

## Chapter 48 A House Call

I awake to find myself alone. Alaric is already at work, and his absence is palpable. His decision to skip work yesterday still lingers in my mind, a subtle indication that something might be amiss.

Sure, someone set fire to the cars, but he had always been in and out when it came to work. Yesterday, he barely even peered at his phone to check on work.

I quickly shower and prepare for the day, making my way downstairs.

Grabbing the bottle from my bag, I take a tablet and consider breakfast options. Thankfully, the medication seems to have quelled the worst of my morning sickness. I didn't experience any discomfort during our dinner last night, which is a welcome relief.

As I start cooking, I hear footsteps approaching. I turn to find Jake entering the room. He smiles at me before sitting down.

"Care for some breakfast?" I offer, knowing he's unable to fend for himself.

He chuckles and takes a seat. "Sure, thanks, Ruby. You look different today."

His comment catches me off guard, and I turn to him, surprised. "Sorry, you just seemed exhausted lately, but today... you're practically glowing." He offers me a warm smile as he speaks.

I wonder if Alaric has confided in Jake about the pregnancy. As I continue cooking, the thought of broaching the subject with him lingers in my mind.

How will Jake react to the news that he'll soon be a brother and that the baby will be Alaric's and mine? I haven't yet prepared for this conversation, but it looms on the horizon. Standing at the cooker, I contemplate the best approach to telling Jake as I cook.

I know Alaric will know the best approach. After placing the food on the plates, I settle opposite Jake, eyeing him intently.

"Have you thought about what your dad suggested?" I inquire, noticing his confusion. "Taking up a position at his company instead of seeking employment elsewhere. It'll be yours eventually, Jake. Why not start familiarising yourself with it now?"

I understand his worry. His past mistakes, often made worse by his access to wealth, are not forgotten memories of either of us. But he's changed, grown, and acknowledged his past mistakes.

He chuckles, and I raise an eyebrow in response. "Ruby, the business won't entirely be mine," he confesses.

My confusion is evident. "But your dad has made it clear you're inheriting it," I point out, puzzled by his stance.

"I had a talk with Dad yesterday. I know about your pregnancy, Ruby. I've asked him to redirect the businesses to the baby. They're not what I want," he explains calmly, leaving me utterly stunned.

"Jake, no!" My immediate reaction is disbelief. How could he make such a decision? It dredges up all my anxieties about finances. Alaric can't simply alter who inherits the business because I'm pregnant. He kept that quiet. He didn't tell me.

"It's done, Ruby. Dad's made the changes. Those businesses are yours and the baby's now," he states firmly, determination etched in his features. "If Dad could build his businesses with me while he was a single parent, I can do it. I want to do it myself, not be handed my life and not have to struggle a single day."

His resolve is both surprising and admirable. I'm at a loss for words as my mind struggles with the unexpected turn of events. This isn't the Jake I'm used to, but he's determined regardless. I can only hope he won't regret his decision to forgo the businesses in the future.

Sitting together, we talked, and he asked me about the course and my plan. I want to finish it. I don't want to stop now and walk away just to regret the time spent on it as it will be wasted.

Jake walks off, leaving me alone with my laptop and university work. With no classes to attend, I'm hoping to make headway on my assignments. Although the deadline is months away, I've set my sights on completing it this month.

Sometime later, I watched Jake walk into the kitchen, and he began to cook.

"So you've figured out the air fryer?" I tease, and he nods, a hint of surprise in his expression. "Did you know you can cook breakfast in it too?"

He turns to me, his gaze reflecting disbelief. "Really?" he questions, and I chuckle in response. "Dad bought it with the intention of preventing me from burning down the house while making breakfast. I didn't think he meant I could actually cook breakfast in it."

Laughing, I confirm, "Yes, Jake, you can cook breakfast in it. Just don't forget about it and leave it running for hours, and you should be safe from causing any fires." My smile reassures him, and he nods.

The sudden buzz of the intercom interrupts our conversation. Jake strides over and answers, allowing two police officers entry.

"Ruby Simmons?" one of them addresses me, and I confirm my identity, feeling a sense of unease wash over me. Why do I feel something bad is about to happen again?

"We're here to discuss an incident you reported to your university," the officer continues, his gaze shifting between Jake and me.

My heart sinks as I realise they're referring to Max. Closing my laptop, I watch as Jake retreats.

"We just need your account of what happened," the officer prompts.

I nod and try to recall the events. "I was in the kitchen, and I had just been speaking to a friend named Oliver, who had just left. Max entered, and I said 'hi'. When I tried to pass by him, he stopped me, assuming something was going on between Oliver and me."

As I continue to speak, memories flood back. "I repeatedly tried to move past him, but he blocked my way. I assured him nothing was happening with Oliver. Eventually, he attempted to kiss me, and I pushed him away. He gripped me and pulled me back to him, and he tore my dress. In a panic, as he kissed me, I bit his lip, and he hit me, causing me to hit my head on the nearby unit. My friend Bex walked in, and the door knocked him away from me."

I watch the officer write down what I said. "Are you intending to file an official complaint and press charges against him?"

"No," I respond softly.

"Why not?" Jake's voice carries a note of confusion.

"Because... I don't want to press charges against Max. I'd prefer the university to handle it. If you want a reason, I will tell you after when your dad is back." I explain to Jake, and he nods.

"We'll give you some time to reconsider," the officer says, shaking my hand before leaving. Alaric arrives as they leave.

Alaric's concern is evident as he asks, "What's going on?"

"They took Ruby's statement. She's not pressing charges against Max," Jake explains, causing Alaric to look at me with shock.

"Look, what Max did was wrong, but he's not entirely to blame. His father and the university share responsibility. Max learned from his brother getting away with similar behavior. I'm not pressing charges because it punishes Max and not the cause," I explain, feeling the weight of my decision.

"Max grew up knowing he could use money to silence people. He was taught it was fine. If women refused to sleep with him, he threw money at them, and they agreed. His dad and brothers are worse, and they taught him it's right to do that," I elaborate further.

Alaric challenges me, "You're making excuses for him, baby girl. If he doesn't even get interviewed by the police, how will he learn?"

"Max is the youngest of what, four boys? Anything he does, he learned. He will learn from the university suspending him. I don't want to cause more trouble," I explain, knowing that it will.

"You were the only one to do this, though, without you, nothing will get done," Alaric insists, but I shake my head.

"No, it isn't. Bex told me last night that other women had reported him when we were alone and talking. Knowing that the police are involved means more women have come forward, so either way, the police will question him about the others," I explain back to him.

Jake storms off angrily, leaving a tense atmosphere in his wake.

"If you're sure, baby girl?" Alaric sits next to me, his concern palpable.

"I am, I swear. Now, what is this about you not signing your businesses to Jake?" I ask, diverting the conversation.

"He told you?" Alaric seems taken aback. I'm guessing he didn't think to tell Jake not to mention it to me.

"Yes, so what's the deal with that, Alaric?" I press, waiting for an explanation. "You changed your will, Alaric."

He sighs and nods. "I spoke to Jake. I had a feeling Bex would figure out you were pregnant, and I know that she can't hold a secret. I wanted to tell him. He's against taking over the business, and I don't need it once I'm dead or retired."

His explanation doesn't fully answer the question for me. "Yes okay, I've agreed it's yours and the baby's if anything happens to me. Then I know you're supported going forward," he adds.

I pause, feeling a build up of irrational emotion. This isn't like he done it now and signed the business to me. I need to stop acting so irrationally over a change that won't happen until he dies.

"Sorry," I apologise, realising I've overreacted.

"It's fine, baby girl. I expected worse when you found out. You can't expect me to just sit back and not make plans. That isn't me," he explains, his tone understanding.

"Making plans for when you die is a bit excessive," I joke weakly, and he nods in agreement.

"You may see it as that, but I see it as planning for every outcome. Come on, let's get food, then we need to talk," he suggests, rising from the chair.

As we head into the kitchen, I can't shake the feeling that more drama awaits in our conversation.