

# **Captive Lies Bonus Epilogue**

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Synopsis:

Enjoy snippets of Blaire and Grant's life as they navigate a special part of their happily ever after.

## Chapter One

### *Grant*

He watched his wife through the gallery windows and forced himself to count to ten.

What Grant really wanted to do was storm in there and punch the bastard flirting with Blaire, but he made a promise to his wife not to act like the psycho husband when she accepted the gallery job. He moved into the shadows like a stalker and focused on the woman who'd turned his life upside-down or right-side up; whatever one would call a besotted husband.

Did he give a fuck?

No.

They'd been married for almost a year and half and every day she never failed to take his breath away.

Blaire gestured passionately as she explained the painting in front of her. The guy-in-the-suit hung on to her every word, his eyes clearly not interested in the piece in front of him. Grant expelled a resigned breath. Could he really blame the guy? The gallery lighting, meant to enhance the collection of art pieces, played on the golden highlights of his wife's hair and

cast a pearl-like sheen to her skin, giving her a sensual glow.

His angel then, his angel now.

She turned slightly, and Grant's eyes lowered to the slight bump on her belly. An air of satisfaction filled his chest. He put a baby inside her six-months before and that thought only fueled his desire. Because Blaire pregnant with his child? The biggest turn on he never expected.

His gaze squinted as Suit-Guy stepped closer to her. He'd counted to *fucking* twenty.

Time was up.

Grant stepped up to the gallery entrance and pushed open the door. Blaire whipped around at the sound and smiled at him. That was all it took to calm his jealousy. The way her eyes softened and lit with adoration that made him feel like the luckiest bastard on the planet.

He walked up to her and tagged her around the waist. Pulling her close, he kissed her more aggressively than he normally would in public. He turned to Suit-Guy, extending his arm while keeping a firm hand on Blaire's hip. "Grant Thorne, Blaire's husband."

Suit-Guy's mouth tightened as he accepted the proffered hand. "Steven Richter. I'm very impressed with your wife's talent."

Grant's eyes narrowed as they shook hands, his grip tighter than necessary. Richter had his blond hair carefully styled and wore a pricey suit, yet he seemed ill at ease in the outfit. Grant pegged him as a recently successful investment banker.

"Steven is interested in my painting of the Cape," Blaire enthused. "He said he just acquired a house there. Isn't that wonderful?"

Yup, Grant was right. New money.

"That's wonderful, baby." He grinned at his wife, wincing inwardly as a wave of guilt hit him. Sometimes his jealousy overshadowed the fact that his wife was a brilliant artist and the reason men sought her out was because of her skill and not her looks. He kissed her temple. "I'll wait over by the counter and let you finish up. Our appointment isn't for another hour. Just dropped in early in case we hit traffic on our way there."

He forced himself to smile at Richter. Grant would kick himself if he ruined any chances of Blaire making a sale. Everyone told him he'd be more relaxed with his possessiveness when his wife got pregnant, but it was looking like he'd become doubly so now that they

were going to be a family of three.

Five minutes later the man left without buying anything and Blaire walked up to him with a droop to her lips.

*Fuck.*

“I’m sorry, baby.”

Blaire gave him the side-eye. “Are you, really?” She turned to face him with hands on hips. “I didn’t imagine you stalking in here like some freaking caveman about to throw me over your shoulder.”

The glint of amusement in her eyes precipitated his response in banter. “First of all, you’re pregnant. I don’t think it’d be prudent to throw you over my shoulder. And second? I don’t think he’s the type of guy who’d buy your painting.”

“Uh—ouch?” Blaire’s lips twitched. “And how did you deduce that?”

“Your paintings have class that man doesn’t have. Sure, he’s wearing an Armani suit, but he’s far from comfortable in it. He might have made a shit-ton of money lately, but I doubt he bought a house in the Cape.”

“Is that what your crystal ball is telling you?”

“Don’t need one. Reading people is part of my business. He’s as pale as milk. With that blond hair you’d think he’d tan easily. Think that’s the type of guy who’s going to spend money on a house on the Cape that he’d visit on weekends or holidays?” Grant hauled her in for a quick kiss. “Besides he spent his time staring at you, not at the painting.”

Blaire’s brows furrowed. “How long have you been standing outside?”

“Enough time to stop myself from punching Richter.”

His statement was met with an eye roll. “Grant, we discussed this before I took the job.”

“Have I punched anyone since I married you?”

“No, but admit it. There were some very close calls that if I hadn’t intervened, your behavior would have cost you a night in jail or an assault charge. I can’t believe you’d think anyone would be interested in me.” She looked down at her stomach. “I’m six months pregnant.”

“Ah, baby,” he whispered. “You’ve got a glow I can’t explain and I can’t honestly blame a guy for trying to get your attention. I’d like to count the ways how sexy as fuck you are, but

we need to get to class. It's the first one and we don't want to be late." Not to mention they would probably have to fill out some forms.

Her eyes softened as she linked her arms around his neck and kissed him. "I'm so glad you're attending this prenatal class with me."

"Told you I'd be with you every step of the way," he said. His hands landed on her shoulders, turned her around and playfully swatted her ass. "Go get your things."

She moved with an exaggerated sway to her hips; her teasing had the intended effect as his gaze lowered to her ass. An ass that had grown fuller along with her tits in the past month. His cock stirred as he remembered how they'd been all over each other at the penthouse the night before. And her libido...*Christ*.

This prenatal class couldn't be over soon enough.

#

### ***Blaire***

"You are not giving birth in a pool," Grant said, glaring at me.

Even before we attended our first prenatal class, I'd been researching different methods of childbirth. One of the artists at the gallery had just delivered her baby via a water birth and we'd talked about her experience with her doula.

"It's called a water birth," I corrected him. "And I didn't say I was considering it for this birth—"

"Or ever," he growled. "What's wrong with giving birth in a hospital like a normal person?" He handed me a glass of milk before sitting beside me at the dinner table. His notes were in front of us along with the birth plan template he'd downloaded from the internet. Grant had been scribbling heavily on a legal pad during class, paying close attention to our seminar leader. It was quite endearing, but he really needed to chill.

"Nothing wrong, but there are pros and cons to each method, and some hospitals now offer them," I explained patiently. "But it's not an option if one of us is uncomfortable with it."

This appeased my husband a bit. Seriously, he was more high strung about this pregnancy

than I was. He clasped my hands in his, searching my face carefully. “I just want the best for you. You know that, right?”

I smiled. Of course, I did. This was the man who would have bought an ultrasound machine for the house if I hadn’t stopped him. “Always.”

Since the birth plan was part of our assignment next week, we decided to go over it while the lecture tonight was fresh on our minds. We were to discuss our preferences during the day of delivery, but all I could think about was how lucky I was to have such a supportive husband.

It was so sexy.

Oh yeah, my pregnancy hormones were at full throttle and my panties were wet just staring at his profile—strong jaw shadowed by a trim stubble beard. My husband was follicularly blessed. His facial hair grew evenly which made beard grooming easy. He definitely got the after-work rough-around-the-edges look. Shirt sleeves shoved up revealed the muscles and dark hairs of his forearms. He’d been raking his fingers through his inky black hair, tousling it as though he’d just rolled out of bed. At that moment, he was frowning at our birth plan. “Do you want to take anything for the pain?” His gaze lifted to mine.

“Well, yeah.”

“I wasn’t sure because you seem interested in a water birth.” He returned his attention to the template in front of him. He cleared his throat and looked at me again. “I’m still not sold on a water birth, but I’m open to getting you a doula for your next pregnancy.”

*See!* I sighed. *Sexy and reasonable.*

“Yes, it’d be amazing to have someone keep us both centered in case you lose all rationality during labor.” I winked at him.

His eyes finally latched on to the heat in mine. A smile that was almost like a smirk formed at the corner of his mouth.

Elbow resting on the table, I rested my chin on the heel of my hand and returned his perusal with an innocent flutter of my lids. “So, what do you say...”

“Baby,” he said gruffly, lowering his pen. “We agreed to go through this tonight.”

“But you’re sitting there all rugged and handsome,” I pouted.

He swallowed. His eyes hooded as he rolled his lower lip between his teeth as though weighing his options.

Finally, he muttered. “Fuck this.”

“Fuck me,” I breathed, pleased with myself as he grabbed my arm and dragged me to the living room. I shuffled behind him in my fluffy slippers, kicking them off before we hit the plush area rug. In the past few weeks, this had been our favorite spot for making love. He dropped to his knees, letting his hands skim up and down my legs as he kissed my belly sweetly. Then his hand went under my lace bodice maternity dress and squeezed my ass.

Skirts drove him crazy.

My husband liked to have free access to my pussy.

Fingers slipped past my panties and traced my slit. I moaned as pleasure jolted below my navel.

A rumble of approval rose from his throat. “Jesus, you’re soaked.” He sprung to his feet, ripped my dress over my head and flung it to the floor. Impatience dominated his expression as he unbuttoned my bra, letting it join the pile on the floor. He stood back, blue fire charting the curves of my body. “God, you’re so beautiful,” he murmured reverently. Grant stepped forward and touched my swollen belly before he cupped a heavy breast. “So goddamned beautiful.”

Anticipation built as he backed me into the sofa. My legs hit the edge and I sat.

“Spread your legs,” he commanded. I complied as he got between them. Leaning in, he kissed me deeply while one hand slipped off my panties.

I pulled my mouth away. “You still have clothes on.”

He smirked as he slowly unbuttoned his shirt. Though I didn’t need to help him, I took pleasure in grabbing the bottom of his undershirt and yanking it over his head. I ran my fingers across the hard muscles of his chest, the ridges of his abs. *God*, my husband was fine and I ached for him to be inside me.

His smirk deepened. “You seem pleased with yourself.”

I grabbed the back of his head and pulled him aggressively toward me. With our mouths just short of touching, I hissed, “Because I am.” Then I crushed my lips against him and his own animalistic growl lit a fuse under my yearning. I wanted to crawl on top of him, under him, skin to skin, but Grant was careful not to smash my belly. I sank my teeth into his bottom lip, not quite drawing blood, but letting him know I wanted more.

“Pregnancy makes you a wildcat.” His eyes gleamed as he drew back. “Love it,” he

murmured. His movements were jerky as he spread my thighs, straining to be gentle. He put his mouth on me, and my eyes rolled back at the exquisite sensation rippling over my sensitive flesh. My fingers gripped his hair as my climax shuddered through me. He ate me through my orgasm, drawing out tension and taking me to newer heights, over and over.

When I finally came down, he eased me on the plush rug. “Hands and knees,” he ordered before stacking pillows under my stomach. I heard the sound of the zipper and the rustling of his trousers. He folded over me as I felt his cock slide inside me, inch by delicious inch. “Damn, baby, I should get you pregnant more often,” he mumbled by my ear, catching a lobe between his teeth.

My laughter caught when his fingers reached under us and pinched my clit and a surprise climax hit me. Unrivaled pleasure soared and my arms lost their strength. If Grant wasn’t holding an arm under me, I would have pitched forward. His thrusts continued, flesh smacking against flesh, his hips pounding against my ass until he pulled out. A curse and muffled groan accompanied ropes of cum that landed on my back and ass

He collapsed beside me, a sheen of sweat on his skin and his still hard cock peeking out from his unzipped pants. My husband would always be like some pillaging barbarian claiming his woman in the most primitive way.

Grant turned his head and looked at me, I was still on my knees, head on the rug turned toward him. A smile broke through his face and he reached over and pulled me into the crook of his arms. I settled in and inhaled the mix of sandalwood, spice and man, and exhaled contentment.



## Chapter Two

*Four weeks later*

***Blaire***

I'd been evading talks of a baby shower for weeks, but in my seventh month of pregnancy, my mother-in-law wouldn't be denied any longer. It was a Saturday and Colette was off, so I was puttering around the kitchen getting some tea cakes ready for Amelia's arrival. She loved her sweets with tea. I'd been blessed with Grant's family. Amelia and Marcus had been very welcoming from the start, but it took a shared ordeal with Valerie for us to forge some kind of bond. We still weren't besties, but the animosity was no longer there.

No competition.

She loved her brother; I loved my husband.

We lived in New York now, although we visited the brownstone in Boston once a month, my work as a part-time manager at Hummingbird Gallery made staying in Manhattan more sensible. It was the same gallery that took a chance on me and gave me my first exhibit. I used my Nyuki artist alias because I wanted to do this on my own without the influence of my husband's name. If Grant had his way he would have bought me a gallery.

Whisking together the ingredients for the almond tea cakes, I realized the baking forms

were on the top shelf. Glancing at the step stool in the corner of the kitchen, I debated getting them myself, but my fight with Grant right after my first trimester gave me pause.

*The top drawer of my studio cabinet was where I stored photographs for future reference. I kept them out of sight so I would develop my skill in painting from memory. That morning was the day after my three-month checkup when my OB declared me in perfect health. Grant had reservations about my exposure to paint fumes while pregnant, but oil paints were actually safer than acrylic, and my OB had said so, but to appease my husband's worry, I agreed to wait until after my first trimester to start painting again.*

*Just like any other time I needed something from the top level of the cabinet, I pulled a chair beside it, and from there I got on the cabinet ledge that was about waist height. The drawer I needed was below my shoulder that made rifling through its contents easy. I found the picture I was looking for and, just when I was about to step back onto the chair, the door opened.*

*"What the hell are you doing?" Grant roared.*

*Startled, my other foot slipped and I was falling.*

*Strong arms and a hard chest broke my fall and my giddiness at surviving my near mishap had me clinging tightly to the man who saved me. I buried my face in the crook of his shoulder. Grant's heartbeat pounded where my side met his sternum, our breaths ragged and deep.*

*"Are you all right?" his voice was hoarse.*

*"Yes," I whispered.*

*He lowered me to my feet, making sure I could remain standing before taking a step back. His not-so-steady fingers raked through his hair as he started pacing.*

*His face was a thundercloud, dark and forbidding.*

*The air crackled between us.*

*Then he exploded. "Jesus fucking Christ Blaire! What the fuck were you thinking?"*

*I crossed my arms over my chest, instantly defensive. "I get up on there all the time. It's no big deal."*

*"It's no big deal that you nearly fell and broke your neck!" he was still yelling, veins I hadn't seen before popped by his temple.*

*"I wouldn't have fallen if you didn't startle me."*

*He breathed heavily as he glared at me, jaw clenched hard before he pivoted sharply and left the room.*

*My heart was racing. I lowered myself weakly to a chair, taking in ragged breaths to calm down. Grant would return in a few minutes. We'd worked on our communication since our engagement. He just needed to cool off a bit.*

*My butt barely settled when my husband returned. He took one look at me and his face paled. "Are you all right? Is it the baby?"*

*I sighed. "No. I guess it's an after effect of my fall. I guess I got scared after all."*

*He crouched in front of me. "I'm not sorry I yelled at you." Ice water seemed to have extinguished his fury. "Getting up on that ledge was a stupid thing to do, especially in your condition."*

*"I'm not even showing yet. My balance is fine."*

*Resolve hardened his face. "You are not allowed to get on top of anything over eighteen inches."*

*My brows shot up. "That's very specific."*

*"I'm finding I have to be when it comes to you." Concerned blue eyes searched my face. "Are you sure you're all right, Angel?"*

*"I'm fine, Grant."*

*He exhaled a weary sigh. "Ask me for help next time, okay? You scared fifty years off my life."*

*Then he cupped my face and kissed me.*

I left the whisk in the bowl and wiped my hands on the apron and left the kitchen. Making my way down the hallway, my nose twitched as the smell of acrylic paint hit me before a shirtless male filled my vision. I leaned against the door frame and enjoyed the display of my husband's back muscles, not to mention that firm ass that fit snugly into that faded denims. He was painting the baby's room in a Navy and Yellow Color palette I'd seen on Pinterest. One wall would be a deep Navy blue, while the adjacent wall would be white. The ceiling would be striped yellow and white. The ceiling hadn't been easy, judging by the way Grant cussed a blue streak

when he painted it the night before. But he didn't complain about the design because it gave the room a nautical and masculine vibe.

My husband had a thing against paint rollers and he was going old school with a brush. I could see now why he didn't want anyone else to paint the room. He was clearly enjoying the activity. With each stroke, his muscles flexed and my libido burned, but with each precise corner application, my heart swelled with the care he infused into the task.

I fell in love with him more each day.

“Grant?”

His head whipped around and he lowered the brush onto the paint tray. “Yeah, baby?”

“I need help getting some molds from the top shelf of the kitchen.”

A grin broke through his face as he picked up a shop towel and wiped his hands. “I'm here to serve.”

*Best husband ever.*

#

***Grant***

He stood by the kitchen counter, sipping coffee while watching Blaire take the tray out of the oven. She flipped the silicone molds over, tapped the bottom, and miniature cakes dropped onto the cooling racks just as the rich nutty aroma hit his nose.

*Financiers*, Blaire had called them and it certainly explained their shape. Grant snatched the gold bar shaped sweet and took a bite. Crunchy outer layer yielded to a spongy center redolent with butter.

“It's hot!” Blaire warned him, shooting him a disapproving look.

It was, but his wife knew how hot he drank his coffee and his tongue could handle extreme temperatures—and other things like tongue fucking her to an orgasm. He inwardly smirked as he asked himself why he had sex on the brain all the time. He asked himself that question almost every week, but every week the answer was the same. Because it was Blaire. To be inside her, to be a part of her was an all-consuming need. He was as addicted to her now as

the first time he'd laid eyes on her. Popping the rest of the cake into his mouth, he chased it down with coffee.

"Yum." He gave an exaggerated swipe of his tongue across his lower lip as though catching the crumbs and was pleased to see Blaire's eyes darken with heat.

"Don't worry, I didn't injure your favorite body part." He wagged his brows. "Well, second favorite anyway."

"You better not," his woman sassed. Turning to the oven, she threw a warning over her shoulder. "I'll need it later."

Grant puffed a laugh as his wife made no effort to disguise her own need for him. "Damn woman, if you're this horny every time you get pregnant we should make babies more often."

She turned around and leaned against the counter. "Easy for you to say. Try carrying this"—she framed her belly—"for two more months." She grimaced. "It's only going to double in size."

Grant pushed back from the island and walked to her side. He gathered her into his arms. "It's not going to double in size." She'd been more conscious about her growing figure and it broke his heart that it made her miserable. Blaire tried to hide it from him, but he was too attuned to her moods. He knew exactly when it started—two weeks before when she couldn't fit any longer in her regular clothes and had to buy more maternity dresses to supplement the few she already had.

"It's feeling like it," she mumbled into his shirt. "Everything is swelling up. My face ... especially my nose. And my feet!"

"You've been standing in the kitchen almost all morning," he chided gently. "That's not helping."

"I should have listened to you and had Colette make them yesterday, but fresh is always better."

Grant didn't say anything. No use making her feel worse. He ran his hands up and down her back in soothing strokes. "How about a foot massage later, hmm?" Their OB had given the green light to the simple massage techniques they'd learned in prenatal class. A foot massage, done gently, would help alleviate stress and could make the pregnancy more comfortable for both mother and baby.

“That’s nice.” She was still mumbling into his chest. “And a cold compress?”

He pressed his lips to the top of her head. “I’m here to serve you, remember?”

Blaire chuckled and looked up at him. He couldn’t resist not kissing her so he stole one from her. The swelling on her nose was adorable, but he dared not comment on it. Grant was learning throughout this pregnancy that he had to be careful with words because the hormone stew in Blaire’s body was making her more emotional and sensitive than normal.

He leaned away to look at her. “Do you want a baby shower? Is it too much stress?”

“I’m not stressed with the event itself, but picking a date for it. What if the baby comes early ... what if something happens and ...”

Her eyes filled with tears.

“Blaire,” he hugged her close. “The baby is fine, you’ll be fine. You heard Dr. Pierce. She said everything about your pregnancy is on track and the baby is healthy.”

“I know, but everything just hit me,” she said. “I have the perfect husband, the perfect pregnancy, the perfect life. I’m afraid something is going to take them all away.”

“With everything we’ve been through, I think we deserve perfection for the rest of our lives.” He stroked her cheek. “Don’t you agree?”

She nodded, but what Blaire needed was perspective. “Remember how you stopped me from getting an ultrasound machine?” he asked.

At this, she smiled. “Yes.”

“You teased me that I was being overly dramatic?”

“You were.”

“What happened to that woman who teased me then?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered. “I’ve been very contrary lately.”

“You have.”

She glared at him. “It’s the hormones.”

“I know,” he chuckled. “But I don’t have that problem. My fear was based on unknowns; I needed facts. Your recent checkup put most of my fears to rest.” He framed her face with his hands and tipped it up. “We’re in this together, Angel. You were strong for me when I was weak, and now I’m taking your fears and assuring you Nathaniel will be fine.”

Her lips pursed before she gave him a watery smile. “I love you, Grant Thorne.”

“Love you, Mrs. Thorne.”

The building intercom buzzed, breaking their moment.

“That would be Amelia,” Blaire murmured, wiping the tears that had spilled on her cheeks.

“Are you okay, now?” Grant asked. “Because if you’re not, I can send Mom away.”

Her eyes widened in horror. “Don’t you dare!”

He grinned. “I’ll meet her at the elevator while you get the rest of the stuff ready.”

#

*7 weeks later*

***Grant***

“Fuck!” He groaned as his back came up as Blaire sank down on his cock in a final stroke, triggering the blinding intensity of his release. She straddled him with her back facing him, gracing his view with the curves of her pregnant form—a sensuous silhouette against the light coming from the bathroom.

“So good, baby,” he squeezed the area where her legs joined her pelvis. Blaire glanced at him over her shoulder and, even when he couldn’t see her face clearly, he could picture her siren smile in the darkness. “C’mere.”

He guided her lumbering movements and positioned her comfortably on her left side with a pillow between her legs. Then he scooted close to her from behind and pressed a kiss to her cheek. “Be right back.”

Sex hadn’t been comfortable for Blaire in the past month, and Grant hadn’t pushed her for any, contenting himself with his hand. Except his wife found him jacking off in the shower. He knew this bothered her and turned her on at the same time. So he assured her he was perfectly fine until she was ready, even though it might be months after birth.

They’d just turned in after a successful baby shower. Unbeknownst to Blaire, he had a chat with his mother. He made it known he wouldn’t stand for any added stress on his wife and

the baby shower would be a small gathering of friends and family only. Since his dad already won reelection to the senate the previous year and had decided not to run for the presidency, it was easy to convince his mother to leave out political acquaintances. From what Grant gathered there were only thirty women at the shower. When he and his Dad arrived with the other guys at the tail end of the party, their number only rose to fifty—a small gathering considering who they were.

But most important of all, his wife looked happy. He expected Blaire to look tired but she'd been humming with excitement after the last of their guests departed. She admitted to feeling more relaxed and mentioned giving attention to her neglected husband. Smiling, he warmed a towel under running water and headed back to their room and paused.

Blaire was sitting up at the end of the bed, a hand over her belly.

At his wife's pinched face, a cold fist of anxiety gripped his heart and froze him in place.

"Did you have a cramp?" he asked. She had spasms after having sex and they were told it was quite normal to cramp after orgasms.

"Yes," she mumbled. "But this one really stung."

His jaw clenched. No matter how much she begged, he would never have sex with his wife again until this pregnancy was over.

"Ahh ...." she cried, clutching her stomach.

He came unstuck and rushed to her side, sliding to his knees as he grabbed his watch by the nightstand. "Okay," he said, trying to keep his voice steady. "We'll consider that a contraction and start timing it."

Blaire nodded and tried to get up. "I need to pee."

Grant helped her stand and frowned when a wet splash drenched his feet.

"Oh God," she gasped.

"Is that ..." his voice faltered, lifting his gaze to Blaire's. "Your water broke."



### Chapter Three

#### *Grant*

Ten fingers, ten toes, and a strong set of lungs. A head of dark hair and cheeks flushed in the pink of health. Nathaniel Liam Thorne was perfect. The nurse settled their son in his wife's arms.

Blaire blinked through her tears as a sob and a laugh simultaneously broke through her lips. Then she looked at him with those magnificent hazel eyes. Grant brushed her tears away, but emotions threatened to spill from his eyes. He was gone for them. His heart and soul was full of love because his beautiful wife had given him a son.

When he made Blaire his wife, he'd thought he couldn't be happier. But the joy of this moment was indescribable. Now they were a family.

A family he cherished and adored.

## Chapter Four

*Six months later*

***Blair***

I put the banana and blueberries in a blender and pureed it for Nathaniel's mid-morning snack before we headed to Central Park for our daily walk. Colette was keeping him company in his high-chair as he babbled and tried to displace a lock from the housekeeper's expertly coiffed hair. My little man had strong grabby fingers.

It was an unusually cool August. The highs would usually be in the nineties by now with humidity that made my clothes stick to my skin. By mid-morning the temperature barely broke the sixties and I had scrambled for some clothes to put on my son. I found a sweater and denim jacket his Nana had given him. Our boy was spoiled by Grant's family. Amelia or Val would bring toys and clothes almost every week. I begged them to stop. I was running out of shelves to hold them, and it was such a chore to pick up so many toys from the floor. But they would cease for only a few weeks and then they'd start all over again. My son outgrew his clothes too fast, and just the other day he attempted to crawl.

"Mama."

I unlocked the container from the base of the blender and smiled at my boy. Amelia told me he looked a lot like Grant when he was this age. His blue eyes were already the exact shade of his dad's.

After spooning the puree into a bowl, Colette took the container from me. "Haven't seen Nathan over the weekend and he's already grown." Nathaniel was a mouthful, so most times we called him Nathan.

"He's growing too fast," I muttered.

"Well he is Grant's boy," the housekeeper said. "I bet he's going to be as tall as his dad."

"No argument there," I replied with a light laugh. My heart warmed every time someone mentioned how Nathaniel looked like his dad. I sat in front of my baby and started to feed him his snack.

The elevator dinged and Tyler walked into the penthouse. Our security had lightened a lot since our marriage and after the senator's reelection. Jake returned to handling Thorne Industries' corporate security while Tyler managed Grant's various private residences. When Nathan was born, my husband wanted someone to look after Nathan and me when he wasn't around. Grant suggested hiring a nanny as well but I'd been putting that off. I wasn't sure I wanted to return to the gallery. I loved being a mom.

"Ready to go, Mrs. T?" Tyler asked.

"Give us a sec," I said, wiping Nathan's mouth while removing his bib. Colette appeared again by my side and cleared the dirty dishes, telling me to go ahead and she could tidy up after me.

Removing the guard from the high chair, I fitted the denim jacket over my baby's chubby frame. He tried to grab my hair and got my eye instead.

"Ouch," I groaned.

"Need me to take him?" Tyler asked, chuckling.

"Nah, just grab the baby bag and the stroller." I turned to my son and picked him up. "No grabby hands, Nathan." I swung him on my hip and checked my reflection at the foyer mirror, making sure I didn't have any baby food clinging to my clothes or face. Nope. All clear. I did have circles under my eyes from lack of sleep and my hair was tied back in a ratty pony tail. Yoga pants and a swipe of lipstick were as much as I could muster with a six-month-old baby in

tow.

I rifled through my purse and made sure I had my sunglasses.

I looked at Tyler. “All set.”

#

After walking about three miles, I positioned the stroller by the nearest bench. The park was crowded more than usual and was filling with Manhattanites taking their lunch outdoors or fitting in a workout during their lunch break.

I spied a new food truck right on 59<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue touting Peruvian food. That should be healthy enough with charcoal grilled chicken and yucca. I’d been trying to lose the last of my baby weight, but breastfeeding Nathan had made me more ravenous than usual and I tended to overeat. These daily walks helped me offset the extra food, and enabled me to stay active with my son instead of disappearing into the gym. However, I needed to start lifting weights soon as I was losing muscle in my legs.

Not my arms though. Lifting and lowering my baby boy certainly did wonders for my shoulders and biceps.

I bent over the stroller and checked on him. The moderate temperature and low humidity made Nathan comfortable enough to drift off to sleep. Tyler was around somewhere. After that one time someone had mistaken him for my husband, we both agreed that it would be better for him to keep an eye on us from a distance and avoid awkward statements or questions. I laughed shortly at the recollection.

Someone sat beside me and from my peripheral vision, I could tell it was a man of hefty build. There was something oddly familiar with his profile—painfully familiar. I lifted my eyes in search of Tyler, but I couldn’t find him.

My heart pounded, but I didn’t turn to check out the stranger. There’d been so many times I thought I’d see him again only to be heartbroken when it wasn’t him.

“You’re fussing too much. Let him sleep.”

That voice.

I held my breath as I turned around. His eyes were covered by aviator shades, but the twitch of his mouth, the salt and pepper buzz-cut and beard were all him.

“Liam?” I whispered.

He grinned, revealing white even teeth. “Hi, Wren.”

I flew into his open arms. Laughing and crying, all I knew was this wasn’t a dream, he was real. He was warm and he was alive.

He chuckled and untangled my clinging arms. “Name’s Cam Murphy now.” He looked over my shoulder. “Better not climb all over me, Blaire, or your husband’s gonna be pissed.”

“Wh-what?”

I glanced over my shoulder and sure enough Grant was standing beside Tyler about twenty-five feet away. He wasn’t pissed though, there was an expression on his face I couldn’t quite describe, but it was obvious he was thrilled for me.

Turning back to my long-lost friend, I asked. “How?”

“I knew Thorne had been looking into me. I guess, it wasn’t such a bright idea to leave you all those wood carvings, but I couldn’t help it.” His eyes softened. “I wanted you to know how proud I was of you.”

“You helped me fly.”

“I did,” he grinned.

“Does that mean you’re back now? Does your daughter know?”

His face dimmed. “I’m back, but I’m a different person now. The only reason I’m here is because your husband wouldn’t leave well enough alone. But that made my case to the agency to be able to tell you.”

*Agency? Hmm ...* “Where do you live now?”

“Atlanta,” he said.

“To be close to your daughter?”

He nodded. “Let’s me look in on them from time to time.”

I pursed my lips. “I guess you can’t tell me who you’re working for?”

He smirked. “Best you don’t know.”

Nathan made a sound from his stroller. Both of us looked over and noticed he was awake. I drew the stroller in and Liam peered inside.

“Hi there, little man,” he glanced at me. “Damn, he’s Thorne through and through.”

I laughed. “That he is.”

“I’m so happy for you, Blaire,” he said. “Everything we’ve gone through. It was worth it in the end.”

I wasn’t sure if I agreed because he lost his daughter and grandkids in the process. He must have read my mind and took my hand. “They’re fine.”

Still, my words clogged in my throat and I shook my head.

“They’ll be okay,” he reiterated.

“And you?” I whispered. “Are you okay? Happy?”

“I’ve met someone,” he said, looking at me intently.

My eyes widened. “What? How?”

“There’s this small town. I can’t really tell you much right now, but I’m happy, Blaire. More than any other time in my life.”

Happiness surged through me because Liam’s face brightened when he declared those last words. I couldn’t believe it. My friend was in love. And judging by the look on face, he had fallen hard.

“You’re crazy about her.”

He raised a brow.

“Don’t deny it,” I said huffily. “I’ve never seen that look on your face when you said you were happy.”

He raise his hands in concession. “Whatever you say.”

I punched him lightly on his shoulder.

We talked some more and he held Nathan for a beat. My son was curious and kept plucking his shades off. I laughed and took him back from my friend and rocked him as Liam continued to tell me what he could, which wasn’t much. He had a different identity and, though he’d pretty much built a new life, he couldn’t be careless with who he was in the past.

“Will I see you again?” I asked when he stood. He couldn’t stay long. I laid Nathan in his stroller and gave him a toy as I rose to say goodbye. I felt sadness, but also hope.

“You bet,” he replied. “Thorne will know how to contact me.” He lifted his chin at someone beyond my shoulder, mostly likely Grant.

My husband appeared by my side and held out his hand. “Thanks for doing this, Liam.”

“No hardship,” my friend assured him. The men shook hands, but the moment called for more and they both drew each other in for a hug. “We’re family,” he told my husband. Then Liam looked at me. “It was time. We both needed closure. This was it.”

“But you promised to keep in touch?” I asked.

“You can count on it.”

And I knew Liam would keep his word.

“And better get used to calling me Cam.” He gave me an extended hug and then he let me go and turned around, walking away without looking back.

We watched him disappear into the crowd. I turned to Grant. “Thank you for giving me my best friend back.”

He put an arm around me, tucked me close and stared into my eyes. “I’ll do anything to make you happy.” He shifted his gaze to Nathan who was peering up curiously from his stroller, toy forgotten. “God knows how happy you’ve made me.”

“I love you, Grant Thorne,” I declared.

“And I love you, Mrs. Thorne,” he smiled at me before bending down to pick Nathan up. “Now, how about some lunch?”

“Oh, there’s this new food truck right up this park exit on 59th.”

“Food truck it is.”

“You don’t mind?”

He raised a brow, and I smiled wide. I knew what that meant.

*Whatever makes you happy.*

Tyler appeared in front of us. “I can get the stroller.”

“Tyler,” I chided. “Relax. We got this. Let us look like a normal family for a change. Shoo! Go play your spy games.”

Our bodyguard shook his head and grinned sheepishly while Grant chuckled.

“You know there’s nothing normal about us,” my husband told me when Tyler faded into the background. “How we met; how we fell in love. Not anyone can claim his wife kicked ass just so she can return to the man she loves.” He winked at me.

“Don’t burst my bubble,” I grouched. “I’d like to believe we’re normal.”

“Dada,” Nathan babbled as he touched his father’s stubble. Our son drew back and then started patting Grant’s jaw in light slaps before he tried to pluck the shades that were slung behind his neck.

“Ah, this sunglass thief,” Grant muttered, yanking the object off from around his neck and handing it to me before our son poked his eye with it.

I tucked his sunglasses into the baby bag before pushing the stroller forward. I watched my husband hold our son in front him while he gently scolded him. Of course, Nathan only babbled in unintelligible syllables. The expression on Grant’s face as he stared at our little miracle tugged on my heartstrings like how the moon pulls in the tides. Then he turned those adoring blue eyes on me.

My breath hitched and I was overwhelmed with the peak of fulfillment.

I had my art that I was free to pursue.

I had an adorable son who was a spitting image of his dad.

And I had a husband who loved me more than anything else and made my happiness his priority.

Who wanted a normal life?

When mine was *perfect*.

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