

-Brie-

The sound of laughter and loud footsteps woke me up. I opened my eyes and turned to Roman who was still asleep.

He slept in my room every day now. Roman had clutched my shirt and was squeezing into my chest.

I slowly released his grip and rolled away from him. I slipped out of the room and went down the stairs.

"Oh honeybee, did we wake you?"

I shook my head.

"No Mom, don't worry about it," I told her. "Why are there so many people here now?"

"Who's ready for the wedding tomorrow?!" a girl chirped walking past us into the kitchen with three other girls.

"Right," I murmured.

"I've got to go honey. Your sister is going to freak out if everything isn't perfect."

She hurried o .

"Humour me."

I turned to see who said that.

"Why are you awake?"

"The babies kept me up all night and as I was finally falling asleep, the stupid bridal team and event trucks made it impossible to get any rest."

She settled down in a chair in the kitchen. I followed closely behind her. A part of me was frightened she'd trip and fall with how big her bump was. I took a seat on the kitchen aisle.

"When is this hell party going to be over?" she groaned.

"It feels like it's been years... can't they just get married already?" Maude added walking in through the back door.

She was sweating and breathing fast. She headed toward the fridge and Nia nudged me to speak up.

"Erm... Maude?" I called out to her.

"Mm?"

"Why are you in gym clothes?"

She moved away from the fridge with a bowl of cold spaghetti.

"Well, your sister thought it was a good idea to get me a gym membership. Apparently, I'm too fat to fit in her bridesmaid dress."

I raised my brows and Nia scoo ed.

"Why won't you people let me beat some sense into that girl?"

"I thought you said Chalanians aren't aggressive" I smiled.

"We're not. But for Aubree, I'm more than willing to let my other self out."

"I support you sister," Maude said, setting the bowl on the kitchen aisle.

"Okay, okay ladies, calm down," I told them.

"She has me on a diet!" Maude whined. "And I can't do this."

"Just ignore her," Nia said. "This happened at a bad time... if I wasn't pregnant, I would have taught her a very good lesson."

I looked at her and she was rummaging through a cupboard.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

She brought out a can of tomato soup and o erred it to Maude.

"Yes please" she smiled.

Grabbing a can opener they popped it open. I watched her dump it into the cold spaghetti. I o erred her a spoon but she refused. We watched her chow down.

Laughter floated through the kitchen door but came to a halt the second we all turned.

"Nia?"

"Zachary Hart" she laughed. "It's been forever."

"... fun but they'll be mad... oh..." another trailed o .

I looked at Dove, then Zach, then back at Dove, then I finally settled on Zach.

"What's going on?" Nia asked me.

I shrugged.

"But they might be able to tell us where the heck they've been."

"Brie."

I held my hand up at Zach.

"I don't even wanna know," I told him.

"I'll... em... go find... Aubs" Dove said and turned away.

"Yes I think that's a good idea... walk me to my room will you please Brie? I need to check on my kids" Nia added.

"And I'll go too because I can't be a part of this already awkward atmosphere" Maude added.

I watched them all leave and I was alone with Zach. Then I took a seat and waited for him to say something.

"I took a trip with Dove. It wasn't planned... it just happened. And I would have called to let you know but we lost track of time before we realized almost two weeks had gone by. So I'm sorry."

I watched him quietly.

"Well? Say something, Brie."

I shrugged.

"What? I'm not mad at you. I was just worried. And with everything that has been going on, I didn't need to add missing people to it. So I'm glad you're both okay."

He exhaled.

"So does that mean that you're not mad at me?"

"Don't push it" I said to him and stood up.

He chuckled and followed me out of the kitchen.

"Where's Roman?" he asked as we climbed the stairs.

"Asleep. He's been a little under the weather."

"Well, I'm sure seeing me will get him to feel a hundred percent better."

I chuckled. My smile immediately disappeared. Roman's bedroom door was opened and boxes and suitcases were arranged outside. I frowned and marched into the room. Everything had been cleared. His bed, his books, his toys.

I looked around and spotted Aubree talking to a couple of men.

"Can you explain to me what is going on here?!" I yelled out.

She turned around slowly, a smug look on her face.

"Gentlemen, this is my sister. But don't bother yourself looking too hard. I'm obviously the better-looking twin."

I scoo ed.

"What are you doing Aubree?"

She scratched the corner of her eyebrow and folded her arms.

"Trying to decide between turning this room into a nursery for my baby or a girl's room for my Bachelorette party tonight."

"You cleared my son's room for a bachelorette party and you didn't bother to ask me if I agreed or not?"

"Well he clearly doesn't want to sleep in here anymore and I don't need your permission to do anything. This is my father's house too you know. And besides, it's not like I threw his things out. I've made sure all his clothes are packed and his toys and books are all in the boxes outside. I was going to have them put them in your room but you beat me to it."

She smiled at me.

"You're not seriously upset are you?"

I chuckled and shook my head.

"I'm not even going to waste my time with you. Do whatever you want."

"Great! I'm glad we're on the same page!"

I turned to walk out of the room and Zach shook his head at me.

"Oh and Bee, I didn't arrange his things so some might be a little messed up. But I'll be happy to pay for damages."

I didn't even bother to turn back. I just pushed past Zach and began to transfer the things to my room.

"Brie, are you okay?"

"Yes Zach don't worry about me" I responded doubling my steps. I entered my room and Roman was out of bed and going through my closet.

"What are you up to?" I chuckled setting his suitcases on my bed.

"Picking out something for you to wear."

I crossed over to his side and kissed him.

"Since when did you become my stylist?"

His eyes caught his suitcases and he frowned.

"Are we going somewhere?" he asked.

Zach and I exchanged looks.

"I'll go get the rest of the boxes," he said to me and moved out.

"Mommy?"

I pulled him to the bed and li ed him onto my lap.

"Well, I thought about how you said your room got cold at night and so I wanted you to move in with me."

"But are you sure Mommy?" he asked wiggling my fingers absent-mindedly.

I wrapped my arms around him and he leaned back into my embrace.

"Of course, I'm sure my love. Why wouldn't I be?"

He stayed quiet for a moment before he spoke up again.

"So what is going to happen to my room now?"

I sighed and shi ed his weight in my lap to rest my chin on top of his head.

"Well, your aunt decided to do some renovations and turn it into a guest room for her friends she invited to the wedding."

Roman pulled away from me and turned to face me.

"Mommy, I don't want my dad to marry your sister. I just want Auntie Aubree to keep being my Auntie."

I looked at him. I knew sooner he'd want to talk about it.

"My love, listen to me. I know we haven't spoken about this and it's fair enough that you wanna talk about it."

He pursed his lips.

"I didn't want to talk about it because of how sad it made you feel. But you don't seem so sad about Dad and your sister anymore."

I honestly didn't think he noticed. He was too young to be worrying about stu_ like this. I'm the parent and I should be the one doing the worrying for the both of us.

"My love listen, whatever that happens, remember that your mommy isn't ever going to leave you alone okay? And no matter what, the two of us will always and always be together you hear me?"

He nodded and folded himself into my arms.

"I'm happy to be staying in your room now Mommy. It's warmer and I get to give you more cuddles."

I laughed and kissed him.

"Now what do you say we get ready to have a great day together huh?"

He nodded and jumped down from the bed.

"I'll go start the bath," he said excitedly and ran into the bathroom.

Zach came back with the last box and I thanked him.

"Need any help?" he asked.

I nodded.

"You can just arrange his toys on those shelves by the window. I'll go check on him real quick and start unpacking his clothes."

He nodded and got to work. I helped Roman set the water temperature right and monitored his teeth brushing. A er giving me an entire list of reasons why he was very capable of bathing himself, I le him alone and walked back into the bedroom.

I looked at the shelves and they were nowhere near filled only to find Zachary hovering over my laptop. He stood up straight and gave me a look.

"Why are you looking at house listings?" he asked.

"You had one job. Arrange his toys, not play detective."

I closed the laptop and dragged him away from my desk.

"I'm changing my password" I folded my arms.

"Why are you looking at houses, Brie?"

I glance over at the bathroom door and pull him aside.

"Okay, I've been thinking about moving for a while now but I wasn't certain. But Aubree kicking my son out of his room is definitely the sign I was waiting for."

"But have you seen the prices of those properties?!"

"I have a job okay? And it pays well. I'll mortgage if I have to."

He stared at me.

"And Roman? Have you thought about how you might have to change his school and how he's going to react to all of this?"

"I'm looking at houses close to my work so that whatever it is, I drop him o_ at school before I go to work. I just don't want to live here anymore. I want my own place away from all this chaos. My son has been through so much already and I really don't want anything else a ecting his chances of having a normal childhood."

Zach remained quiet. Then took hold of both my shoulders.

"Look Breanna, I'm just trying to look out for you. You're not alone in this. You have me, always. I just don't want you making decisions influenced by emotions."

I patted his hands.

"I've thought it through Zach. I promise. I'm going to look at some houses today. I'll talk to Roman about it and see how he'll take it. I'm not in that much of a hurry to move but I need to get a place of my own. Nothing fancy. It's just my son and I. And maybe a few guestrooms for when you guys come over."

He sighed.

"Alright. But if you need anything, anything at all, just let me know okay?"

I nodded.

"Of course, I'll let you know."

"Good. Now I hate to do this but I gotta go get ready for lunch with Dove."

I made a face.

"It's only 9:28 in the morning. And didn't you say you were going to help me with arranging Roman's toys?"

He chuckled.

"Oh right. I didn't mean it."

I grabbed a pillow and threw it at him as he laughed.

"See you later Brie."

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"Ouu, where are you going all dressed up like that?" Nia teased me when I walked into the den to fetch Roman.

"Just groceries and I need to refill Roman's inhaler and get some other stu_."

She raised a brow.

"All this, for groceries?" she asked waving her hands dramatically over me.

"Yes, nothing more. Would you like something?"

"Yes. The name of the man you're going to see" she chuckled, playfully shoulder-bumping me.

"I'm going to the grocery store now cut it out."

"Liar" she teases and follows me to where Roman is playing with his cousins.

"Who missed me?" I grinned and held my arms open.

"Aunt Breanna!" Jake cried out and came barreling towards me, practically tackling me with hugs.

"Woah, easy kids!" Emmett cautions.

"I missed you too?" I laughed showering the four of them with kisses.

"Oh, my goodness Hopsy. Look how tall you are now!" I cooed at the youngest twin.

She smiled up at me and ran back to her legos. I ruled Mariah's wild hair and Jake tugged my hand.

"Do we get to eat some of those amazing cookies you make?" he asked, trying to prevent his mother from cooking.

I chuckled and gave him a light pat on the back.

"Of course."

"Jacob? I know what you're up to" Nia called out from across the road where she was tying up Mariah's hair.

He pouted and looked up at me.

"We'll make sure we don't leave any evidence" I whispered.

He flashed me a satisfied smile and I held out my hand for Roman.

"C'mon, sweetie. We have cookies to bake a erward."

The kids jumped up in excitement and Nia waddled up to me. I laughed.

"You're really showing this pregnancy who's boss?" I teased. Emmett snorted out a laugh from the couch which earned him a warning look from his wife.

"I thought you said no more cookies for them."

"Oh relax Nia."

"It makes them hyper Breanna. You know that" she complained and playfully punched my arm.

"And that's why they'll eat it at noon, run around till all the sugar gets out of their system and they'll be dropping like flies before bedtime."

She folded her arms.

"It's just oatmeal raisin cookies... not a time bomb" I assured her.

"Well just oatmeal raisin cookies... not a time bomb for the rest of the day."

"Yes ma'am" I chuckled. "Let's go, Ro."

He ran ahead of me.

"Hey, what have I told you about running huh?"

"Sorry Mommy!" he called out, skipping instead.

"Walk."

But he was already out the door. I reached out into the antique dish my car keys were usually in but nothing was there. I sighed and rummaged through my purse when I remembered Aiden had someone drop o_ my car and leave the keys with my father. I searched for him and found him outside directing a bunch of movers. The rest of the family was there too helping.

"Hey Daddy, could I please have my keys? I need to run a quick errand with Ro."

He nodded and pointed back to the house.

"It's in the flat antique dish by the front door."

"I looked Daddy, it wasn't there."

He stopped and turned to face me.

"Well, that's where I put it when that guy dropped it over last night. It should be there."

"But it's not," I said squinting a little from the sunshine.

"That's because I took it" Aubree's voice rang from behind us.

My father gave me a worried look and I turned to face her, holding out my hand.

"Well, can I have my keys back? I have to go and I'm not in the mood to play your little games."

Aubree chuckled.

"I'm afraid that's not going to happen, dearest sister."

I sighed and looked at my father.

"Aubree, give your sister back her car keys. You don't want to start a fight the day before your wedding do you?"

"Well, I can't possibly give her the car Dad. I have errands to run too."

"So take a cab Aubree" I raised my voice.

Our family turned their attention to us.

"Look Aubree, I am trying the best I can to stay calm. Now hand over my keys right now."

"But it's her car now Breanna. Didn't she mention that?" Beck's voice cut in.

His face wasn't looking too good and he was limping.

"My love, what are you doing up? You should be resting. We have a big day tomorrow" Aubree smiled.

"I know, but I saw you here with her and I wanted to make sure that everything was alright."

He glared at me. I was starting to get irritated.

"Look, I don't want to be a part of any of this. So if you'd just give me back my car keys Aub..."

"Breanna, have you forgotten who got that car for you?" Beck asked, cutting me o_.

Of course, I hadn't. He gave me that car the day Roman turned seven years old.

I crossed my arms and attempted to stare him down.

"I got you that car two years ago and somehow I forgot to re-register it in your name. So I decided a er last night's event to do that, but not in your name." She smiled sweetly down at his sister who smiled back "I decided to register it in hers and every asset I ever gave you."

An uncomfortable feeling washed over me.

He was taking away my car? Why?

"Seriously?!" Maud yelled at him.

My mother slipped beside me and tried to talk me out of retaliating.

"If you need a ride, I'm sure you'd be comfortable in a cab..." he continued "... or better still, your lover can give you a ride. I'm sure you'd both like that. You'd get a break from sneaking around."

"That's enough Beckett!" Emmett yelled at him.

"Oh stay out of this Em!" Aubree hopped to Beck's defense.

I chuckled nastily and zipped up my purse. Our entire family and the people from the rental agency were watching us now.

"You're kicking my son out of his room, for no reason and now you take my car? What's next? You're going to pin my parents against me and have me thrown out?" I let out an exhausted laugh, struggling to fight back the tears.

"Wait, wait. She did what to Roman's room?" Dad asked shaking my shoulder.

I sni ed and eyed them.

"Ask your daughter, Daddy" I spat out and turned away from them.

"Hey I'll drop you o_" Emmett called a er me.

"Don't bother