’t lost your touch.”

“Damn woman, you’re full of it,” he mutters, his hands settling on my waist, his fingers light as they skim my skin. A shiver moves through me, and I’m seriously glad my husband hasn’t lost his touch.

“It’s called sexual frustration,” I murmur as I bend over him, my lips right in front of his. “As in, I want my husband. And I’m going to be really sad if he rejects me.”

“Sad?” One of his hands goes to the back of my head and brings me closer, our mouths brushing against each other as we speak. “I can’t have you sad, Ivy.”

“I know. So why don’t you have me screaming your name in, say, ten minutes?”

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Chuckling, he kisses me, his tongue darting out for a lick. “You sure?”

“Definitely,” I assure him. “Let me control it though. I don’t want you to make a wrong move and then it’s over.”

He kisses me, his tongue thrusting deep, one hand holding my hip to him, his other hand in my hair, fingers pulling tight. I whimper against his hungry mouth, moan when his hand slides over my backside, his fingers dipping gently between my legs from behind.

“You’re wet,” he murmurs, sounding shocked as he slowly strokes me.

I release a shuddering breath. My entire body feels strung tight as a wire. “I want you, Archer. I’ve wanted you for days. Weeks.”

“Hmm.” He hums against my lips, inserting just the tip of his finger inside me. “Does that hurt?”

I move against him, flexing my hips. “No. It feels good,” I whisper.

He flips me over, and I’m sprawled on the bed, Archer’s mouth pressed hard against mine. Then I’m left shocked when he leaps away from me, and quickly strips off his clothes. He’s erect and just seeing him like that sends sparks of heat scattering through me. My ni**les tighten and an incessant ache begins to throb between my legs.

“Come here,” I whisper, holding my arms out. “Hurry.”

Grinning, he rejoins me in bed, positioning himself above me, his mouth on my neck, nipping and tasting my skin. "If I'm on top then I can control how deep I go," he whispers just before he licks my ear.

I shiver. "But I like being on top."

"Next time," he promises. "I just want to feel you beneath me, wrapped around me."

His words touch my heart. I curl my legs around his hips, anchoring myself to him as he moves downward, blazing a hot, damp, path along my skin with his lips and tongue. He lashes at my ni**les before sucking first one, then the other inside his mouth, and I cling to him, crying out when he sucks one particularly hard. "Careful," I murmur. "I'm sensitive there."

"Ah, right." He smiles and adjusts himself above me, his erection nudging my belly. "You sensitive here?" He grabs hold of his c**k and gently pushes just the tip inside.

I suck in a sharp breath, holding it as he slowly enters me. "Yes," I whisper in encouragement, but which only makes him stop.

"I'm hurting you?" He sounds pained, his expression tight, his gaze dark. He's waited a long time for this too, and I immediately feel bad for him.

"No. I'm fine." I kiss him hungrily, wanting him to realize that I'm all for this. "Just . . . go slow. No abrupt thrusts okay?"

"Okay." He nods almost frantically. "I'll go slow, I promise."

We move cautiously in unison, me because I'm trying to get used to his size again and he because he's afraid to hurt me. There's something so sweet about it though, how gently he's making love to me. His touch is featherlight, his kisses deep and

delicious and so incredibly soft.

I feel like I'm in a dream. Everything is hazy and blurred, my skin tingles when he touches me, my body trembling as he moves inside of me, and I feel so protected, so loved.

Within minutes Archer increases his pace, his breathing heavier, and I can tell he's already close. I'm close too, and I whisper it in his ear, wanting him to push me right over that delicious edge so I can fall into oblivion along with him. "Touch me," I encourage and he does, his hand going straight between us, his fingers playing nimbly with my clit.

I bite my lip and arch into his touch, sending him deeper which makes him groan. The pace becomes frantic, and he's not being as careful any longer, but it doesn't matter. I'm caught up completely, seeking my orgasm just as ferociously as he is. Until we're both tumbling over the brink and falling headfirst into climax, our bodies shuddering and shaking together.

He falls atop me, his heavy weight a comfort. I breathe into his neck, rubbing my hands up and down the wide expanse of his back, as he tries to gather himself after such an amazing orgasm, no doubt.

Oops. Realization dawns, and I shove at him so he has no choice but to roll over on his side next to me.

"What's wrong?" he asks, sounding put out.

"We didn't use a condom." I slap my hand against my forehead, feeling like an idiot. "God, I'm so stupid."

"What's the big deal? You won't get pregnant this quick," he says, sounding pleased

with himself. Looking pleased with himself too, like he always does right after he comes. His hair is a mess and his eyes have a satisfied gleam to them, but I sort of want to slug him.

“There are horror stories out there, Archer. I’ve met women who after having a baby, get knocked up again within months. Sometimes weeks.” I shudder in horror. “That sounds awful.”

“What, having another Jackson? That kid is the best.” He slings his arms behind his head, that smug curl to his lips both attractive and irritating. “He’s amazing. Don’t tell me all you want is one.”

“Oh, I want more,” I tell him, walking my fingers across his sweat-dampened chest. “But I don’t want babies ten months apart. What a nightmare.” I tug on his nipple a little too hard, making him yelp.

“I’d help you,” he says, leaning in to kiss me.

I dodge his lips. “I’d need two nannies at least.”

“You don’t even have a nanny now,” he points out. “You refused when I offered you one.”

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“I can do this on my own.” I’ve taken a temporary leave of absence from work so I can concentrate on taking care of Jackson.

“Right. And you could take care of two babies too if you had to,” he says, pulling me close so I can lay my head on his chest. “You can do anything. That’s why I admire you so much.”

“Aw, you’re just sucking up to me because you might’ve knocked me up.” I gaze up at him. “You’re so romantic.”

“You’re the romantic one.” He drops a kiss on the tip of my nose. “Don’t sweat it, babe. Whatever hand we’re dealt, we’ll make it.”

I snuggle close and close my eyes, my arm slung over his middle. “You’re right. With you by my side, we can do no wrong. Even if that means having three babies in two years.”

“Three?” His voice sounds strangled and he clears his throat. “Uh, what do you mean, three babies?”

“What if we have twins next time? They run in my family,” I say.

“They do? Huh. Wish you would’ve told me this before. I might’ve reconsidered our marriage knowing that.”

“You pompous jackass.” I tweak his nipple again, earning another yelp from him. “You know you couldn’t survive without me.”

“So true, babe,” he murmurs sleepily against my forehead just before he kisses it. “So very freaking true.”